

Northbridge Historical Commission
Minutes of Meeting
6/10/14

Members present: Karen Talley, Paula McCowan, Ken Warchol, Dan O'Neill, Mary Barlow.

Absent: Lenny Smith, Wendy Timmons.

The meeting was called to order at 7:05PM

The meeting wavered from one topic to another, then back to the first.

I combined notes for brevity.

Trolley tours:

Ken W said people tried to use influence to get included in last month's tours after they were fully booked. Thinks there is still pent-up demand for them; he thought we should continue on a 6 month rotation until we can't sell out again.

Ken told the group that 8-10 individuals called him to thank us for having the tours and said they really learned a lot.

Mary B said that she placed an ad in the Blackstone Valley Tribune for the tours, and they then sold out in less than 6 days. Ads in the Uxbridge Times and Worcester Telegram became redundant. She said that Providence RI has art tours monthly, and they sell out perpetually. Perhaps we will too. She suggested having merchants fund tours by placing ads in the walking tours booklets, etc. Ken thought this was a good idea.

Current funders (Omni, a bank and Alternatives), are not willing to fund tours more than once a year. We need to approach other concerns for funding. Mary B said she would produce a flier with our planned events to use in recruiting new corporate sponsors.

Alternatives has another large cultural event running on the last Saturday in October. It was suggested that we combine our event with theirs. The Singh Theater (Alternatives complex) will be used in-house, so we would have to have the slide show/historical reenactment at the Fletcher House, across the street. Also, many people have said that Columbus Day weekend presents too many scheduling conflicts to be feasible.

Alternatives is sponsoring artists/painters who will be displaying their work at various sites in Northbridge and Uxbridge. Some are at historic sites. Mary B will coordinate our event with Tom Saupe from Alternatives.

Wendy T had previously taken the large sign at the old meetinghouse (Corner of Hill St and Benson Rd) to be restored. Someone called the police, thinking it had been stolen. They searched and called around and finally found out about the restoration. Ken W thinks this is a good sign re: community acknowledgement of the historic nature of our town. Other individuals in town have stepped forward to fund specific restoration projects. Jack Davis has given \$400 for restoration of the Kimotek house marker (corner of Benson and Highland). The DAR (Caroline Lavalley) gave \$100 and Jack Walker \$100 toward the historic sign restoration project. The Northbridge Council on Aging has given \$25 directly to our commission.

Omni and Unibank have given \$500 each toward trolley tours.

Note: the Commission can only accept such earmarked donations; we can't raise and keep in-house any more than our annual budget (\$500).

Preservation Award:

Lenny S, Ken W and the town manager attended and received an award at the Historic Preservation Ceremony in Boston. There was a short slide show of the process of town hall restoration included. A photo op occurred with the 3 people mentioned front and center.

Town Hall Great Hall restoration:

The Building Capital Committee had Ken W consult re: the projected timeline and goals re: restoring to full function our town hall great hall (upper floor). He mentioned plastering, floor sanding, painting and wood restoration. He told them he would consult w/ our commission for further ideas. We discussed this subject. We as a group would like to see a staged restoration. Perhaps plan on putting a kitchen area in to warm food etc. for catered events there; not a full-service kitchen. Also we could put in mens and womens bathrooms, so people wouldn't have to go down one level to use current facilities.

We also discussed what uses to put the space to. Theater, meetings, dance classes, recitals were mentioned. We think that it is unique space in that it call accommodate 200-300 people when Mr Knotts "House of Affirmation"(previous name) seats only less than 100. Some of our members thought the space will contribute to the cultural vibrancy of our town.

Ken W proposed a town meeting article in the fall re: building study funding, to investigate the feasibility of these proposed uses and others. No vote was taken.

It was thought that the town could apply for a beer and wine license for the venue. Ken W didn't think this would be feasible.

We think as a group that schools will not want to use this space, but will use their own or go out of town.

Ken then mentioned that the original wooden benches in the great hall are still there and is wondering how to use them in the future. If the town rents space for weddings, the principals would have to rent their own tables and chairs.

The commission then discussed raising funds to restore the Fletcher House.

It needs \$300K worth of work, and in the past has received only paltry funding, like \$200/event. The Historical Society (actual owners of the House) have raised \$250 or so by charging for house tours, etc repeatedly in the past.

It was suggested that the town hire a corporate fundraiser to supply large donations to the project. Mary B suggested forming a sub-committee on fund-raising to tie in with that. She thought we could approach businesses located in the Whittin Machine Works mill building to tie in our efforts with their bottom line; that they would have an interest already in pursuing historical ventures.

On a related subject, Ken W mentioned that Alternatives has proposed removing historic artifacts from the Fletcher House to be put in newly restored space at their complex..

The Meeting was adjourned at 8:45PM.