

City of Keene
New Hampshire

HERITAGE COMMISSION
MEETING MINUTES

Wednesday, September 11, 2019

4:00 PM

2nd Floor Conference Rm

Members Present:

Rose Carey, Chair
Susan D'Egidio, Vice-Chair
Erin Benik
Louise Zerba, Alternate

Staff Present:

Tara Kessler, Senior Planner

Members Not Present:

Christine Houston
Charlotte Schuerman
Cauley Powell

1. Call to Order/Roll Call

Chair Carey called the meeting to order at 4:02 PM.

2. Minutes of July 10, 2019

Ms. Kessler stated that the committee has not adopted the meeting minutes from February 13, 2019. Discussion ensued.

Chair Carey made a motion to accept the minutes of February 13, 2019. Ms. D'Egidio seconded the motion, which passed by unanimous vote.

Ms. D'Egidio made a motion to accept the minutes of July 10, 2019. Ms. Benik seconded the motion, which passed by unanimous vote.

3. CLG Grant

a) FY 2019 Workshop Debrief

b) FY 2020 Urban Barn Survey

Chair Carey stated that the Urban Barn Tour workshop was fun and a lot of work. She thanked Ms. D'Egidio for her work, and continued that there were 40 or 50 people and everyone did the walking tour. Ms. D'Egidio agreed that it was fun but hard work, and the weather was perfect.

Ms. Zerba stated that the minutes should reflect that Chair Carey's and Ms. D'Egidio's work was really commendable, and the Heritage Commission thanks them highly. Chair Carey replied that she thanks Ms. Zerba, too, for her work.

Chair Carey stated that they got several houses inventoried and she has yet to submit those to the City. Homeowners were very excited about it. Josh Gorman was informed about RSA 79-E and is participating in that program. Ms. Kessler replied that he has not received it yet. She continued that next Thursday, September 19, the City Council will hold a public hearing on his application, and then there is a time period after the public hearing during which the City Council will decide whether to grant the temporary tax relief. Ms. D'Egidio stated that she thought Mr. Gorman was already granted that. Ms. Kessler replied no, what he was granted is he was deemed eligible by the State to be on the national historical registry.

Ms. Zerba asked if someone will put together a brochure of the walking tour. Chair Carey replied that she would like to see something. She continued that they already have the write-up. They could put it on the City's website or send it to the Historical Society; she is not sure. But a lot of work went into this. Ms. D'Egidio stated that many people asked the Heritage Commission for copies of what they had. She asked if everyone received the addresses she sent. Chair Carey replied yes. Ms. Zerba asked if it can be sent to the whole group. Ms. Kessler asked Chair Carey to send her the final script, so she can make sure the version she has is the final one, and she can distribute it to the group.

Chair Carey stated that the conclusion of the walking tour closes that grant. Ms. Kessler replied yes. She continued that they just received one more invoice. She would like to talk with Chair Carey after the meeting about cashing the last check so it gets closed out on time (by September 30). The City received notice that the grant agreement for FY20 is going before the Governor and Council. They are waiting on that to get executed. They can issue the Request for Proposals (RFP) at any time, although she had to put that on hold. They should get it issued this fall so they can begin the consultant selection process and get work started in late winter or early spring.

Chair Carey stated that will mostly be consultant work; the Commission will work with them, but they are going to be doing the legwork themselves. This consultant would do a more detailed inventory form for all structures, and develop a better list of at-risk structures. If anyone from the demolition committee (which right now is just Ms. D'Egidio) ever gets those requests, if they know a structure is on the list, it will help them vet the request. Ms. D'Egidio replied yes, it would be helpful. She continued that she is always asking City staff for more information.

Chair Carey stated that this ends their series. She continued that she thanks everyone for the work they have done these past two years. Ms. Kessler stated that this committee has been so active. She continued that within the city and other elected and appointed boards the Commission has received a lot of praise and recognition for their good work.

4. Stone Arch Bridge Improvements/Proposed Keene Transportation Heritage Trail

Chair Carey stated that Ms. Kessler has a new project, and asked her to speak about it.

Ms. Kessler stated that improvements to the Stone Arch Bridge is something this Commission spearheaded a number of years ago. She continued that the bridge is owned by the NH Department of Transportation (NH DOT), not the City. It connects to a trail network in Swanzey. It had significant water damage and other damage to the bridge deck, and trees were growing into the wing walls and abutments. A lot of work needed to be done to restore and maintain the bridge, and there

was a significant amount of effort in the City to help accomplish this task. The Commission and others in the community came together to recognize the historical significance of the structure and get grant funding to make improvements to it and think about long term rehabilitation. Phase I was drainage and restoration of the bridge deck and removal of trees. This was done with two L-Chip grants, a Preserve America grant, City funding, and local donations. The City always intended to have continued phases. She continued that next is to restore the capstones. Right now the bridge is one level deck. There is no railing. It is not intended for anyone to go over, but people do use it; it is not fenced off.

Ms. Kessler continued that when the Stone Arch Bridge was first built it had granite capstones on top, and two low walls. It was always used as a railroad bridge. In the 1920s the railroad removed the walls and replaced them with iron railings, which did not look as good. Some granite capstones are still around the surrounding area. The goal would be to create a design to match what was once there, get cost estimates for what it would take to achieve that design, and determine the type and cost of granite. All the work of the Commission in the early 2000s documented a significant amount of history, and Jim Garvin, the Historic Preservation Officer at the time, filed for it to be on the National Register, so there are strict standards to adhere to.

