

These minutes were approved at the March 7, 2024 meeting.

DURHAM HISTORIC DISTRICT/HERITAGE COMMISSION
Thursday, December 14, 2023
DURHAM TOWN HALL, COUNCIL CHAMBERS
7:00 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT: Larry Brickner-Wood (Chair); Charlotte Hitchcock (Vice-Chair via zoom – at 7:04 p.m.); Michael Hoffman, Eric Lund (Town Council Rep); Carolyn Singer (arrived at 7:09 p.m.); Jennifer Becker (Alternate) and Tom Janosz (Alternate).

MEMBERS ABSENT: Bill McGowan (Planning Board Rep) and Aaron Wolfson-Slepian

ALSO PRESENT: 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

The Chair seated Alternates Ms. Becker for Mr. Wolfson-Slepian and Mr Janosz for Ms. Singer.

IV. Approval of the Agenda

Mr. Lund MOVED to approve the agenda as presented; SECONDED by Ms. Becker, APPROVED unanimously, 5-0, Motion carries.

V. Approval of Minutes: November 2, 2023 - POSTPONED

Members had not received draft minutes in advance so review was postponed until January.

VI. Public Comments: None.

VII. Staff Report: There was nothing to report.

VIII. Tideline Public House – Parking Signs 15 Newmarket Road. Application to install a 14 square foot freestanding sign in the front of the site. The applicant received a variance as the size limit is 6 square feet in the Historic District. Slipknot Properties LLC - Scott and Karen Letourneau, applicants. Map 108, Lot 69. **HDC**

Mr. Letourneau said nothing has changed from the application submitted and discussed by the Commission last month. As requested, he researched materials for the signposts and found the cost of granite too high for their budget. Two alternatives are pressure-treated lumber wrapped with Azec (their preferred choice) or cedar.

The second item discussed was lighting. He noted nothing will take place until the spring since the sign installer doesn't install in cold weather. The Letourneaus may delay lighting the signs, but they understand it needs to be downcast.

Mr. Hoffman recommended the color of the light be kept close to 3,000 to 4,000 kelvins, consistent with other lights on the property. He said the Commission typically isn't in favor of azec if it's viewable up close, but from a distance of five feet or more it's indistinguishable from other materials and allows for easier maintenance. He would approve it in this instance, but in his view, this shouldn't be considered precedent setting for other cases.

There was brief discussion of the composition of the sign material, which is High Density Urethane (HDU) with the letters carved into it. Mr. Hoffman recommends sandwiching the material in the back with plywood to avoid damage from snow or snow removal.

Mr. Hoffman MOVED to approve the application with the modification noted to mount the lighting downcast and to be consistent with the kelvin of other lighting on the property; SECONDED by Ms. Becker, APPROVED, 6-0-1, with Ms. Singer abstaining because she wasn't present for the full discussion; Motion carries.

IX. Wagon Hill Farmhouse – LCHIP. Update on the LCHIP application for the farmhouse. **HC**

Ms. Singer reported the Town got a large LCHIP grant of \$286,600. Combined with a \$20K Moose Plate Grant, the total awarded for renovations at Wagon Hill Farm is now \$306,600.

The Chair extended a big thank you to Ms. Singer and Ms. Hitchcock for their considerable amount of work on the applications and noted this is a milestone for the Town.

Ms. Singer said this is a prime example of the town and local citizens working together. She acknowledged contributions from the Durham Historic Association, DPW Director Rich Reine, and Chair Brickner-Wood.

Vice-Chair Hitchcock added that Ms. Singer was asked to speak at the LCHIP awards ceremony because this project combines both longstanding conservation efforts and historical renovation.

Vice-Chair Hitchcock noted a construction manager has been hired and Ms. Singer said work could begin in late spring once details have been worked out with LCHIP.

Mr. Lund said Town Council needs to hold a public hearing and accept the LCHIP grant and the earliest that will happen is early February.

X. Oyster River Raid Sign. Discussion about plans to hold facilitated meetings with stakeholders to address revisions to the language in the sign that was located on Newmarket Road near the Oyster River. **HC**

The Chair said Montgomery Will has been hired as a facilitator for the meetings. The principals are Barbara Will and Charlotte Bacon, both now affiliated with Dartmouth College. They have done facilitator work around the issue of inclusion of indigenous people.

Ms. Singer asked about the expected outcomes for the meeting and Chair Brickner-Wood said ideally consensus would be reached on language for the sign. If that doesn't occur, then hopefully there would be a clear path forward. He added that these meetings could provide a model for how to talk about similar topics in the future.

