

LOCAL HISTORIC DISTRICT STUDY COMMITTEE

MEETING MINUTES

Tuesday, April 09, 2019

I. MEETING CALLED TO ORDER

Chair Harry Berkowitz called the meeting to order at 6:00 PM with Ken Warchol, Dan O’Neil, Robert LaFlamme, and Randi Zanca in attendance. R. Gary Bechtholdt II, Town Planner was also present. Tim Reiter, Member was absent. One (1) vacancy remains.

II. WELCOME & INTRODUCTIONS

Committee members welcomed back Heather Elster, Executive Director of the Whitin Community Center.

III. APPROVAL OF MEETING MINUTES

August 14, 2018, January 08, 2019 & February 26, 2019

Upon motion duly made (R. LaFlamme) and seconded (D. O’Neil) the Committee voted (5-0) to accept the meeting minutes for August 14, 2018. Not an official meeting due to lack of quorum.

Upon motion duly made (K. Warchol) and seconded (D. O’Neil) the Committee voted (5-0) to accept the meeting minutes for January 08, 2019.

Upon motion duly made (K. Warchol) and seconded (D. O’Neil) the Committee voted (5-0) to accept the meeting minutes for February 26, 2019.

IV. PROPERTY OWNERS’ OPINION SURVEY

Responses Received to Date -Review/Discussion

Committee members noted receipt of survey response form Carol Brower, as a member of the Trustees at the Whitinsville Social Library, in support of the local historic district. The Committee reviewed responses Ms. Brower provided. Mr. Bechtholdt noted after the last public forum he reached out to Rebecca Sasseeville, Library Director to solicit responses on behalf of the Whitinsville Social Library.

Robert LaFlamme explained that in total the Committee received twenty-five (25) responses, noting support from (representing) the Paul Whitin Mill; Whitin House/Congregational Parsonage; Village Congregational Church; Whitinsville Savings Bank; Whitin Community Center; & now the Whitinsville Social Library. Mr. LaFlamme did note there were a number of anonymous survey responses not in favor of the Local Historic District. Jack Crawford, a member of the Northbridge Historical Society did provide a response in favor of this initiative.

Committee members noted it would be nice to receive some feedback from the Historical Society, as it is unclear if any/all of the anonymous responses are associated with the Fletcher House. Mr. LaFlamme suggested he could reach out to Jack Walker, President of the Northbridge Historical Society to perhaps see what his position may be.

Mr. Bechtholdt suggested that the Board of Selectmen are in support of this initiative as they established the study committee (LHDSC) to consider a local historic district within Whitinsville (to include Northbridge Memorial Town Hall, Aldrich School, and Town Common). Ken Warchol noted that leaves the Granite Cotton Mill, where a preservation restriction is already in place for the property.

V. LOCAL HISTORIC DISTRICT

MA General Law Chapter 40C

In advance of the meeting Mr. Bechtholdt distributed to the Committee members an electronic copy of Mass General Law Chapter 40C -Historic District provisions. Committee members had no questions at this time.

VI. LOCAL HISTORIC DISTRICT

MHC -Sample Template

In advance of the meeting Mr. Bechtholdt distributed electronic copy of MHC's sample bylaw template to Committee members. The Committee reviewed composition of the sample bylaw: Title, Purpose, Definitions, District, Commission Powers and Duties, Alterations and Construction Prohibited Without a Certificate, Enforcement and Penalties, Validity and Separability, and Appendices.

Committee members directed the Town Planner to prepare an initial draft of bylaw provisions, noting they would like to include a comprehensive listing of potential exemptions for consideration. *Upon motion duly made (K. Warchol) and seconded (R. LaFlamme) the Committee voted (5-0) to have the Town Planner prepare the initial draft.*

VII. ESTABLISHING LOCAL HISTORIC DISTRICT

MHC -Process, Timelines & Next Steps

Committee members reviewed timelines (flowchart) for establishing a Local Historic District. Mr. Bechtholdt informed the Committee that the Consultant is finishing up preparing/updating the Form Bs, etc. and preparing an initial draft of the Preliminary Study Report. Committee members indicated that they would like to review the preliminary study report (draft) for mid-May 2019; that way they stay on track for the Fall Annual Town Meeting scheduled for October 2019. Committee members noted the preliminary study report needs to be submitted to Mass Historical Commission and the Planning Board and a public hearing needs to be held not less than 60-days from the Study Report transmittal to MHC and within 14-days written notice to property owners. Mr. Bechtholdt indicated that he would contact MHC to review

current status and discuss remaining process. Committee members requested that the Consultant have the preliminary report (draft) completed by May 14, 2019.

