

Minutes of the
Whately Historical Commission Meeting
October 21, 2019 at 5:30pm

Present: Alan McArdle, Donna Wiley, Judy Markland, Darcy Tozier, Susan Baron

Also present: Chris Kellogg

The meeting was called to order at 5:30 p.m.

The minutes for the September 16 meeting were approved.

Large solar installations and historic/scenic landscape

Chris Kellogg introduced himself and spoke concerning changes in the regulations regarding large-scale solar installations in Massachusetts, with particular reference to the encouragement of expansion in towns in western Massachusetts. The Committee engaged in a wide-ranging discussion of the advantages and disadvantages of solar installations in Whately and the intersection with the Commission's responsibilities regarding scenic roads and views..

Judy Markland reported that the Planning Board has begun consideration of the current bylaws regarding large-scale solar installations and will seek input from the Historical Commission, particularly with respect to Scenic Roads and Scenic Vistas Bylaws. Historic districts may become an issue as well, especially if more are defined..

Town Committee updates (Center School; Open Space)

Judy reported that the Center School Visioning Committee has been appointed, but has not yet met.. Judy distributed the first section of a draft memo containing background material, largely concerning historic issues, which she plans to distribute to the committee before its first meeting and asked for comments.. She will try to ensure that the committee thinks about alternative possibilities for the Center School and enumerates carefully the costs and options for each..

The Commission discussed the possible designation of the Center School as "historically significant" according to the bylaw on 'converted historic municipal, religious and commercial buildings' that was approved at Town Meeting last April. Commission members discussed the fact that this designation will enable alternate uses of the structure, despite the fact that the plot is non-conforming, but will not in and of itself protect the historically significant exterior features. The Commission voted unanimously to designate the Center School "historically significant." Donna Wiley will communicate this decision to the Town Manager and others as appropriate.

Donna reported that she has been appointed to the revived Open Space Committee, one of whose tasks will be to revise Whately's current Open Space and Recreation Plan (2006-2011). She had reviewed the lengthy plan and noted two comments within it pertaining to the Historical Commission:

- a note that the Historical Commission was "working to establish an historical district between River Road and the site of the former railroad station on Christian Lane" (no current Commission members worked on this project, which we surmise had been shelved),

- and a note that the Historical Commission had proposed the designation of Westbrook, Conway, and Poplar Roads as scenic roads (this proposal was deferred because of concerns about the possibly burdensome requirement for public hearings about maintenance of trees and stone walls on public rights-of-way on such roads, which has again been on the Commission's agenda this fall.)

Community Preservation Committee plan

The Historical Commission reviewed the Historic Preservation Section of the Community Preservation Plan, and revised the stated historic preservation priorities as follows:

- Rehabilitate historically significant buildings and structures in Whately.
- Conserve and document gravestones and landscapes in the town cemeteries.
- Conserve the town's historic records and artifacts and provide storage to ensure their preservation.
- Conserve the Historical Society's collection of Whately artifacts, photographs, and documents.
- Provide signage and educational material for town historic resources.
- Update the existing inventory of historic houses, tobacco barns, mill sites, and stone walls.

Donna will forward this list to Alan Sanderson, Chair of the Community Preservation Committee.

Project for 250th Celebration

The Commission continued discussion about developing a self-guided tour of historic sites in Whately as part of the upcoming 250th, agreeing that the product should endure beyond the week of celebration scheduled for June 2021. Donna reported that Calla Jones has offered to help think about the best vehicles for this project, based on the forest story map she developed last spring. Darcy Tozier and Donna will meet with Calla soon and report back to the Commission.

Other business

Donna reported that conservator Lisa Mehlin will work on the Town Safe November 5-8 and 18-22. The Commission agreed that Lisa should be invited to talk briefly with them about her work on the afternoon of November 18.

The next meeting is scheduled for Monday, November 18, 5:30 pm, in the meeting room of Town Hall.

The meeting adjourned at 6:45 p.m.