

ASHFIELD HISTORICAL COMMISSION
MEETING
THURSDAY, JANUARY 28, 2010

PRESENT: Steve Gougeon, Mollie Babize, Gerard McGovern, Nancy Garvin.
guest: Jocelyn Forbush, TTOR

Meeting commenced at 7:35 pm

MINUTES

Minutes of 24 September 2009 were approved.

BULLITT PROPERTY:

Jocelyn Forbush, Western Massachusetts Regional Director of The Trustees of Reservations, updated the Historical Commission on plans for that portion of the former Bullitt Property acquired by The Trustees in March 2009. The 265-acre property, including the former caretaker's house, two barns and several smaller outbuildings will be the headquarters of the Highland Communities Initiative, but will also include a conference room and program facilities. The main house (a wide late 18th century cape) will be renovated, keeping the existing footprint but removing everything to the timber frame. Existing materials will be reused when possible while making the building energy efficient, including full insulation and new windows. The extension to the original cape will be removed. The larger barn will be renovated for three-season program use; other structures will be demolished, recycling timbers as possible. Use and management of the larger property is being discussed with and reviewed by representatives from Conway and Ashfield. At one point, part of the property (157 acres) was Ashfield's first poor farm, but the Town sold the property to the Chapin family in 1874. The Reservation will be named in honor of William Bullitt; Nancy Garvin emphasized that the property has a longer history than Bullitt, and that should be acknowledged. In addition, the Commission agreed that the conservation of the landscape and its stone walls is important, even if the house itself cannot be preserved.

STONE BRIDGE

Steve Gougeon received, at long last, acknowledgement from the Massachusetts Historical Commission in the form of a highlighted copy of John Baldwin's original letter inquiring about getting the bridge listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Steve will send the requested photos and additional documentation of the bridge (again) and keep this project on MHC's radar.

COMMUNITY PRESERVATION ACT

Several town boards and commissions have been discussing the benefits of passing the Community Preservation Act. Those communities who have passed it have accumulated significant funds (from a tax levy matched by State funds) to underwrite historic preservation, open space conservation and affordable housing projects. Ashfield defeated this vote a decade or so ago. The Historical Commission is in favor of approving it, although in this economy it may be difficult to get a Town Meeting vote passed that would raise taxes even a half percent to fund it. It will require a good deal of community education. Conway apparently held a number of smaller, neighborhood meetings before it came before their Town Meeting and passed. Mollie volunteered to speak with Wendy Sweetser at HCI and get details of what neighboring towns have been able to do with their CPA funds, as well as find out what the state match is currently (no longer 100%).

INN AT NORTON HILL

Nan Parati has been told by the Franklin County Building Inspector that the Inn must be provided with a fully accessible ramp meeting ADA criteria. The Inn is a central contributing structure to the Ashfield Plain Historic District. In addition, any ramp on the front of the house will not only detract from the historic integrity of the building, it will be hazardous for users since it will extend close to the street. Another option that seems more reasonable to the Commission is to make the side door barrier-free, immediately adjacent to the driveway where a handicapped parking place could be designated. This would provide full access to the main floor of the Inn, with a much shorter ramp that is further from the road and closer to parking. Steve will contact Nan to find the current status of her appeal to the state Architectural Access Board, and see if a letter from the Historical Commission supporting her appeal is appropriate.

SPRUCE CORNER SCHOOL HOUSE

Gerard will continue to work on finding volunteers to help reinforce/rebuild the stone foundation. This would be a great location for a neighborhood discussion of the CPA!

BARN TOUR:

Mollie will contact Jack Sobon to see if he is interested in leading another barn tour in 2010. We would select barns that were not on the 2007 tour. If Jack is not interested, there are others who renovate old barns who could lead such a tour.

Nancy asked if there is any state or other funding for repairs to historic barns. Specifically, she is concerned about the Krasnoselsky barn on Baptist Corner Road. One estimate to repair the barn was \$100,000, of which \$60,000 would go to repairing the roof. Neither Gerard nor Mollie knows of any funding. PreservationMASS is the state organization that would have the most up-to-date information.

ANNUAL REPORT/ TOWN WEB SITE

Steve drafted a brief summary of the Historic Commission's overview and projects in 2009 for the Town's Annual Report, which the Commission heartily approved. This will form the basis of what appears in the upcoming town web site. Mollie suggested including a number of photos that represent projects, such as the stone bridge, a historic barn, schoolhouse, etc.

UTILITY LINE WORK

WMECO is replacing several wooden utility poles with metal ones; MHC has requested information about possible impact on historic or archaeological resources. Nancy reports that the Conservation Commission received similar information, and has more details concerning where the impacts will be. She will review the plans and get back to the Commission if there appear to be any potential historic resources within the designated corridor.

NEXT MEETING:

The Commission will meet again Thursday, February 25, 2010, 7:30 pm

Meeting adjourned at 9:15 pm.

Respectfully submitted by Mollie Babize.