

Durham Historic District Commission

Thursday, Sept. 17, 2015

Attendance:

Vice Chair Benjamin Love

Secretary Seth Koenig

Joe Donovanick

Paula Erdmann-Purdy

Call to Order and Establishment of Quorum

Pledge of Allegiance

Acceptance of Minutes

Motion: Seth made a motion to accept the minutes from Aug. 20, 2015.

Ben seconded.

Vote: 4-0.

Informational exchange

Paul: Handed out guidelines for the Certified Local Government Program in Maine from Maine Historic Preservation Commission; provides for home rule provided

Paul: Maine allows home rule of historic attributes provided the municipality passes and administers ordinance to do so which complies with state and federal guidelines; as far as I can tell, Durham has not complied with these criteria

Paul: Commission rules require demonstrated expertises; board members in Durham have not been made to prove competency

Paula: But we have "interest," as written into the ordinance

Paul: Demonstrated "interest" as written here is not just a passing hobby, but rather a track record of academic study, etc.

Paula: Do we have enough archaeologists and historians to fill out a board in Durham?

Paul: The state can/will provide the expertise, the board can/will provide the authority; The board could ask the MHPC to rescind the ordinance and then move forward with a different approach

Paul: Commission can seek grants on behalf of preservation/restoration projects, identify historic properties, do applications to put those properties on historic lists

Seth: So Durham could/should turn over review authority to the state, and turn our attention to advocacy and preversation

Joe: If we haven't been fulfilling the ordinance and feel we can't, how can we do the things Seth talked about?

Paul: Maybe re-form as a Historic Preservation Committee? You could inventory the historic buildings and do the historic research on the important structures and properties and document how they're being preserved; work with the state and historic society, build documentation about the historical properties

Joe: What he's recommending would seem to fulfill what everybody would prefer to be doing. I've been here from this commission's founding, and I agree with Paul – we have not done the job. We didn't have a meeting at one point for two years, the town hasn't kept our records or meeting minutes. I think the ordinance was well-intended, but K-Marts and Wal-Marts are not interfering here.

Paul: The comprehensive plan acknowledges that we need historic preservation, but in 13 years since, the establishment of a district/HDC hasn't played out as useful in historic preservation

Paul: The local certified governments can reach out to the state to decertify the commission; we can write a letter to the selectmen, who can then petition the state

Paula: Before we bag the whole thing, maybe we can do a bit of research on other towns which have both, to find out how those two organizations work and what they do

Paul: I think reviewing what other towns do start us in the right direction; you can spend the next three years reviewing and revising the ordinance to make it work, or you can dump it and start doing historic preservation

Joe: This has been brewing; we hadn't before wanted to throw the baby out with the bathwater; new board members weren't sure what they were getting into, which caused us to first look into reviewing the ordinance first

Paula: If we do that, would we lose any authority? Would we effectively be a second historical society?

Ben: We have authority in the district

Paul: What good is authority in the district? If the goal is historic preservation, it's questionable whether that authority is effective. The state would bring the expertise and potentially the funding; I think it's a win-win.

Ben: Candy's house in the historic district – what if someone who wants to strip mall in across the street

Paul: The town land-use ordinances already would restrict commercial development like that; you could advocate for changes to the land-use ordinance to create buffer zones around buildings that the committee then designates as historic

Joe: We should develop a mission before we seek training on carrying out that mission

Paul: The things you guys really want to do, you can't; should somebody buy Candy's house and want to do something with it, you guys don't have the expertise to decide whether it's appropriate; the state does

Paul: Let go of what you're not qualified to do and focus on what you can do to help historic preservation

Seth: The ordinance/district is not fun, and it's not been effective

Joe: This ordinance and district would be gone

Paula: Would we be able to designate which properties are historically significant to the state?

Seth: I imagine we would document and inventory the historic structures, then turn that documentation over to the state to educate them on how to adjudicate future applications regarding those structures

Paul: The land-use ordinance townwide applying to historical resources identified by MHPC (which we could influence), would still be held to historic standards still

Joe: I think we have a lot to think about; it's a major, major change, so we should wait until the chair and perhaps associate members. We should table most items on the agenda.

Ben: Is everybody OK skipping past most of the agenda?

Paula: If our role is going to change, maybe we could step in and play a more active role in working to preserve the Historical Society's buildings

Ben: Which of the agenda items are still applicable given the current considerations?

Paul: All members swear in annually before the town meeting

Motion: Joe made a motion to skip the remainder of the scheduled agenda items, with an eye toward further discussion of the proposal at hand.

Ben seconded.

Vote: 4-0.

Next meeting

Ben: Candy can't make Oct. 8; how about Oct. 15?

Motion: Ben made a motion to adjourn.

Joe seconded.

Vote: 4-0.