

These minutes were approved at the November 2, 2023 meeting.

DURHAM HISTORIC DISTRICT/HERITAGE COMMISSION
Thursday, September 14, 2023

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

MEMBERS PRESENT: Larry Brickner-Wood (Chair), Charlotte Hitchcock (Vice-Chair via zoom); Jennifer Becker (Alternate), Tom Janosz (Alternate), Eric Lund (Town Council Rep), Bill McGowan (Planning Board Rep/arrived at 7:35 p.m.), Carolyn Singer and Aaron Wolfson-Slepian

MEMBERS ABSENT: Michael Hoffman

ALSO PRESENT: Town Planner Michael Behrendt

I. Call to Order

Chair Larry Brickner-Wood called the meeting to order at 7:09 p.m.

II. Roll Call

Roll call attendance was taken.

III. Seating of Alternates

The Chair noted an alternate cannot be named for the Planning Board Rep but can be for the other open position. He seated Alternate Jennifer Becker as a voting member this evening.

IV. Approval of the Agenda

Mr. Lund MOVED to approve the agenda as submitted; SECONDED by Ms. Becker, APPROVED unanimously by roll call vote, 6-0, Motion carries.

Voting AYE: Chair Larry Brickner-Wood, Vice-Chair Charlotte Hitchcock, Jennifer Becker, Eric Lund, Carolyn Singer and Aaron Wolfson-Slepian.

V. Approval of Minutes: August 3, 2023

Vice Chair Hitchcock asked for a change to Item XI, Line 110 -- The correct language should be "UNH is *eligible* to be a historic district." They have not been nominated yet.

Chair Brickner-Wood asked for clarification to Item XI, Lines 98-100: It should say: “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.”

Mr. Wolfson-Slepian MOVED to approve the minutes as amended; SECONDED by Ms. Becker, APPROVED unanimously by roll call vote, 6-0. Motion carries.

Voting AYE: Chair Larry Brickner-Wood, Vice-Chair Charlotte Hitchcock, Jennifer Becker, Eric Lund, Carolyn Singer and Aaron Wolfson-Slepian.

VI. Public Comments: There were none this evening.

VII. Staff Report: Town Planner Michael Behrendt reported that Tideline has been tremendously successful, but parking is an issue. The worst time is Thursday evenings when the HDC meets and to a lesser extent on Wednesdays when the Planning Board meets. Parking is a problem potentially three times a month.

He noted the Letourneaus are talking to Three Chimneys Inn and Durham Village Garage about overflow parking. He and Administrator Selig have discussed signage but have decided to just observe the situation for now.

Chair Brickner-Wood disagreed with the “wait and see” approach.” He recommends the Town put cones out on Wednesdays and Thursdays to reserve spots for members of Town commissions and boards. He does not believe as public servants they should have to walk a few blocks to get to meetings. It’s become an issue already. Mr. Behrendt will discuss this suggestion with Administrator Selig.

In other news, construction has begun on UNH’s Huddleston Hall addition. They are complying with the donor’s wishes for the design. Work has also begun on Hetzel Hall.

ATO fraternity had a building approved for Garrison Avenue and had put the project on hold for a few years due to cost. They are now ready to start again.

Chair Brickner-Wood said the grass had been mowed at 1 Durham Road and he thanked Mr. Behrendt for making phone calls to the owner.

Mr. Lund said they should still keep an eye on it. Last month a list of properties with liens in Durham was sent to Town Council and 1 Durham Road was on the list, as well as the other property owned by the same LLC.

It was agreed that Mr. Behrendt will send a letter to the property owner with the Commission's concerns about continued property upkeep.

VIII. Mill Pond Dam Mitigation. Recommendations from the Heritage Commission Public History Committee in response to the June 26 report from VHB to the Town Council. **HC**

The Chair said the proposal had been distributed via email to members and asked Ms. Hitchcock to give a summary.

Vice-Chair Hitchcock said in her view the most important thing in the report was the proposal to add riffle crests (little stone barriers) that would go across the channel and create artificial rapids. She was struck by how similar it would be to the dam and would be a nice way to get back some of the feeling of the original head-of-tide waterfall. She added the Section 106 group is meeting on September 18th.

Mr. Lund MOVED to make a proposal to the 106 Group as described in the memo from Ms. Hitchcock; SECONDED by Mr. Wolfson-Slepian, APPROVED unanimously by roll call vote, 6-0, Motion carries.

Voting AYE: Chair Larry Brickner-Wood, Vice-Chair Charlotte Hitchcock, Jennifer Becker, Eric Lund, Carolyn Singer and Aaron Wolfson-Slepian.

The Chair thanked Ms. Hitchcock and others on the sub-committee for their work on the dam project.

