

LOCAL HISTORIC DISTRICT STUDY COMMITTEE

MEETING NOTES

Tuesday, October 22, 2019

2019 Fall Annual Town Meeting

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The following members attended the 2019 Fall Annual Town Meeting: Chair Harry Berkowitz, Vice Chair Kenneth Warchol, Robert LaFlamme, and Randi Zanca. Daniel O'Neill and Timothy Reiter were absent.

A handout prepared for Article #7 was distributed, as well as a map of the proposed local historic district; display boards, illustrating & highlighting the 12 properties and historical narrative of Whitinsville was displayed at Town Meeting, including (2) large, color-copies of the proposed the Local Historic District Map.

The Local Historic District Study Committee presented/spoke to the following Warrant Article:

Article #7 -Local Historic District

Harry Berkowitz offered the motion to amend the General Bylaws by adopting a new section entitled "Whitinsville -Downtown Crossroads Local Historic District as described in the Warrant (Art. #7).

Chair Berkowitz read the Local Historic District Study Committee for Article #7. In accordance with Massachusetts General Law Chapter 40C [Historic Districts], a local historic district study committee was established by the Board of Selectmen to investigate & explore the idea of creating a local historic district within the Village of Whitinsville. This Committee, over the past 18-months, hosted various public workshops, meetings & community outreach to residents and property owners. In July of 2019, the Study Committee completed a Preliminary Study Report, identifying 12 properties for inclusion in a Whitinsville Local Historic District. The proposed "Whitinsville -Downtown Crossroads Historic District" is to include: the Col. James Fletcher House; Paul Whitin Mill (Alternatives); Granite Cotton Mill; Stephen F. & Mary Ann Bachelor House (parsonage); the Town Hall; Aldrich School; the Town Common/Memorial Park; the Village Congregational Church; Whitinsville Savings Bank building; Whitinsville Social Library; Whitin Community Center; & the Trinity Episcopal Church. The properties selected reflect the growth of a paternalistic mill village from the early begins of the American Industrial Revolution, when a largely agricultural community was transformed into an industrial mill village planned & developed by the Whitin family. The 12 properties represent housing, industry, government, civic, religious, educational, recreational, commerce, and community institutions. On October 08, 2019, the Study Committee held a public hearing on the proposed Local Historic District Bylaw, voting unanimously (5-0) to support & recommend adoption. Where, the Planning Board, at its public meeting held September 10, 2019 voted in support of the Bylaw. The Local Historic District Study Committee recommends local adoption of Article #7, the creation and establishment of the "Whitinsville -Downtown Crossroads Historic District" and herewith submits its Final Report and map of the proposed District.

41 After reading the report and recommendation, Mr. Berkowitz provided the Moderator (Town Clerk) with a
4 copy of the Final Study Report and map of the proposed Local Historic District.

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44 Mr. Berkowitz then provided the following talking points as it relates to Article #7, the proposed Local
45 Historic District Bylaw and the National Historical Park designation (General Agreement): The Study
46 Committee prepared a handout for Article #7, which includes a brief history of Northbridge (Whitinsville) &
47 each of the 12 properties selected for inclusion in the proposed Whitinsville -Downtown Crossroads
48 Historic District; The purpose of the Bylaw is to aid in & encourage the historic preservation & protection of
49 the buildings, structures & sites within the proposed District; Adoption of the Bylaw (Article #7) would
50 create a local historic district, establish a Historic District Commission to administer the Bylaw, identify
51 properties included in the District, define the composition of the Commission & its duties, outline
52 procedures for review & decisions (Certificate of Appropriateness, Certificate of Non-Applicability &
53 Certificate of Hardship), identify exemptions/exclusions of the Bylaw, enforcement and the amendment
54 process; The Study Committee understands the concerns with “big government” & adding more local
55 regulations -the Committee has proposed a Bylaw that balances historic preservation with individual
56 property rights; Only the 12 properties proposed would be subject to the provisions of the Local Historic
57 District Bylaw; if your property is not one of the 12 properties, then your property will not be impacted;
58 Not one single property owner, proposed to be include in the District (Bylaw) has indicated a desire not to
59 be included in the District; The Study Committee received letters of support from the Northbridge
60 Historical Society, the Whitin Community Center, Village Congregational Church, and Osterman
61 Management, LLC for their individual properties; The Study Committee also received public support from
62 Alternatives Unlimited, the Northbridge Historical Commission, the Planning Board and acceptance of the
63 preliminary study report from the Massachusetts Historical Commission; The Bylaw presented (Article #7),
64 has been reviewed/edited by Town Counsel, where the Study Committee utilized Mass Historical
65 Commissions’ guidance document entitled “Establishing Local Historic Districts” (including a sample bylaw
66 template) and the review of several existing bylaws, including Acton, Amherst, Duxbury, Grafton & Holden,
67 MA; The adoption & establishment of a Local Historic District must adhere to Mass General Law Chapter
68 40C [Historic Districts], with a pre-defined process and steps to follow; the handout includes a flowchart
69 which outlines the Study Committee’s 18-month process, culminating in Town Meeting, where 2/3 vote is
70 required; Amending the Bylaw (adding properties) would require the District Commission to conduct a new
71 study, similar to what the Study Committee has performed, including public meetings, a hearing and
72 separate Town Meeting action; There has been a National Parks presence in the Blackstone Valley
73 (Northbridge) since 1986, as part of the John H. Chafee Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor
74 Commission, however Congress’ reauthorization of the Commission expired in 2011 (sunset clause),
75 whereas the Blackstone Heritage Corridor was then created to expand the work of the Commission; In
76 December 2014, Northbridge (Whitinsville) was designated to be included in the Blackstone River Valley
77 National Historical Park, as the 402nd park in the National Parks System; The National Park designation
78 includes 5 sites within Rhode Island and Massachusetts: the Old Slater Mill in Pawtucket (RI); Slatersville in
79 North Smithfield (RI); Ashton Village in Cumberland (RI); and Hopedale (MA); & Whitinsville; Whitinsville’s
80 designation (similar to Hopedale) did not define a boundary or identify a specific site, unlike the Old Slater
81 Mill in Pawtucket (RI); establishing a local historic district w/in Whitinsville will provide the National Parks
82 Service with assurances that the town supports the National Historical Park designation & in turn the

National Parks will commit its resources, funding, branding and other promotions to celebrate Northbridge as part of the Blackstone River Valley National Historical Park (General Agreement); Establishing a local historic district as part of the General Agreement with the National Parks Service will provide the Town with unique opportunities to showcase Whitinsville; boost the local economy through tourism, creating a destination where visitors may spend the day in town, frequent our shops, eat in our restaurants, etc.; Failure to adopt/establish a local historic district will not remove Whitinsville from the National Parks designation, (maintained & will remain in the legislation) however the National Parks Service would not be able to commit federal funds and other resources to promoting Whitinsville.

Jennifer Smith, Acting Superintendent (Blackstone River Valley National Historical Park) spoke to attendees on the relationship between the National Parks Service, the Town of Northbridge (General Agreement) and the National Park designation (Whitinsville).

Vice Chair, Kenneth Warchol offered support of local adoption and provided a brief history of Whitinsville, explained the difference between a Local Historic District and a National Register District and acknowledged the work of Peter Hackett, who some 40-plus years ago helped inspire him to pursue the establishment of a local historic district for Whitinsville.

Article #7 [Local Historic District] passed at the 2019 Fall Annual Town Meeting, satisfying a 2/3 majority vote, via secret ballot.

Respectfully submitted,



R. Gary Bechtholdt II
Town Planner

Cc: Town Clerk