

These minutes were approved at the September 14, 2023 meeting.

DURHAM HISTORIC DISTRICT/HERITAGE COMMISSION
Thursday, August 3, 2023

DURHAM TOWN HALL, COUNCIL CHAMBERS
7:00 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT: Larry Brickner-Wood (Chair), Michael Hoffman, Eric Lund (Town Council Rep), Aaron Wolfson-Slepian and Alternate Tom Janosz

MEMBERS ABSENT: Charlotte Hitchcock (Vice-Chair); Bill McGowan; Carolyn Singer; and Alternate Jennifer Becker.

ALSO ABSENT: Town Planner Michael Behrendt

I. Call to Order

Chair Larry Brickner-Wood called the meeting to order at 7:01 p.m.

II. Roll Call

Roll call attendance was taken.

III. Seating of Alternates

Alternate Tom Janosz was seated as a voting member this evening.

IV. Approval of the Agenda

Mr. Lund MOVED to approve the agenda as submitted; SECONDED by Mr. Wolfson-Slepian, APPROVED unanimously, 5-0, Motion carries.

V. Approval of Minutes: June 8, 2023 & July 6, 2023

June 8, 2023: Chair Brickner-Wood asked for correction of the vote count on Item XII from 8-0 to 6-0 since there are only seven voting members.

Mr. Wolfson-Slepian MOVED to accept the minutes as amended; SECONDED by Mr. Janosz, APPROVED 4-0-1, with Mr. Hoffman abstaining.

July 6, 2023: The Chair asked for the minutes to reflect that Ms. Singer arrived at 7:05 p.m. at which time she was a voting member for the remainder of the meeting and Alternate Tom Janosz was no longer voting.

Mr. Lund MOVED to accept the minutes of July 6, 2023 as amended; SECONDED by Mr. Wolfson-Slepian; APPROVED unanimously, 5-0, Motion carries.

VI. Public Comments: There were none this evening.

VII. Staff Report: There was no staff report.

VIII. 15 Newmarket Road – Windows. Modification to approved plan to replace three windows and remove one window on an outbuilding on the site (the former ORYA building). Slipknot Properties LLC – Scott and Karen Letourneau, applicants. Map 108, Lot 69. HDC

Mr. Letourneau, 23 Newmarket Road, came forward to discuss the project. He said the application is for the Eastern-most third of the building. Their remodel plans have changed and they would now like to keep the office as storage space. To allow for mounting a head for a mini-split, they would like to remove two windows and replace them with a solid wall.

The application also calls for replacing three windows (two on the East side and one on the South side) with identical replacement windows to the two done on the back of the building.

Mr. Hoffman MOVED to approve the removal of two windows and replacement of three windows at 15 Newmarket Road as requested; SECONDED by Mr. Janosz; APPROVED unanimously 5-0, Motion carries.

Mr. Letourneau thanked the Commission and said they are still working with the Town to resolve parking issues on Wednesday and Thursday evenings.

IX. Town Farm Burial Ground. Discussion about Town-owned lot situated next to Chesley Cemetery, located off Stone Quarry Drive. Map 209, Lot 3. HC

The Chair noted this is a continuing discussion from last month. At that meeting, Mr. Lund presented an inquiry from the Cemetery Committee asking if the Heritage Commission would fund the use of ground-penetrating radar at the Town Farm Burial Ground to assess how many graves are there. Some members of the Commission were able to visit the site this month.

Chair Brickner-Wood said the cost of radar is bigger than any single item in the HDC/HC budget. If they were to recommend it, the Commission would likely have to ask Town Council to allocate funds.

Mr. Hoffman said given the fact that members weren't aware of it before now, it seems it hasn't been a Town priority. He's not sure if it should become one from a historical perspective.

Mr. Lund walked the site and said it's overgrown and no one has maintained the clearing to the burial ground.

Mr. Janosz commented that there are over 93 burial sites in Durham. He doesn't see any reason to single out the Town Farm Burial Ground and believes it might set a precedent that all sites in Town will be specially marked or examined with radar. Later he added that he doesn't support the Town spending money on this.

Chair Brickner-Wood noted this site is distinguished because it's the Town Farm. He believes there's a historical component since most Towns had similar sites. But he's not sure why identifying how many individuals are buried there would make a difference.

Mr. Hoffman agreed with the Chair's position that this site is different from private family burial grounds. He recommends tabling this discussion and giving members time to think about how this site might be a Town asset. Possibly a walking trail could be added as part of an Eagle Scout project, for example.

The Chair will research with the help of Mr. Behrendt how other towns have handled similar sites.

X. Oyster River Plaque. Discussion about next steps for revising the wording on the plaque noting the Oyster River Raid. HC

Chair Brickner-Wood said he has no updates other than an email he shared earlier with Commission members from Amy Dixon from the State Historic Resources Division. She noted the Oyster River sign will be part of a wider discussion during the Section 106 review for the mitigation of the dam removal.

He also met with Janet Perkins Howland, Chair of the Human Rights Commission, who sent him final wording for a sign in Rye showing it was a collaborative effort between the Commission on Native American Affairs and the State. He hopes similar collaboration takes place in Durham.

XI. Other Business

The Chair referenced an email from DPW checking in about their desire to remove some granite curbing (which is in the Town right-of-way) on the back side of the sidewalk. Rich Reine [DPW Director] said there's no engineering or structural

reason for what's being done. It's not curbing; It's just blocks and a black aluminum fence. It's unclear why the Town installed them and the property owner doesn't want them. The Chair said he doesn't find either of those features to be historic and he has no objections to their removal. Members concurred.

Mr. Hoffman recommended the Town retain ownership of the granite because it's valuable and it was confirmed that's going to take place.

Re-configuration of U.S. 4 interchange

Mr. Lund reported he attended an Information Session on July 19th about the proposed re-configuration of the U.S. 4 - Madbury intersection. He learned UNH is eligible to be a historic district which potentially impacts some of the alternatives being considered. He's not sure if the Commission should be part of the Section 106 review for the project, if there is one.

Commission members engaged in discussion. The Chair said there's no formal designation of UNH's historic district, other than it being identified in Eversource's Seacoast Reliability Project.

Mr. Lund said Town Council concurred that a roundabout is the preferred option, from four other alternatives. The State is moving forward with the project outside of the Town's 10-year plan because it's considered an urgent safety issue. Construction is slated to begin in 2026.

The consensus was there's nothing for the Commission to do at this point, but it's helpful to be aware of the potential historic considerations at UNH.

Historic District Sign

Mr. Janosz sent a picture to the Commission of a small Historic District sign that is barely visible due to its small size and overgrown vegetation. He recommends the weeds be cut back. Members briefly discussed the size of signs based on if they're intended for pedestrians or motorists.

In her email response, Vice-Chair Hitchcock recommended the Commission look at historic signage as part of a comprehensive plan for the Town and not address issues on an ad hoc basis.

XII. Adjournment

With no further business, Mr. Hoffman MOVED to adjourn the meeting at 7:29 p.m., SECONDED by Mr. Janosz, APPROVED unanimously, 5-0, Motion carries.

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

