

ASHFIELD HISTORICAL COMMISSION
THURSDAY, MAY 29, 2014
7:35 PM
APPROVED MINUTES

PRESENT:

Commission members Steve Gougeon, Mollie Babize, Jody Hall
members not present: Tristan Romer, Gerard McGovern

Other public present: Judy Haupt, Chris Gray

Meeting called to order 7:36 pm

MINUTES:

January 27, 2014:

Chris Gray noted that the language of the motion to conditionally support the installation of WiFi antennas on the tower of Town Hall, as reported in the January 27, 2014 minutes, was not consistent with the motion as read by Steve Gougeon at the Select Board meeting later that evening. Steve moved to amend the language in the minutes to conform with the Select Board transcript; Mollie seconded; the Commission voted unanimously to accept the amended minutes of January 27, 2014.

April 30, 2014:

With the deletion of a parenthetical question in the minutes, Steve moved to approve the minutes of April 30, 2014; Mollie seconded, and the Commission voted unanimously to accept the minutes.

NOMINATING THE FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH ON THE NATIONAL HISTORIC REGISTER

Judy Haupt reported that significant improvements to the wiring, heating and insulation of the First Congregational Church were entirely paid for by donations. Knowing there will be additional expenses in the future, she is looking into the possibility of applying for grants, and whether listing on the National Register of Historic Places would help. Since some members of the church are concerned that such a listing would restrict the church in any way, she asked whether that might be true. The Commission indicated the church has been inventoried, and criteria for listing on the Register include whether the church has been associated with significant events or people in the history of the town, whether it represents a distinctive type or period of architecture, or has played a significant role in the history of the town.

The Commission stressed listing on the National Register has few if any constraints unless federal or state funds are involved, in which case the Massachusetts Historic Commission would review any changes. This is entirely different than listing within a Local Historic District, which can have strict limitations on exterior details such as color of paint, style of windows, etc. The Ashfield Plain Historic District is listed with the Massachusetts Historic Commission, but is not a Local Historic District and does not have any such restrictions.

Judy Haupt took a copy of the inventory on the church, along with a copy of a document from MHC describing the difference between listing on the National Register and being in a Local Historic District.

IMPACT OF CELL TOWERS ON HISTORIC PROPERTIES:

At the 4/30/14 meeting, the Historical Commission discussed an inquiry concerning the potential impact to historic resources of a proposed cell tower at the Robertson Farm. Chris Gray said he has more information on section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act. Applicants for cell towers are required to fill out an application listing all historic properties in the Area of Potential Effects; if more than 10 properties are effected, they must file a different report. Part of the town's responsibility is to identify those properties. He offered to send additional information on Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act which outlines the responsibilities of those applying to build a transmission tower.

In a subsequent email, he sent the following links:

FCC Encyclopedia: Tower and Antenna Siting (includes links to the files below)
<http://www.fcc.gov/encyclopedia/tower-and-antenna-siting>

Nationwide Programmatic Agreement for Review of Effects on Historic Properties
http://hraunfoss.fcc.gov/edocs_public/attachmatch/FCC-04-222A3.pdf

Nationwide Programmatic Agreement for the Collocation of Wireless Antennas
<http://wireless.fcc.gov/releases/da010691a.pdf>

Nationwide Programmatic Agreement Regarding the Section 106 National Historic Preservation Act Review Process Report and Order
http://hraunfoss.fcc.gov/edocs_public/attachmatch/FCC-04-222A1.pdf

FCC Form 620 (Page 6-7 of Instructions and Page 7 of the Form)
<http://wireless.fcc.gov/antenna/FCC-Form-620.pdf>

MHC LISTING/DIGITAL MAPPING INQUIRY

The Commission received a listing from the MHC regarding a list of historic properties which they would like updated. Some structures have been demolished, others need further inquiry; it was suggested we review this list and bring notes to next meeting of any changes we know of. Jody is interested in looking at the historical inventory forms to see if she can make sense of the numbering system MHC uses on this list, and compare it to what we have on file.

SENIOR HOUSING PROPOSAL

There is no immediate deadline on this proposal from the Planning Board; the Historical Commission will discuss further at another meeting. All agreed it would be nice to have some capacity for reviewing proposals, should the zoning change be implemented. It would be good to review any similar ordinances in other communities to see what design guidelines they have for new construction in historic districts. Mollie agreed to bring in a copy of the Northampton guidelines for the Central Business District, and to search other smaller communities to see what other examples might be out there.

TOWH HALL ANTENNA

Chris Gray expressed his concern that Historical Commission believes their position on this issue was misrepresented. His understanding, confirmed by the transcription of the Select Board meeting on January 27, 2014, was that the Commission did not specify that their approval was temporary as well as conditional. (See above note about amendment to the minutes of January 27, 2014.) His intention was to meet the requirements of the Commission as he understood them.

He updated the Commission on the current status: He continues to do the modeling, and although eliminating large antennas on the columns will likely reduce coverage, those are most visually obnoxious to many people and will be excluded entirely in the short term. They were offered as the worst case scenario. Given the negative response the Select Board has been getting, they are not moving forward on an agreement.

Chris admitted that personally he didn't like the look of the large antennas, but has little problem with the smaller antennas up there now. He cannot determine the metrics (e.g., the number of people who will be served) without empirical evidence.

Theoretically, Chris believes the antenna could be built within the posts, behind windows or with just smaller panels on railings. The design with three above/three below is the quickest way to provide service, but he'd like to start with smaller ones and then with empirical evidence see how much service is provided.

The Commission noted that churches in Wellesley and Wellfleet have adapted towers to provide cell service; these are larger communities with many more customers than Ashfield would have, and thus quite appealing to communications companies.

Jody noted that the steeple has been reconstructed and 90% of it replaced with locally harvested and milled timbers by Ashfield craftspeople, using the same kinds of materials as originally used. She recommends that the Commission make a statement to the Select Board in light of her research concerning the significance and aesthetics of the steeple. Mollie added that, in light of the new information Chris has brought tonight, it could be discussed at the next meeting, hopefully with the members who originally discussed and voted on the issue in January.

TOWN HALL 200TH ANNIVERSARY

Jody will be developing activities for children so families have something to do with their kids. She met with the Sanderson principal, and hopes to recruit parents and teens to help plan.

Mollie needs to get something in the Ashfield News for July and August. Nancy Garvin, who is no longer on the Commission, provided a comprehensive file of articles and resources on the history of the building, and Mollie will use that for the basis of a small booklet to be distributed at the anniversary celebration. Nancy has also flagged what she believe is the original location of the building up at the Norton Hill Cemetery.

August 2nd-3rd seemed to be the best weekend, avoiding conflicts with the Belding Library celebration and community fairs.

Ideas for the celebration: Gather at the cemetery, talk about the reasons for moving it and how it was done. Walk the route of the move, or as close to it as possible. Could the community band play while we walk, or is it too steep? Gather at Town Hall where Stuart will coordinate a presentation on the changes to the building over time and the reconstruction of the steeple. Mollie has offered to make large drawings of the original interior plan of the building with pews shown, and will scan a drawing by Mimi Pieropan of the pulpit which is at the Historical Society.

NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of the Historical Commission will be held Tuesday, June 17th, if Tristan & Gerard can make it.

Meeting was adjourned at 9:44 pm

Submitted by Mollie Babize