

## LOCAL HISTORIC DISTRICT STUDY COMMITTEE

**MEETING MINUTES**

Tuesday, May 28, 2019

**PUBLIC FORUM/WORKSHOP**

On Tuesday, May 28, 2019 (7:00 PM) the Local Historic District Study Committee hosted a public forum/workshop to review an initial draft of the Local Historic District Bylaw based upon feedback, input and discussions had to date. The following members of the Local Historic District Study Committee (LHDSC) were in attendance: Robert Laflamme, Harry Berkowitz, Ken Warchol, Randi Zanca, & Dan O’Neil; Tim Reiter was absent. R. Gary Bechtholdt II, Town Planer and R. Christopher Noonan, Consultant were also present.

The following members of the public were in attendance: Laurine Crosby; Domenica Cuscina; Sheryl Echols; Susan Spencer; Dennis Rice; Heather Elster; Carol Brower; & Shelley J. Buma

Harry Berkowitz, Chair welcomed attendees, Committee members introduced themselves followed by Gary Bechtholdt, Town Planner and Christopher Noonan, Consultant. The public then also introduced themselves.

Mr. Berkowitz explained the purpose of the public forum/workshop was to review the initial draft of the LHD Bylaw for the twelve (12) properties proposed in the Whitinsville -Downtown Crossroads Local Historic District which includes the Fletcher House; Paul Whitin Mill; Granite Cotton Mill; Northbridge Memorial Town Hall; Aldrich School; Whitin Community Center; Whitinsville Savings Bank; Town Common (Memorial Square); Whitinsville Social Library; Trinity Episcopal Church; Village Congregational Church; & Congregational Parsonage.

Ken Warchol explained that the proposed Whitinsville Local Historic District tells the story of how the Industrial Revolution transformed Whitinsville into one of New England’s leading mill villages between the late 1700’s to the mid 1900’s. The properties selected represent industrial, civic, religious, governmental, recreational, and business commerce during the growth of the village of Whitinsville (Northbridge) Whitin family. Mr. Warchol noted that five (5) of the twelve properties already have state or local preservation restrictions in place. Mr. Warchol explained that only construction or alteration that affects the exterior architectural features visible from the public way would be subjected to the Local Historic District Bylaw.

Mr. Bechtholdt explained that the initial draft was prepared utilizing Massachusetts Historical Commission’s Local Historic District Bylaw sample (template) and review of existing bylaws adopted in the state; including Acton, Amherst, Duxbury, Grafton, Holden, Falmouth, Mendon, & Royalston.

Mr. Berkowitz noted, based upon initial feedback from the public and discussions had with Committee members the draft bylaw includes a number of exemptions, as the Committee did not want to overburden

or restrict property owners; adding the Committee tired to create a balance between the overall intent of the District which is the preservation of historic buildings while respecting private property rights.

Mr. Berkowitz explained that the draft is an initial draft and will be amended based upon input from the public. Mr. Berkowitz added the Planning Board will need to hold a public hearing and approval at Town Meeting would be required for local adoption.

Mr. Bechtholdt indicated that copies of the initial draft were distributed to property owners and others upon request, with same included online. Mr. Bechtholdt distributed hardcopies of the draft to attendees. Mr. Bechtholdt provided a summary brief on the contents of the LHD Bylaw (citing Sections 1 through Section 17). Committee members to input and comment from attendees as Mr. Bechtholdt readthrough the draft. Robert LaFlamme, Ken Warchol and other members recorded comments, which shall be reviewed and incorporated in a revised draft at a subsequent meeting. Mr. Bechtholdt explained that prior to the workshop he was contacted by Vincent Osterman who represents three (3) of the 12 properties (Whitinsville Savings Bank, Village Congregational Church & Congregational Parsonage); Mr. Osterman provided him with comments on the draft bylaw which will also be incorporated into future revisions.

Committee members reviewed/discussed Definitions; properties within the District (proper names); composition of the LHD Commission; duties of the Commission; fees and mailing costs; procedures and criteria for review; timing of public hearing and filing of decision; Exemptions; and Enforcement. Committee explained that an opt-out clause would not be included in the Bylaw, however would add provisions that describe how the Local Historic District could be amended (add/subtract properties).

Shelley Buma inquired which other properties would be considered; Committee members explained twelve (12) properties are proposed to be included, changes either adding or removing properties would need to be done in accordance to MGL, like the current process being undertaken to adopt a local historic district. Ms. Buma questioned who would have oversight; Committee members explained appointments would be through the Board of Selectmen.

Committee reviewed with Heather Elster proposed timelines; Ms. Buma indicated that property owners may like to get things done quickly, suggesting the Committee consider approvals as soon as possible; Committee members agreed. Mr. Laflamme suggested provisions for Alternate Members be added to help address potential quorum issues, where reviews could be delayed; Committee members agreed.

Ms. Buma asked who would be responsible for costs of mailings (postage) and newspaper public hearing notices; Mr. Bechtholdt indicated, typically it would be the Applicant's responsibility to satisfy payment of the legal advertisement and existing departments may absorb costs for mailings; something the Commission, once appointed could clarify.

Ms. Buma asked about the wording of "any charitable corporation" suggesting might open the door for someone, anyone to object. Mr. Bechtholdt noted that Vincent Osterman, owner of the bank building and representative on behalf of the Congregational Church building(s) expressed similar concerns. R.

Christopher Noonan, Consultant suggested adding the word “local” may limit it properly. Ms. Buma asked how one would establish hardship; Mr. Laflamme suggested through documentation. Mr. Bechtholdt suggested to include a definition for Hardship to Section 3, Definitions.

Dennis Rice, representing Paul Whittin Mill (Alternatives Unlimited) noted windows can be quite varied and was concerned with potential costs and requirements to replace them. Ms. Buma also noted the wood windows at the Fletcher House were old and may need to be replaced at some time. Committee members considered adding an exemption for replacement windows, noting they did not want to create a Bylaw that was too restrictive or costly for property owners to improve their individual buildings. Mr. Bechtholdt reminded the Committee that a number of the properties proposed for inclusion in the local historic district have existing Preservation Restrictions either through the State (Massachusetts Historical Commission) or the Town and would need to satisfy those restrictions regardless of what exemptions may be included in the local historic district Bylaw.

Ms. Buma asked if there is an opt-out clause for property owners; for example, with the Fletcher House, if someone new bought the Fletcher House could the new owner opt-out. Mr. Noonan explained the Local Historic District once adopted would be binding and transfer to the next property owner. Mr. Berkowitz explained there is no opt-out clause, the new owner would need to petition the Town and voted on at Town Meeting; Mr. Bechtholdt suggested a provision could be added to the Bylaw describing the process to amend the District. Mr. Berkowitz agreed, noting it would be the same process as defined by MGL.

After the Committee concluded its review of the draft bylaw and solicited comments/questions from the public, R. Christopher Noonan (Consultant) provided a brief overview of the preliminary study report and next steps. The Committee will convene a meeting on June 11, 2019 to review comments received and will look to incorporate into a revised draft. Mr. Bechtholdt suggested the Committee look to host a follow-up public forum/workshop in July, in advance of the Planning Board public hearing. Mr. Berkowitz and other Committee members thanked attendees for participating in the workshop and encouraged them to contact the Planning Office if they have any comments, questions or concerns.

### Adjournment

Having no additional business, the Local Historic District Study Committee (LHDSC) adjourned its meeting of May 28, 2019 at or about 9:00 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Randi Zanca  
LHDSC Member

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Cc: Town Clerk