

Northbridge Historical Commission (NHC)
Time: Wednesday, Apr 26, 2023, 06:30 PM
Meeting Minutes

Approved

Present: Ken Warchol, Chairperson; Christine Johnson, Vice Chairperson; David Blauvelt, Mark DeWeerd, Caryn Gagner, Dave Potty (*Dave Potty joins the meeting at 6:45*).

Absent: None

Ken Warchol called the meeting to order at 6:30 PM.

1.0 Approval of Meetings of February 10, 2023

Moved by Mark DeWeerd, "To approve the February 11, 2023 minutes. Second by Dave Potty. The motion passed unanimously.

2.0 Downtown Crossing Commission – Update

Mark DeWeerd, Downtown Crossing Commission liaison, provided an update on the Commission's work to set up protocols and processes according to the local By-laws and state regulations, identifying how groups or private citizens make requests, and discussing how various groups can work together to secure funding. Dave Blauvelt, a member of the Downtown Crossing Commission, reviewed the updates with the MACRIS database, which includes correcting discrepancies and listing properties in the Downtown Historic District. He reports that all properties are now aligned with MACRIS.

3.0 Cotton Mill Apartments Restoration (vote to approve)

Ken Warchol is seeking clarification on the overlapping languages by the three governing bodies. David Blauvelt approached Jennifer Doherty to help clarify the oversight of the preservation and approval process. Property owners would need approval from both authorities; if it is upgrading of windows specifically, the local historic district is exempt from addressing windows; the permission of the preservation restriction holder would be the Northbridge Historical Commission, as it is the authority written in the deed restriction. Ken provides the context: the proposed renovations at the Cotton Mill Apartments for repairing and weatherproofing some windows. (Photos of proposed areas are shared with the Commission). The Cotton Mill is on the side of Railroad Avenue, and the back of the building has five windows. The deed restriction is specific to changing some windows, and the intent is to keep wood vs. metal inserts. Ken and Christine have met with one of the potential contractors. We will continue to update the Commission. A meeting to vote may be required beyond the NHC meeting schedule. No vote was taken at this time.

4.0 Historical Tours for 2023 – Update

The May 13 Trolley Tour filled within three days indicates a strong interest in our local history and preservation. Each of the three tours will include a 2-hour tour of Northbridge, beginning with a tour of the Fletcher House and a stop at the LaSalle (Oakhurst) House. A request for volunteers from the NHC and the Northbridge Historical Society (NHS) is encouraged. This is a good effort to collaborate with the Historical Society and to increase its membership. David Blauvelt is working on hand-outs on the Society. He is working with community members to incentivize membership. In addition, David Blauvelt hopes to film aspects of the event for viewing on various social media sites. Caryn Gagner volunteers to help set up the Fletcher House before the tour date, including documents and photographs. A discussion occurred regarding donations and tips—the tour bills for the driver's tip. The NHC agreed that any donations should benefit the NHS. It was decided that a donation jar and the maps would be at the sign-in table.

Motion made by Dave Potty: "To have tip containers on the trolley and at the check-in table, and that all tips collected will benefit the NHS. It was seconded by David Blauvelt. The motion passed unanimously."

5.0 Historical Signage – Rockdale, Aldrich School – Update

The historical signage throughout the Town is decaying and needs replacement. The Rockdale sign has been provided to a local sign company for a quote and suggested design and composite that would not degrade. The request was to provide a quote on multiple signs based on the Rockdale sign shape and font, which is white with a black border. Additional bids will be requested. Christine explained that we spoke with the town manager about whether there might be some funding through the town or ARPA rather than through NHC's limited budget. Updates will be provided as they become available. Some of the wood signs have been up since the early 1970s. Christine asks if this would come under Downtown Crossing. Their bylaws mention signage, i.e., Town Halls Bulletin Board, and state that this is a good question with decisions made in the future as they arise. Ken Warchol states that most of the signs under consideration are outside the Downtown Crossing District. Ken points out that many of these are in Rockdale, Riverdale, and Linwood and that the National Parks also have signage within the Whitinsville Historical District. Memorial Square is also under the Heritage Zone (Planning and Historical Commission), Local Historic District, and National Parks. Mark adds that Downtown Crossing may step away as it needs to be covered in the By-Laws.