VIII. CORRESPONDENCE

Review Letter Received by Board of Selectmen & Other Correspondence

Robert LaFlamme, member of the Northbridge Historical Society explained to the other Committee members that the Society leadership team will be meeting in the summer to set meeting agenda topics for this fall (2019) and Spring of 2020. Committee members agreed that it would be good if someone from the National Park Service and or the Heritage Corridor was able to speak on the Blackstone River Valley National Historical Park for this fall, in advance of the town's Fall Annual Town Meeting.

Mr. Bechtholdt informed the Committee that Shelley Buma has requested (via email received 03/19/2019) that the Committee consider removing the Fletcher House from the proposed Local Historic District based upon responses that may have been received from the Historical Society members.

Mr. Bechtholdt read email into the record which reads as follows: Hi Gary, Given that the "various other responses" may be from Historical Society members with reference to the Fletcher House, and those responses were all strongly opposed to the District, will the Fletcher House be removed from the proposed LHD? I heard you say at a Selectmen's meeting that a property would not be included if the owner opposed being in the District. Thanks, Shelley.

Committee members questioned if the various other responses which were anonymous are all from Historical Society members. Committee reiterated the need to at least solicit a response from the Society President to see what his position is or to see if the Society can provide a letter indicating whether the Society supports this initiative. Short of that Mr. Berkowitz stated we don't know who these anonymous survey responses are from. Mr. Warchol questioned how there would be a local historic district if the Fletcher House was not included.

In advance of the meeting Mr. Bechtholdt distributed electronic copy of letter dated February 08, 2019 from Shelley Buma to Thomas Melia, Chairman Northbridge Board of Selectmen (copy attached).

The Committee members were taken back by the misinformation presented in this letter and felt some response to the Board of Selectmen should be provided. Committee members agreed to have Robert Laflamme prepare a response. Committee members noted they are not some rouge committee set out to take away property rights; they have been asked by the Board of Selectmen to conduct a study for the establishment of a local historic district within Whitinsville. Town Meeting attendees will have an opportunity to vote in support or not in support. Committee members noted that they are aware of individual property rights and have been very open about allowing for exemptions, which will be identified and discussed as part of the review of a draft LHD bylaw. Committee members were not sure how to respond to the communist accusation. Committee members noted the district boundaries (properties) were reduced from 19 to 12 based upon the recommendation of the Consultant and better understanding

of the local historic district and not a result of or influenced by others. Committee members expressed concerns with the amount of misinformation potentially being communicated throughout town. Mr. LaFlamme agreed to work on a response letter to the Board of Selectmen to address and clarify statements included in the February 08, 2019 letter from Shelley Buma (& the Citizens for the Preservation of Northbridge Property Rights).

IX. SCHEDULING OF NEXT PUBLIC FORUM

May/June 2019

Committee members suggested a Public Forum/Workshop to review the LHD bylaw (draft) could be held Tuesday, May 28, 2019 (7:00 PM -Town Hall). Committee also suggested another workshop/meeting to review the Preliminary Study Report (draft) could be held Tuesday, June 11, 2019 (6:00 PM -Town Hall). The Committee will look to schedule the required public hearing in accordance with defined MHC's timelines.

X. ADJOURN MEETING

Prior to adjournment Dan O'Neil informed the Committee of the Trolley Tours scheduled for this year and brought in a newspaper clipping showing the advertisement. Having no additional business, the Committee adjourned its meeting of Tuesday, April 09, 2019 at or about 7:05 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Randi Zanca, Member
Local Historic District Study Committee

Cc: Town Clerk