

---

LOCAL HISTORIC DISTRICT STUDY COMMITTEE  
PUBLIC FORUM

---

RECEIVED  
19 APR 10 PM 3:33

---

**MEETING MINUTES**

Tuesday, February 26, 2019

---

NORTHBRIDGE TOWN CLERK  
DOUGLAS W. PEDONE

**I. MEETING CALLED TO ORDER**

Upon satisfying a quorum, the Local Historic District Study Committee (LHDSC) called the meeting to order at 7 pm with Harry Berkowitz (Chair), Kenneth Warchol (Vice Chair), Robert Laflamme, Dan O'Neil, and Randi Zanca in attendance. R. Gary Bechtholdt II, Town Planner, and R. Christopher Noonan, Historic Preservation Specialist (Consultant) were present. Tim Reiter, Member was absent.

The following members of the public were in attendance: Selectman Thomas Melia Jr., Representative David Muradian, Dennis Latour, Heather Elster (Whitin Community Center) David Ross, Carol Brower, John Crawford, Rebecca Sasseville (Whitin Social Library), Dennis Rice (Alternatives Unlimited), James Berkowitz (Planning Board).

**II. WELCOME & INTRODUCTIONS**

Mr. Bechtholdt welcomed attendees and provided a brief overview of the workshop format. All attendees introduced themselves. Mr. Bechtholdt explained that the Committee, established by the Board of Selectmen is tasked with preparing a study report which will include historical significance, justification of boundaries, a map of the proposed district and a bylaw. Mr. Bechtholdt noted the Committee hopes to complete its study report in time for the 2019 Fall Annual Town Meeting. Mr. Bechtholdt explained the report and draft bylaws will be forwarded to the Planning Board and MA Historical Commission for review and recommendation. The study report and bylaw will also be presented to the Board of Selectmen for sponsoring. Adoption of the Local Historic District and accompanied bylaw provisions need to be approved (2/3 vote) at Town Meeting.

Harry Berkowitz (Chair) identified the twelve (12) properties selected for the proposed Local Historic District for Whitinsville. Mr. Berkowitz reference a large display board (color-aerial) showing the properties: Fletcher House; Paul Whitin Mill; Cotton Mill; Whitin House/Congregational Parsonage; Northbridge Memorial Town Hall; Aldrich School; Village Congregational Church; Whitinsville Savings Bank; Town Common; Trinity Episcopal Church; Whitinsville Social Library; & Whitin Community Center (copy of same distributed).

Mr. Berkowitz explained the "Downtown Cross-roads" methodology of selecting the twelve (12) properties, reduced from the nineteen (19) the Committee had considered previously. Mr. Berkowitz noted the historic properties are centered along Main Street, Douglas Road, Linwood Avenue, Church Street, and Hill Street focused at the Mumford River. Mr. Berkowitz explained the properties selected was reduced from 19 to 12 after consultation with the Committee's consultant, Christopher Noonan where the Committee could not justify why certain worker housing was selected over others, reducing the boundary to the 12 selected tell the story.

**III. APPROVAL OF MEETING MINUTES**

Committee tabled action on approval of meeting minutes for August 14, 2018 and January 8, 2019.

#### **IV. WHITINSVILLE -LOCAL HISTORIC DISTRICT AREA STUDY**

##### **Justification/Narrative of Boundary/Properties**

Ken Warchol (Vice Chair) reviewed the historical context of each of the twelve (12) properties selected. Mr. Warchol referenced a large display board (color-photographs) illustrating each of the properties under consideration. Mr. Warchol explained several the properties selected are town-owned and/or have existing Preservation Restrictions already in place. Town-owned: Northbridge Memorial Town Hall; Aldrich School; Town Common & Whitinsville Social Library. Existing Preservation Restrictions: Northbridge Memorial Town Hall; Paul Whitin Mill; Trinity Episcopal Church; Whitin Community Center; & Cotton Mill.

Mr. Warchol explained the "Downtown Cross-roads" District is centered at the heart of the Village of Whitinsville where five major roads intersect at the Northbridge Memorial Town Hall and the Mumford River. The boundaries encompass 12 historic properties which are also part of the 326 properties making up the Whitinsville National Register District. The proposed district tells the story of the growth of a mill village from its beginnings in the late 1700's through the mid 1900's. The properties reflect industrial, civic, religious, governmental, recreational, business/commerce, and education. The buildings selected are well preserved.

Mr. Warchol explained that the LHDSC decided to go with a smaller Local Historic District within the boundaries of the National Register District after talking to and surveying owners within the NRD and then to owners within the proposed boundary of this LHD. The Committee felt the smaller district told the complete story of the mill village and its importance to the American Industrial Revolution. The growth of a mill village under the Whitin Family is very well told using the proposed Whitinsville Local Historic District -Downtown Cross-roads.

Mr. Bechtholdt explained the LHDSC was established by the Board of Selectmen for the purpose of exploring the option to create a local historic district within Whitinsville as part of its partnership with the National Parks Service (NPS) and Northbridge's inclusion in the Blackstone River Valley National Historical Park.

#### **V. WHITINSVILLE -LOCAL HISTORIC DISTRICT STUDY AREA**

##### **Public & Property Owners' Comment & Input**

Committee members sought comment and input from the public. Attendees inquired about possible restrictions for the Local Historic District. Mr. Bechtholdt explained this Committee has not prepared a draft bylaw, noting previous committee may had utilized an existing bylaw from another community as a sample, however was likely not the best example at it included a lot of restrictions. Mr. Bechtholdt suggested features such as paint color, roofing material, etc. will likely be exempt. Mr. Berkowitz agreed noting it really doesn't matter if the Aldrich School is paint yellow/blue/etc. it is still the Aldrich School, whether it has slate roof of asphalt shingles doesn't take away that it was originally built by the Whitins. Dennis Rice suggested there should be some restrictions to preserve the buildings.