IX. 2024 Budget. Budget for calendar year 2024 for the HDC/HC. **HDC/HC**

Chair Brickner-Wood invited resident Joan Bigwood Osborn to give her presentation [about the 250th anniversary celebration of the American Revolutionary War raid on Fort William and Mary] before members begin discussing the budget. Ms. Osborn is on zoom from Kyoto, Japan.

The Commission agreed it would be okay to hear her request for funds without re-visiting the details for the event, which they've heard at past meetings.

Ms. Osborn said fundraising to the greater community has not begun yet, pending approval of the Freedom Café pass-through account. Tonight she's asking the Heritage Commission to consider financial support for the following items. *Note: Dollar amounts were clarified later in the discussion and added here:*

- The design, building and maintenance of a website. She has identified an individual for this. (\$1K)
- Banners to hang around town (\$800)
- Funding for an educational piece that would take place on the actual day in December (an indoor event) that would feature a historical expert, probably from UNH; (\$400 with refreshments)
- Bunting for the parade route (\$300)

In answer to questions from the Chair, Ms. Osborn said she has not approached any other boards or commissions since this is a historic event directly tied to the mission of the Commission. Her request is for fiscal year 2024.

Chair Brickner-Wood said the Commission is supportive but has a limited budget and allocating funds for the event would take away from other initiatives. They might consider adding it as an extra request in the budget or asking the Town to make a contribution.

Ms. Osborn noted the Town has committed to covering insurance and safety for the day, to include police protection and ambulance services.

It was noted that if the HC were to support the event, they would be considered a sponsor or partner.

The Chair noted Mr. McGowan arrived at 7:35 p.m.

Mr. Behrendt asked if there's a committee working on this and Ms. Osborn said it's been more of a grassroots effort, with different people handling different aspects. Some are working on the parade, for example, while others are working on re-enactments or live music.

Ms. Osborn is seeking involvement from Commission members to help with the writing and editing of the broadcast narrative before the parade since it needs to be historically accurate and sensitive.

Mr. Behrendt recommended the development of a written plan to give to the Town detailing everything that will be done and when. He's not sure if she needs to go to Town Council for approval.

Ms. Osborn said she plans to go to Town Council and will submit written reports to keep town officials and partners up-to-date. Parking is a big issue right now; She's in discussion with UNH about the use of a parking lot and possibly a shuttle. Once it's publicized, she expects to draw attendees from the entire Seacoast region.

Mr. Lund asked Ms. Osborn if her funding request would come under Parks and Rec since it will involve the use of Old Town Landing. Ms. Osborn said she's meeting with Rachel [from Parks & Rec] this week and will see what she says.

She added it's her understanding any banners will need the approval of Town Council.

Mr. Behrendt noted the banner across Pettee Brook Road is the largest in town. The Chair said quite often companies will sponsor a banner in exchange for having their logo on it.

The Chair thanked Ms. Osborn for the information and she then left the meeting.

Opening the discussion about the 2024 budget, Chair Brickner-Wood said last year's budget was \$11,300 – with \$2,500 being a wage/social security item. He favors asking for the same amount.

Year-to-date expenditures have been \$1,094.76 total. The balance in Contract Services is \$4k; Professional Development is \$200 and General supplies is \$3,778; and the balance in Legal Notices is \$200.

Ms. Singer noted past discussions about the need for a temperature and humidity data logger for Smith Chapel and said she sees this as an important item. The goal is to determine if a dehumidifier is needed.

The Chair brought forward the idea to hire a consultant to facilitate discussion on the [Oyster River] marker. He would like to see Durham resolve inclusivity issues and reach consensus as other nearby towns have done.

Other items to be considered include pursuing a CLG grant to help with a historic inventory and also hiring a researcher to look into preservation easements.

Mr. Wolfson-Slepian spoke in favor of preservation easements and said home repairs and improvements in the historic district can be costly and many homeowners could use the extra help. There was discussion about how preservation easements might work and if it would be legal for the Commission to offer them.

The Chair said he has experience with this from working in other communities. More research is needed to see how it might work in Durham.

Bringing forth another item to consider in the budget, Ms. Singer said while visiting the UK this summer, she saw notebooks for each historic house and would like to consider something similar in Durham.

Mr. Janosz asked what happens to funds that haven't been spent so far and the Chair replied they do not roll over. He's in favor of requesting the same amount for 2024 to allow the Commission to hire consultants for un-anticipated needs. He added just because funds haven't been spent yet doesn't mean they're not needed.

Mr. Lund MOVED to request a level-funded budget for fiscal year 2024; SECONDED by Ms. Singer, APPROVED unanimously by roll call vote, 7-0, Motion carries.

Voting AYE: Chair Larry Brickner-Wood, Vice-Chair Charlotte Hitchcock, Jennifer Becker, Eric Lund, Bill McGowan, Carolyn Singer and Aaron Wolfson-Slepian.

