

Northbridge Historical Commission

Minutes of 1/16/19 Meeting

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NORTHBRIDGE TOWN CLERK
DOREEN A. CEDRONE

Meeting called to order at 7:05PM.

The first order of business was planning around commission vacancies that have occurred recently.

Former member Karen Talley passed away and another member, Paula McCowan resigned.

The town has received 2 new applications for membership, so far. The commission reviewed one that has been submitted to the selectmen for approval.

Another issue related to membership was next. The town would like all Commission members to review the conflict of interest documents that all received at today's meeting and turn in the sign-off sheet that indicates members have reviewed the up-to-date regs within the next 48 hours, by email or in person to the town clerk. Also, a sexual harassment training will be forthcoming. The date isn't set yet. Members are required to be current with this training as well.

The newly reconfigured Historic District was next for discussion. The number of covered structures has been reduced from 12 to 9 currently. Most of these already have deed restrictions in place.

The aged Adams House is up for sale presently. The potential buyer is on board re: keeping the historical flavor of the building.

The Commission agreed that we will not pursue approval of the revamped district by town voters until the Fall town meeting... bypassing the one in the spring b/c we will not be ready to present a proper proposal until then.

Assuming passage of the article establishing the district, a permanent Historic District board would then oversee issues like demolishing or radically revamping structures in the district. The Fletcher House may soon be sold to the town for a sum of \$1 so that future town budgets could include the funds to restore it, since the current owners (Northbridge Historical Society) can't do that anytime soon due to their small budget. Later in the meeting, a figure of \$300K was quoted as a ballpark estimate for restoring that building.

The commission's current budget picture came up next. We have \$2,170 in the preservation account, \$500 as the budget from the town and \$1,060 available from donations.

The topic of signs marking some historic structures in town was next. Wendy T found that the woman who, in the past, created these signs has decided not to pursue doing so. Wendy's relatives (her son who does carpentry and her husband, who runs a sawmill) have agreed to create signs as needed in the future. She will get estimates for signs like others in town for properties w/o them on Sutton St, in Rochdale and at the Riverdale mill.

Next was the topic of the Community Preservation Committee, a recent idea from the selectmen. The group would create policy around how much goes into each line item for preservation in the Historic areas of town. Wendy T volunteered, and was voted onto said committee by the Historical Commission.

The members of the commission were then told by the chair that the Blackstone Valley Heritage Corridor staff would like to be included in plans for next years Trolley Tours event. We decided to accept their offer and will network with them around planning the event, scheduled for May 18th this year. They will do advertising for this year's event. Other donors will be contacted as well: Lenny S will contact the town hall staff and Wendy will talk with 3 local corporations interested. In the near future, not this year, there will be other ways to sign up for Trolley Tours, making access easier for the public.

The focus of the meeting now shifted to the subject of people of color and when they appeared in our town. Slavery was the connection for blacks to arrive in local towns, at first clandestinely. The Whitin family did not want to be associated with hiding slaves, etc. However, some were harbored by local residents. The first African American officially on the town census was registered in 1893.

Next, we discussed child labor at local industries in the 20th century. By state law in the 1890's, no one under 16 could work on a machine that could seriously injure them. However, the workers and management locally looked the other way routinely until the 1960's.

The topic of eligibility for matching state funding came up briefly. Matching grants for preservation of buildings is generally reserved for municipalities, non-profits or deed-restricted private owners. Examples of properties accessing these funds lately include our town hall, the Episcopal church and the town library.

Next, we discussed the possibility of building a bike trail from Quaker St to West Hill Park. The former trail is overgrown and currently useless. The current owner of that land is periodically blocking access to that property. This matter was left for future consideration.

The Commission then approached the topic of proper rental fees, etc., for the restored town hall's Great Hall. Currently, the security deposit/ fee is upwards of \$200 for each rental. Users will in the future be required to take out \$1 million one-day insurance (or more) to guard against falls in stairways, damage to bathrooms and adjacent town office space, or such things as broken windows. One member brought up the possible inability to pay such a high cost to rent the space. The chair then said the actual cost for a one-day policy like that is only about \$75.

A last topic was a vote to approve the restoration of windows in the Whitin Mill. The owners are willing to install windows, etc. in accordance with the age/look of the historic building itself. The motion was offered and passed unanimously.

A motion to adjourn was made and passed unanimously, as well.

The next Historical Commission meeting will be February 19th at 179 Fletcher St...the Whitinsville Golf club.