

**DURHAM HISTORIC DISTRICT/HERITAGE COMMISSION MEETING
THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 3, 2020 – 7:00 PM
DURHAM TOWN HALL - COUNCIL CHAMBERS - DURHAM, NH**

NOTE: Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, members attended remotely via Zoom teleconferencing and only the Chair and Town Planner were present in Council Chambers.

Members Present: Chair Andrew Corrow; Larry Brickner-Wood; Charlotte Hitchcock; Mike Hoffman; Bill McGowan (Planning Board Rep), Carolyn Singer and Aaron Wolfson-Slepian.

Also Present: Town Planner Michael Behrendt and Minute Taker Lucie Bryar

I & II. Call to Order and Roll Call: Chair Andrew Corrow called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. and read the current guidelines (per the Governor’s executive order) regarding town meetings during the Covid-19 pandemic. He noted the public may participate in the meeting via phone or zoom, with instructions available on the town website.

III. Approval of the Agenda: Mr. Brickner-Wood MOVED to approve the agenda as presented; SECONDED by Ms. Singer, APPROVED unanimously, 6-0, Motion carries.

Note: Mr. McGowan arrived later (during Item VIII) in the meeting.

IV. Approval of Minutes for August 6, 2020 and Minutes of Site Walk of August 19,2020.

Mr. Brickner-Wood MOVED to approve the August 6, 2020 minutes as submitted; SECONDED by Ms. Singer, APPROVED 6-0, Motion carries.

Mr. Brickner-Wood MOVED to approve the Site Walk minutes from August 19, 2020; SECONDED by Mr. Wolf-Slepian, APPROVED 6-0, Motion carries.

V. Public Comments: There were none this evening.

Item VI. 26 Newmarket Road – Various Changes. Application to demolish garage, build new attached garage and accessory apartment, remove two storage sheds, remove two trees, and build wooden fence in the back yard. Scott and Karen Letourneau, property owners. Alyssa Murphy, Placework Studio, architect. Chris Redmond, contractor. Map 6, Lot 9-5. Residence B District. **HDC**

Architect Alyssa Murphy spoke on behalf of the applicants and said the homeowners had revised their application to remove the proposed moving of granite posts on the property. There are no other changes from the initial application. The application process had been continued from August 6, 2020 to allow Commissioners to conduct a site walk.

Chair Corrow said he believed the site walk had been beneficial to get a better sense of the scope of the project and as proposed, he thinks it will enhance the Historic District.

Mr. Hoffman asked Mr. Letourneau if their decision to remove the granite posts from the project was motivated by a desire to speed the project along (since it met with some objections from Commissioners earlier) or if the Letourneaus have decided not to move them.

Mr. Letourneau said it was both. They want to move the process along and he also would like to do more research on the history of the granite posts. It's possible they will re-visit moving them in the spring.

With no further discussion. Mr. Brickner-Wood MOVED to approve the application as amended for various changes at 26 Newmarket Road; SECONDED by Mr. Hoffman, APPROVED 6-0, Motion carries.

Mr. Behrendt asked project architect Alyssa Murphy if they'd consider painting the half gable on the left side black to add visual balance. He clarified it as a suggestion, not a condition of the approval.

Mr. Hoffman added he spent time reviewing the ordinance and noted "appurtenances that are not visible from the street" are exempt from oversight by the HDC. He believes this would apply to the granite posts and that possibly the applicants could move or remove them without permission. They could not, however, move them into public view [without approval from the HDC].

Ms. Singer said some ordinances need to be updated and it's possible the posts would be visible if the landscape was better trimmed. She asked Mr. Behrendt to send the applicants Bulletin #30 about rural landscapes which will provide further information.

VII. 47 Newmarket Road – Patio. Application to remove asphalt pavement and replace it with concrete pavers at the rear of the house. Aaron Wolfson-Slepian and Hana Vickery, property owners. Map 6, Lot 12-4. Residence Coastal District. **HDC**

Commissioner Wolfson-Slepian came forward to briefly describe the project and said he is recusing himself from voting on it. The home currently has a rear deck surrounded by asphalt pavement on both sides. They would like to remove about 80 square feet of asphalt pavement and replace it with concrete pavers. Only about one square foot is visible from the road.

Commissioners agreed it would be an improvement to the property.

Mr. Brickner-Wood MOVED to approve the application for a patio at 47 Newmarket Road as submitted; SECONDED by Ms. Singer, APPROVED 5-0-1, with Mr. Wolfson-Slepian abstaining.

VIII. Beech Hill Tower – Section 106 Review. Discussion about potential impacts of proposed wireless communications tower atop Beech Hill on cultural resources in accordance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act. The Town of Durham plans to erect a 180-foot high tower adjacent to the existing water tank to accommodate communications for emergency services. **HC**

Mr. Behrendt said the town is proposing to construct an emergency communications tower, if funding is approved. Currently, the town leases other space for telecommunications, which is costly. The proposal is for a free-standing tower on the highest point in Durham, with no lights or markers. A Section 106 review (impact on cultural resources) is required for any project federally-funded or licensed. The Heritage Commission is being asked to submit any comments or concerns to the State about cultural resources that may be impacted.

Commissioners discussed the potential impact on views from various vantage points in Durham. Some of the other concerns expressed:

- Vice Chair Brickner-Wood said he understands if there's a compelling need for the tower, but he struggles with the potential blight on the natural landscape.
- Chair Corrow said he's heard anecdotally there may be Native American burial grounds in the vicinity. Ms. Singer noted construction would need to stop if any remains were found. Typically the state does not publish the location of specific burial or archeological sites – in order to protect them from being disturbed.
- Chair Corrow noted there is also a stone wall about 10.5 feet from the proposed site and expressed his view that the wall should not be disturbed or destroyed.
- Ms. Hitchcock noted the tower would be more visible from Madbury and asked if officials there had been notified. Mr. Behrendt said he assumes the Division of Cultural Resources will contact the town of Madbury.
- Commissioners were unclear why the proposed tower would not have lights, since a smaller tower on the hill already has them. That will be a determination made by the FAA, however.