Mr. Lund asked if the DHA [Durham Historic Association] has appointed a representative yet and the answer was no. He referenced an email exchange between Marjorie Smith (a member of DHA) and Town Administrator Selig that was shared with Town Council. He interpreted the exchange from Ms. Smith to say she doesn't think she's eligible to participate.

The Chair said since this isn't a regulatory body, it's unclear why Ms. Smith might think that. Ultimately the State, not the Town, will make the final decision regarding wording.

Ms. Singer commented that the Division of Historical Resources hasn't provided clear guidance to the Towns about wording for historical signs. She believes they could have done more.

She also expressed that there should be a way for community members to participate and have input.

Mr. Behrendt said residents can send emails and letters at any time to share their views. The Chair said they've already received some input, not all of it positive. He added this needs to be a facilitated discussion, not a public hearing.

Mr. Behrendt recapped there are three public meetings scheduled: Jan. 18th, Feb. 15th and March 21st. Larry Brickner-Wood will chair the meetings, which will be facilitated by Montgomery Will. The Heritage Commission has appointed Carolyn Singer and Jennifer Becker as participants.

He then shared the names of individuals from various groups and commissions who will participate, including from the Durham Human Rights Commission, Durham Historic Association; the NH Division of Historical Resources; the Department of Transportation and the indigenous community in NH.

XI. Other Business

The Chair asked for a review and approval of meeting dates for 2024. Councilor Lund noted the October meeting was scheduled on Rosh Hashanah. The proposal was made to change the date to October 10, 2024.

Mr. Lund MOVED to approve the 2024 meeting schedule for the HDC/HC as amended; SECONDED by Ms. Becker; APPROVED unanimously, 6-0, Motion carries.

Mr. Janosz then said he had prepared a long list of concerns regarding the Commission, but would start by sharing just a few. He moved to Durham in 2020 and recently joined the Commission.

He noted that November 2020 minutes showed short-term, medium-term and long-range goals, but none of them have been discussed since he joined the Commission.

He questioned why buildings in the Historic District don't have historic date plaques and mentioned that the sign indicating the location of the District is barely visible. In addition, he questioned if people living in the HD have ever been invited to a meeting.

To this last question, Ms. Singer noted the Commission held a special event for HD residents at Three Chimneys Inn last fall and had a speaker from Historic New England. There was the opportunity for questions and only one person came forward to say they would like a similar program for contractors.

Responding to Mr. Janosz's point about goals, Mr. Hoffman said perhaps the Commission could review their goals on an annual basis like Town Council does.

Mr. Lund said Town Council typically reviews their goals at the meeting following installation of new councilors in April or May. He suggested the HDC/HC consider discussing their goals in May and finalizing them in June to ensure they're aligned with Town Council goals.

Ms. Singer shared that she's been working on a walking tour of Durham focusing on enslaved peoples but due to her full-time work commitments, progress has been slow. Getting historically accurate information is very time-consuming.

A lengthy discussion followed about historic signage; priorities for the Commission and the feasibility of pursuing specific goals.

Vice-Chair Hitchcock said the Commission set up a Public History Committee to tackle some of the projects. A sign was installed at Smith Chapel, but much of their time has been taken up with the Wagon Hill project recently.

Ms. Singer added that work on the dam by the 106 group has also taken time and may help to drive some of the interpretative signage going forward.

Mr. Behrendt noted the Town has begun a GIS project to identify all historic resources in Town. Input into the database is done when time allows.

Chair Brickner-Wood noted he's proud of the work the Commission has accomplished. He welcomes re-visiting goals but said projects need to be prioritized since this is a volunteer group. If members see things that need to be done, they are free to bring initiatives forward.

Action Items from the discussion:

- The Chair asked Mr. Janosz if he would serve on the Public History Committee and he accepted.
- Mr. Hoffman will identify a speaker from the Newmarket Main Street Corporation, which has a robust historic signage program.
- Mr. Behrendt will re-circulate the Commission's goals via email and begin the process of looking into a larger sign designating the Historic District. Research needs to be done to see if the NH Department of Transportation has to approve this.
- Mr. Lund mentioned there's an ongoing re-write of zoning codes. This would be a good time for the Commission to submit any suggestions for larger signage in the District, particularly for commercial buildings.

XII. Ms. Singer MOVED to adjourn at 8:17 p.m.; SECONDED by Mr. Hoffman, APPROVED unanimously, 6-0; Motion carries.

Respectfully submitted,
Lucie Bryar, Minute Taker
Durham Conservation 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.