6.0 Riverwalk Brochure and Presentation Boards

The town notified NHC that funds for \$5,000 through the ARRPA grant will enhance the historical map to include the Riverwalk Area. Christine Johnson recommends forming a subcommittee to discuss enhancements and language changes to the Whitinsville Historic Walking District Map. The funds are set aside, and the time frame is flexible. The subcommittee will consider the changes and bring proposals to NHC for a vote. The decision was made to take this up at the June meeting.

7.0 Grants & Financial Status

Christine Johnson provides an update on the grants from the local Northbridge Cultural Council and the Massachusetts Cultural Council. We also have received a generous donation from Unibank. These grants will fund the trolley tours, a photographic presentation, and other activities without impacting limited budgets. These activities are coordinated with the Northbridge Historical Society and Blackstone Valley Art Association. In addition to the May 13 trolley tour, an additional trolley tour is scheduled for June 24, and "A Snapshot of Time" will be held on June 11, 2023. As liaison from NHC to the Community Preservation Committee, she provided an update on available CPA funds in the historic preservation subaccount and the process of accumulating and accessing funds.

8.0 Northbridge Historical Society – Update

Christine Johnson, liaison from NHC to the Community Preservation Committee, provided an update on available CPA funds in the historic preservation subaccount and the process of accumulating and accessing funds. Conversations continue with the Town and the Northbridge Historical Society about potentially utilizing these funds to secure a matching grant state to conduct an architectural assessment/engineering analysis to preserve the 1770 James Fletcher House, 1 Elm Place, and Whitinsville. The Northbridge Historical Society currently owns the property, and any proposals must include the approval of the Society.

9.0 Social Media – Facebook Page

A citizen has a video of the 250th Parade and inquired how this could be shared with the community. Caryn Gagner suggested that a link to the video on a secure site be posted with a link on the historical society page, town page, and historical commission; the library shares this information. David Blauvelt shares that he created a YouTube video for the Northbridge Historical Society page, which has a presentation from Ken Warchol, "Paternalism in Whitinsville." He suggests sharing the file, and David Blauvelt can post it on this site, Facebook, and other social media sites. Ken adds that the 200th anniversary has never been shown. Caryn Gagner asks if there is a film of the 225th. There is consensus that the NHC should attempt to post as many of the anniversary celebrations as possible on social media. Ken Warchol asks if we can contact this citizen. Christine volunteers to find the email and make it available to members. Christine recommends creating an NHC Facebook page to post information to the community. Currently, we post on other sites such as Notably Northbridge and Blackstone Valley Reminiscent Society. The group has a consensus that we should explore social media to share information.

Other Items:

- Christine Johnson requested that the NHC approve the purchase of a new costume shirt for Colonel Paul Whitin for \$69.95 plus shipping. The shirt has not been replaced since 1997.

Dave Potty, seconded by Caryn Gagner, made a motion to approve the expending of funds for purchasing a new costume shirt from the NHC donations account. It was approved unanimously.

- Ken Warchol shares that he purchased (15) tripods for display purposes. Caryn suggests that we use them to display items at the Fletcher House. She feels it is important to refresh the display materials at the Fletcher House. It was agreed that the tripods would be loaned to the Fletcher House for displaying artifacts. Caryn agreed to set up displays before the next Trolley Tour.
- Christine shares that there is an opening on the NHC. Ken will notify the Town and ask for a posting to occur. She introduces James Lurgio, a resident and an audience guest.

A motion was made to post for an opening, moved by Dave Potty, seconded by Ken Warchol, and approved unanimously.

- Caryn Gagner requests that we no longer meet on ZOOM for personal reasons. Christine suggests we conduct a brief survey, emailing each member to express their interest in meeting on ZOOM, in-person, or hybrid. The results will be shared at the next meeting.
- David Blauvelt recommends we explore a partnership with Harvard to invite internships to participate in our historical preservation initiatives. In addition, he would like the NHC to consider a gravestone & monument cleaning. Finally, it was suggested that he contact the Town to see what departments or organizations are currently involved in these activities. □ Caryn Gagner shares that the Whitin–Fletcher family is planning a reunion in September. As a contact person for this event, she solicits ideas in identifying other locations within the town this group has not visited and volunteers to assist in the event. Alternatives are hosting the reunion.

Ken Warchol moved the motion to adjourn at 8:10 PM, and Dave Potty seconded it.

Next meeting: Wednesday, June 28, 2023, unless otherwise scheduled.

Respectfully submitted by,

Christine Johnson, Vice-Chairperson
May 24, 2023