She continued that the City has been talking internally about a bigger project this would tie into: the creation of what the City Engineer is calling a transportation heritage trail. She explained the location of the Industrial Heritage Corridor, and stated that the trail ends at Eastern Ave. but at one point went over Route 101, over the Stone Arch Bridge, and into Swanzey. The proposal is to continue the trail over Route 101. The City actually purchased a bridge for a dollar and it is in storage. If the Commission is interested, the City Engineer will come to a next meeting to discuss this. He has a schematic that is very initial right now, showing the bridge's placement. Discussion ensued about the bridges already in the city.

Ms. D'Egidio asked if the iron railings are still on the Stone Arch Bridge. Ms. Kessler replied no, but you can see the railings' remains. Ms. D'Egidio stated that years ago when Jack Little was here, a topic of conversation was how to keep the bridge both safe and historic. Ms. Kessler replied that if they were to restore the granite capstones, the current regulations would be for it to be open to both bicyclists and pedestrians, and there are certain heights you need to have to prevent falls. She thinks the requirement is 40 inches. There would have to be a design effort that would follow the regulations and maintain the historic structure.

Ms. Benik asked if they would need to hire an architect for that. Ms. Kessler replied that this would not be a project that would fall solely to the Commission to undertake, but the City is in the preliminary stages of designing this project. She continued that the first step would be Stone Arch Bridge improvements. Then from there, there would be a phased approach of bridges. There are grants the City can apply for, and there are potential sources of funding from private foundations. Her ask today is whether the Commission is interested in supporting this. If so, there may be opportunities to become more involved and do supportive work. There could be education and outreach about the bridge to get more support.

Ms. Zerba stated that they could get Pathways involved. Ms. Kessler replied yes. She continued that the Commission could write a letter of support to show that they back the City applying for an L-Chip grant. Ms. D'Egidio asked if the money the City received when Mr. Little was present has all been spent. Ms. Kessler replied yes, that all went towards the design and construction of the drainage improvements.

Ms. Zerba stated that she would like to have the City Engineer come speak to the group and give them an overview. Ms. Benik and Chair Carey agreed. Ms. Zerba stated that then they could see how the Commission fits in. Ms. D'Egidio agreed. Ms. Zerba stated that the City Engineer could tell them what their role should be. Ms. Kessler replied that he would probably ask the Commission what they want their role to be. Chair Carey replied that there is fundraising, grant-writing, and public awareness work that needs to happen. Ms. Kessler stated that what is great is that all of the research has been done for this project – she has two milk crates in her office full of the past seven years' worth of work done on this. It has been heavily researched and studied and there used to be a Stone Arch Bridge Committee.

Ms. Zerba asked, if there was going to be a second bridge over Swanzey Factory Road, would Swanzey have financial input? Ms. Kessler replied yes, another component of the project would be collaborating with the Town of Swanzey, since the trail crosses town boundaries and benefits both Keene and Swanzey. The City would like to apply for federal money through the Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP). They will apply for a grant for the bigger picture project. They could be more competitive if they could show they were pursuing other funding for the historical pieces of the bridge.

Ms. Zerba stated that to sell the idea to the public, the City would have to show that the trail will not just stop at the end of the bridge. She continued that they need to show how it will be continuous and eventually lead to Swanzey, and how it all fits together.

Ms. D'Egidio asked if this is proposed to be a walking trail. Ms. Kessler replied yes. Chair Carey replied that it would also allow bicycles but not motorized vehicles.

Ms. Zerba stated that this project sounds good. Ms. Benik agreed that it is very interesting.

5. Updates

a) Demolition Review Subcommittee

Ms. D'Egidio stated that she had one [request] last week – 26 Water Street, the Prospect House. She continued that the house and the barn with cupolas are nice, and the only portion of the site proposed for demolition is the flat-topped, two-bay garage. When they take that down, they will restore the wall that was connecting the garage to the house.

Chair Carey asked if Ms. D'Egidio is going to ask someone to join the committee. Ms. D'Egidio replied yes, a woman she met at the barn tour. Ms. Kessler asked if she is a Keene resident, which is a requirement for being on the committee. Ms. D'Egidio replied that she will ask.

6. New or Other Business

Ms. Kessler reported that she was in the brewery that is going in on Main Street, and they were doing demolition work and uncovered the original bank flooring and architectural feature of ductwork that they restore. She continued that the floor is sourced from all different stone from the region. It is irregularly shaped stone tile that is mortared together. There is curved ductwork that encompasses a majority of that opening in the ceiling. They found images of the old bank so they were on alert to these features.

Ms. Zerba stated that she saw in the minutes from the last meeting that Mr. Gorman found a photo behind the wall in his house. She asked why he put it back in, instead of displaying it. Ms. D'Egidio replied that he thinks it was put in that place for a reason, and thinks it is from when someone died. He wants it to be back where he found it. Chair Carey replied that they should make sure it is documented. Ms. D'Egidio replied that she has the photo on her phone. Ms. Benik replied that she should send it to the Historical Society. Ms. Zerba replied yes, otherwise it will be lost until the wall comes down again.

7. Next Meeting – November 13, 2019

8. Adjourn

Chair Carey adjourned the meeting at 4:35 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Britta Reida, Minute Taker

Reviewed and edited by Tara Kessler, Senior Planner.