Mr. Behrendt raised the question of how the request for \$2,500 for the Fort William and Mary anniversary should be handled. Should the Commission add an extra amount to their budget or should they endorse the project and let the Town Administrator or Town Council decide where to take the funds.

Mr. Lund MOVED that the HDC support an expenditure of up to \$2,500 for the Fort William and Mary 250th Anniversary Reenactment separately from the HDC budget – or wherever it’s deemed appropriate; SECONDED by Mr. McGowan; Approved unanimously by roll call vote, 7-0, Motion carries.

Voting AYE: Chair Larry Brickner-Wood, Vice-Chair Charlotte Hitchcock, Jennifer Becker, Eric Lund, Bill McGowan, Carolyn Singer and Aaron Wolfson-Slepian.

X Other Business

The Chair raised a question about the upcoming Section 106 Review Committee meeting: specifically, should the Oyster River Raid marker be part of a bigger discussion or should it be considered separately? The Durham Historic Association has asked that it be considered separately [from the dam mitigation efforts].

Vice-Chair Hitchcock said it’s a question of timing in her view. Until it’s known what the mitigation measures will be, any decision on the marker should be held. The two need to be coordinated in some fashion.

Mr. Lund asked for clarification. What is the argument for separating the marker review from the Section 106 work? Ms. Singer replied that the raid isn’t pertinent to the dam site. Most of the event happened elsewhere. She feels it’s important to look into the dam site in its entirety, which includes the work of 30 enslaved individuals.

Mr. Behrendt gave a brief recap of the marker project. The State [Division of Historical Resources] removed the marker a while ago and now the revision of the wording is in limbo. There are several groups involved in the editing process including the Durham Historic Association, the Heritage Commission and an Indigenous group from Concord.

The Division of Historical Resources recommended that decisions about the marker be made as part of the Section 106 Review for dam mitigation. A number of Commission members expressed tonight that it should be separate since it's a complex issue and combining the two might delay one or the other.

Lengthy discussion ensued. Ms. Singer, who sits on the Section 106 Committee, said she feels there's a lack of historians and historical expertise in the group. In her view, there's also a need for indigenous people who understand the history and don't have a political ax to grind. She's concerned that the interpretation of historical events is accurate and fair.

Chair Brickner-Wood took exception to her comment and said he doesn't believe an individual needs to be a historian to care about inclusive narratives. There's value in broadening participation to include others with different perspectives. He added that those serving on the Commission are not historians, but each one brings a particular expertise to the table.

After further discussion, **Ms. Singer MOVED that the marker issue be considered separately from the broader 106 Review; SECONDED by Ms. Becker, APPROVED 6-1-0 by roll call vote, Motion carries.**

Voting Aye: Chair Larry Brickner-Wood; Jennifer Becker; Eric Lund; Bill McGowan; Carolyn Singer; and Aaron Wolfson-Slepian. **Opposed:** Vice-Chair Charlotte Hitchcock

Mr. Behrendt brought forth the idea expressed by the Chair to work with a facilitator on the language for the marker. He estimates it would cost \$1-\$2K. The HDC could take the lead on the project and convene all interested parties. The role of a facilitator would be to oversee the discussion, lay down ground rules and keep everyone focused and civil.

Ms. Singer suggested they hire two facilitators. She doesn't believe that people understand how complex the issue is.

Mr. McGowan MOVED to explore hiring one facilitator to oversee the discussion among the stakeholders; SECONDED by Ms. Becker; APPROVED unanimously by roll call vote, 7-0, Motion carries.

Voting AYE: *Chair Larry Brickner-Wood, Vice-Chair Charlotte Hitchcock, Jennifer Becker, Eric Lund, Bill McGowan, Carolyn Singer and Aaron Wolfson-Slepian.*

Members then discussed if they should explore hiring a subject matter expert to take part in the first meeting, with Ms. Singer strongly advocating for the idea. In her view, they need someone knowledgeable about French and Indian Wars, as well as someone with an understanding of the role of Indigenous people and Europeans.

Mr. Behrendt and others expressed the view that they should start with a facilitator and let the group reach a consensus about hiring a subject matter expert. It's unclear what type of expert would be needed and expertise might already exist in the group.

Mr. Lund MOVED that the Commission investigate hiring one or more subject matter experts to participate in the discussion starting at the first meeting; SECONDED by Ms. Singer; Motion FAILED by roll call vote, 4-3.

Opposed: Chair Larry Brickner-Wood, Jennifer Becker, Bill McGowan, and Aaron Wolfson-Slepian. **Voting Aye:** Vice-Chair Charlotte Hitchcock, Eric Lund, and Carolyn Singer.

XII. Adjournment

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

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