After further discussion, Commissioners agreed it would be beneficial to recommend to the Planning Board and/or Town Council to do a view study of the proposed tower, possibly using computer modeling. Vice-Chair Brickner-Wood said the town of Durham should be held to the same standard as a private developer would be.

Mr. Behrendt will submit the comments about the potential cultural impacts to the consultant from the NH Division of Cultural Resources. He noted the Heritage Commission is free to give any input they wish to the Planning Board and/or Town Council.

IX. Town Council Goals. Discussion of Town Council goals. **HC**

Chair Corrow said all town boards and commissions subscribe to the published core values of transparency, honesty and integrity. He believes the Heritage Commission should look at how to better market the historical and agricultural nature of the community. While the Town will likely contribute funds toward restoration of Wagon Hill Farmhouse and Old Town Hall, he said generous Durham residents would probably also support the projects with contributions to the Historic Preservation Trust.

Members discussed a number of ways to celebrate Durham's history and culture, including a focus on making it more walkable and bikeable. Among the topics mentioned:

- Initiating another walking tour of Downtown Durham; Mr. Behrendt noted there is a self-guided historic walking tour brochure created about 15 years ago by the Durham Historic Association available on the town website.
- The installation of historical plaques throughout town, similar to what Newmarket has done over the last decade or so. Based on Mr. Hoffman’s experience with that project, it was agreed starting small with one site would be less overwhelming than trying to accomplish historic signage throughout town all at once.

X. Other Business

Ms. Singer asked Chair Corrow if there could be an update on the Phase I Study Committee’s work. Chair Corrow apologized for not sending out the recommendations to Commissioners earlier.

To recap, he said the Heritage Commission previously set up a Phase I Study Group to look at the restoration of Wagon Hill Farmhouse and the Old Town Hall. The purpose of the Study Group was to recommend general parameters to guide the projects, based on historical considerations and best preservation practices.

Chair Corrow then shared the Study Group’s Recommendations:

- 1) Recommend that Town Council vote to approve the preservation of Wagon Hill Farmhouse and Old Town Hall and apply for an LCHIP grant. [It was noted that a formal Town Council vote is needed in order to apply for the grant.]
- 2) Recommend work on both properties occur concurrently, with a goal being to have the projects in progress or complete prior to Dover’s Quadricentennial in 2023, the Bicentennial of Marquis de Lafayette’s tour of Durham in 2025 and the country’s 250th founding in 2026; Timing the projects to these historic milestones might facilitate fundraising.
- 3) Authorize the Wagon Hill Farmhouse/Old Town Hall Preservation Committee to develop a preliminary cyclical maintenance plan and provide guidance on preservation and other issues that may arise during the preservation process. [A cyclical maintenance plan is a requirement of the LCHIP grant.] The Study Group also recommends Durham’s DPW be part of the plan since they currently handle most maintenance for the properties.
- 4) Authorize only qualified preservationists to perform work on the Wagon Hill Farmhouse and Old Town Hall. Preservationists shall be selected from the NH Preservation Alliance’s Directory of Preservationists and Consultants and will adhere to established preservation ethics.
- 5) In determining uses for the buildings, the architectural integrity of the structures must be respected and maintained. In the case of Wagon Hill, all interior walls are original and must remain and not be altered. In Old Town Hall, some walls have been rebuilt while others are original and should not be altered.

Chair Corrow said the recommendations will be placed on the October 2020 HC agenda for a vote. Once approved, he will present the recommendations to Town Council.

Commissioners asked a number of questions/voiced their views:

- Mr. Hoffman asked if security and fire alarm systems were under consideration since the currently vacant buildings are vulnerable. Chair Corrow said DPW has already initiated a number of meetings on this and they are seeking additional quotes.
- Vice-Chair Brickner-Wood asked if there is a committee or group looking at potential uses for the buildings once they are restored. Chair Corrow said all initial work will be exterior and structural. It will be a while before the interiors will be addressed, though there has been some informal discussion on this.
- Some expressed the view that Wagon Hill Farmhouse should have a tenant – possibly a live-in caretaker or a non-profit group since vacant buildings are subject to vandalism and much higher insurance rates.
- Vice-Chair Brickner-Wood asked which town entity would have purview over the projects. Chair Corrow said he believes there are several Commissions and boards that would work collaboratively, including the Heritage Commission, Conservation Commission, DPW and others.

Ms. Singer asked if Aaron Sturgis could be consulted about the cost of mitigating moisture issues soon. Chair Corrow said he and others have reached out to Mr. Sturgis recently and have not heard back; he will reach out again.

Ms. Singer also asked if temporary security protection could be installed at Wagon Hill Farmhouse, until a more permanent decision is made. A number of Commissioners expressed concern about the potential for fire. Chair Corrow said he will talk with Director of Public Works Rich Reine about this and also reiterated they are meeting with a fire protection and security company next week.

With no further business, Mr. Hoffman MOVED to adjourn the meeting at 8:38 p.m., SECONDED by Ms. Singer, APPROVED unanimously, 7-0, Motion carries.

Respectfully submitted,
Lucie Bryar, Minute Taker
Durham Historic District/ Heritage Commission

Note: These written minutes are intended as a general summary of the meeting. For more complete information, please refer to the DCAT22 On Demand videotape of the entire proceedings on the town of Durham website.