Mr. Bechtholdt explained the purpose of the survey was to gauge the owners of the 12 selected properties to learn what they would like to see and not see in restrictions.

Committee members responded to questions on process and if the district could be altered, noting if the district were to be expanded the Selectmen would need to reappoint a new committee which would be charged with preparing a separate study, which would also be required to be acted on at Town Meeting. Mr. Berkowitz

explained once the district is established and bylaw adopted any changes would require separate Town Meeting action where a 2/3 majority vote is required.

Denis LaTour asked if the district would restrict use and questioned why the town expanded uses permitted by-right in the Heritage Zoning District a few years ago. Committee noted the bylaw would not restrict or regulate use, unlike the Heritage Zoning District. The bylaw would be specific to the exterior of buildings seen from the public way. Committee members explained adoption of an LHD would not include establishing any Deed Restrictions.

Rebecca Sasseville questioned what the potential benefits of the National Park would have for the town. Mr. Berkowitz suggested tourism and other economic development opportunities for the town. Mr. Warchol indicated that the National Park Service would have more of a physical presence in town conducting tours, noting he currently has trolley tours a few times a year which are well attended, having the National Park would create more opportunities for visitors to come to Northbridge. Mr. Berkowitz explained the Planning Board will be installing a kiosk bulletin board at Walmart to attract people to visit our downtown to shop and eat in Northbridge. Mr. Bechtholdt noted in addition to a presence in the community the NPS will utilize resources to publicize nationally the Blackstone River Valley National Historical Park, including Whitinsville. Mr. Warchol touched on the successes in New Bedford and Lowell, MA has experienced with their National Park designations.

Christopher Noonan (Consultant) suggested the National Park inclusion could strength access to grants such as the State's Mass Preservation Projects Fund (MPPF). Representative Muradian said if people are applying for grants to please let him know, as he will provide a letter of support.

Some expressed concerns with overall process; Mr. Bechtholdt explained that the bylaw would establish review process, etc. including application requirements and the issuance of certificates of appropriateness, hardship and exemptions. Mr. Bechtholdt reminded attendees that the Committee is not there yet, wanted to gain input and comment from owners before drafting a bylaw.

## **VI. WHITINSVILLE -LOCAL HISTORIC DISTRICT STUDY AREA**

### **Property Owners Opinion Survey**

Mr. Bechtholdt explained that the Committee sent out Property Owner's Opinion Surveys to the twelve (12) properties identified, noting the Committee has received responses from 24 individuals, which was curious as only 12 surveys to property owners were sent out. Members of the Historical Society (John Crawford & Carol Brower) indicated the survey was distributed to members of the Historical Society representing the Fletcher House. Committee will review responses.

Mr. Bechtholdt explained survey responses were also received from Dennis Rice for the Paul Whitin Mill, Heather Elster for the Whitin Community Center and Vincent Osterman for the Whitinsville Savings Bank, Village Congregational Church and the Parsonage. Rebecca Sasseville, Whitinsville Social Library indicated she will pass along the survey to the Trustees.

**VII. WHITINSVILLE -LOCAL HISTORICA DISTRICT STUDY AREA****Exemptions (LHD Bylaw)**

Robert Laflamme briefly reviewed, noting receipt of other survey responses. Mr. Laflamme reviewed survey results from the five (5) initial responses received; where AC units, solar panels, fencing, landscaping, paint color, signage, and roofing material was identified for exemptions as well as façade treatments, sheds and other temporary structures.

Mr. Bechtholdt explained that he and Mr. Berkowitz (Chair) met with Heather Elster, Whitin Community Center and Vincent Osterman, Whitinsville Savings Bank, Congregational Church and Parsonage to review survey and other potential exemptions including Handicapped Accessible Access, exterior upgrades/alterations that may be required to satisfy Federal/State/Local building codes or regulations (now or in the future) and exterior construction/alteration under a permit duly issued prior to adoption or required for public safety.

Mr. Laflamme then reviewed other potential exemptions that may be considered including: awnings, antennas, balconies, barns, chimneys, decks, doors & hardware, dormers, fire escapes, flags, gutters & downspouts, lighting, mailboxes, HVAC equipment, mechanical & plumbing vents, shutters & hardware, street numbers, windows & skylights, and window storms & screens.

**VIII. WHITINSVILLE -LOCAL HISTORICA DISTRICT STUDY AREA****Process, Timeline, & Next Steps**

The Committee will hold a meeting in March to review survey responses and begin drafting bylaw provisions. The Committee will look to host a follow up public forum in April/May to review the draft bylaw. The Committee hopes to conclude its review report in July/August in preparation for the Fall Annual Town Meeting in October, where the establishment of the district and bylaw provisions will be considered for adoption. John Crawford thanked the Committee members for all their hard work and dedication to working on this effort. Committee members thanked Mr. Crawford and the other residents for attending.

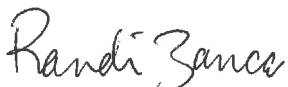
**IX. CORRESPONDENCE**

No correspondence reviewed.

**X. ADJOURN MEETING**

Having no additional business, the Local Historic District Study Committee adjourned its meeting of February 26, 2019 at 8:05 pm. Randi Zanca made the motion; Robert Laflamme seconded.

Respectfully submitted,



Randi Zanca

LHDSC Member

cc: Town Clerk