

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

DURHAM HISTORIC DISTRICT/HERITAGE COMMISSION
Thursday, January 4, 2024
DURHAM TOWN HALL, COUNCIL CHAMBERS
7:00 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT: Larry Brickner-Wood (Chair); Charlotte Hitchcock (Vice-Chair); Eric Lund (Town Council Rep); Carolyn Singer; Aaron Wolfson-Slepian; and Tom Janosz (Alternate).

MEMBERS ABSENT: Jennifer Becker (Alternate); Michael Hoffman, and Bill McGowan (Planning Board Rep).

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 Alternate Tom Janosz as a voting member for Mike Hoffman.

IV. Approval of the Agenda

*Ms. Singer **MOVED** to approve the agenda as presented; **SECONDED** by Mr. Janosz, **APPROVED** unanimously, 6-0, Motion carries.*

V. Approval of Minutes: November 2, 2023

*Mr. Lund **MOVED** to approve the minutes as presented; **SECONDED** by Ms. Hitchcock, **APPROVED** 5-0-1, with Mr. Wolfson-Slepian abstaining, Motion carries.*

VI. Public Comments:

Robin Mower of Britton Lane came forward to speak about the 1694 Oyster River Raid Marker. She will submit her comments in writing to the Commission for posting on the town website.

She said some of her ancestors were among those killed during the raid and gave a brief family history. She does not believe history should be re-told through a contemporary lens and said, “I was more than startled to learn the Commission is entertaining 21st Century ideas that are irrelevant to the presentation of facts about a specific event that occurred more than 300 years ago.” While those ideas have a role going forward, in her view, they “have no place on a sign whose brief language must commemorate devastating events that happened over the course of a single day.”

She expressed appreciation for the thoroughness of the work done by the Durham Historic Association and said there’s no substitute for primary research.

Ms. Mower added the review of the Oyster River sign could be an opportunity for the DNCR to consider giving more space for events such as this in order to provide more context.

She concurs with a suggestion made to the Commission by resident Scott Letourneau at a prior meeting in which he said the marker could be used to bring the public to a resource that has the “rest of the story,” possibly with a QR code leading to a book or to Durham Historic Association documents.

VII. Staff Report: There was nothing to report.

VIII. Oyster River Raid Sign. Update on plans for roundtable discussions starting January 18. HC

Chair Brickner-Wood reiterated that the first roundtable is scheduled for January 18th. Additional meetings are scheduled for February 15th and March 21st, though it’s not certain if three meetings will be needed.

The Commission is still waiting to hear back from some invited groups to see if they will send representatives to participate. The Chair and Town Planner will meet next week with the consultants to discuss the framework and agenda for the first meeting.

The Chair said he expects the first meeting to start with representatives from the State providing context for the sign replacement program and answering questions that have been raised.

The meetings will be available for live viewing on zoom and afterwards on the Town website. Ms. Singer expressed disappointment that the public won't be able to ask questions during the sessions.

The Chair responded that while there won't be time for public comment, the Commission invites residents to submit questions and comments in writing. Some comments have already been received. All communications are posted on the Heritage Commission webpage/Current Projects & Applications/Oyster River Raid

There was some discussion about the General Sullivan Bridge sign, with Ms. Singer saying he was a slaveholder who decimated several villages in New York. Mr. Lund added the sign was removed for maintenance and then returned with new wording; the Town wasn't consulted about it.

Vice-Chair Hitchcock said review of historical markers shouldn't necessarily be seen as an attempt to re-write history but rather as an opportunity to include some of the voices and people who were left out of the story the first time.

Ms. Singer recommends the article, "The New History Wars" from *The Atlantic*, which is posted on the Heritage Commission's webpage. She also named several individuals from UNH who were instrumental in making the telling of history more inclusive.

IX. Program for Historical Plaques. Discussion about program for creating historical plaques in Durham and a review of the established program in Newmarket.

Mr. Behrendt reported that Mr. Hoffman sent an excellent Power Point (via email) about an impressive signage program in Newmarket. Due to illness, he couldn't be here tonight to present it.

Newmarket's signs are all bronze, made by Franklin Bronze Company in Pennsylvania. Most are wall plaques; some are free-standing and some have engraved images.

Mr. Behrendt would like to recommend that Durham follow the example of Newmarket. He suggests the Commission choose one property – possibly starting with the courthouse – and focus on installing one plaque per year.

Vice-Chair Hitchcock then gave a Power Point presentation [starting at 45:50 on D-CAT] on current historical signage in Durham, showing photos of many sites that could be considered for signs demarcating the Historic District. The goal is to

make it more visible to the public. [She will ask to have her presentation posted on the Heritage Commission webpage.]

She presented concepts to consider for HDC signage including:

1. Mark entrances to the HDC in a much more significant way -- not just with bigger signs but using a gateway approach.
2. Have banners on light poles -- maybe on every other or every third pole. Banners could be individualized for buildings;
3. Install individual building signs (for pedestrian-viewing) or just name and date signs.

The Chair thanked Ms. Hitchcock and then a lengthy discussion ensued. He noted the Commission has already budgeted for installing one sign a year.

Ms. Singer suggested the Commission adopt general guidelines first about what type of information should be on signs.

Topics brought up during the discussion included:

- Some of Durham's historic buildings – those in the Historic District Overlay - are currently shown on zoning overlay maps.
- When Eversource did the Seacoast Reliability Project, they identified other historic buildings, including the UNH campus.
- The Durham Historic Association would like to expand the Historic District, but it's unclear if they are looking to add only buildings that are eligible for the National Register.
- The historic Lafayette sign (red and blue) is distinct from other signs in town; It was initiated and funded by a private foundation with approval by the Heritage Commission.
- Some recently-replaced street signs in town have Town Seal toppers. It's unclear when this practice was started or who is responsible.
- The NH-DOT would need to be consulted for any proposed signs on Route 108.

- A suggestion was made to re-locate the current small sign from Church Hill (which all agreed is mounted too high) to a different location in town and replace it with something more visible.
- There was discussion of the durability of different materials including bronze or possibly a type of plastic for building-mounted signs.
- QR codes could be used to bring people to linked information so that more of the historical story could be told. The linked files can be modified when information needs to be updated.

After discussion, Mr. Behrendt offered to do some preliminary research about a sign for the Old Courthouse (a.k.a. Old Town Hall), to get preliminary pricing from Franklin Bronze and to reach out to the Durham Historic Association. There was consensus this is a good idea.

Commission members were also invited to look at existing signs around town to help decide the best approach for historic signs going forward.

X. Adjournment

With no further business, Ms. Singer MOVED to adjourn at 8:34 p.m., SECONDED by Mr. Wolfson-Slepian, APPROVED unanimously, 6-0, Motion carries.

Respectfully submitted,
Lucie Bryar, Minute Taker
Durham 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.