

**Gloucester Historical Commission
Gloucester, Massachusetts**

A meeting of the Gloucester Historical Commission (GHC) was held after due notice on 17 June 2019 in the third floor meeting room of the Gloucester City Hall, 9 Dale Ave., Gloucester, MA 01930.

Attendees: Mary Ellen Lepionka, Bob Whitmarsh, Bill Remsen, Sandy Barry, and David Rhineland, Jude Seminara.

Also Present: Susan Morreale, Lillian Olmstead.

A quorum was present. The meeting was called to order at 6:39pm.

1. Acceptance Of Past Minutes, Prepared By Jude Seminara And Bill Remsen. The minutes were briefly discussed.

On a motion duly made and seconded, the Commission VOTED to accept as presented to the Commission as amended to reflect such changes as specified at the meeting.

2. Action Plan For Following Up With Mayor And P&D Committee Regarding Presentation Of The Demolition Review (DR) Proposal. The issues and strategies of the Demo Review (no longer to be called a demo delay) were discussed. The schedule of necessary actions include:

- a. Checking in with Val Gillman and the P&D Committee of the City Council to see what progress they had made with the DR materials the GHC previously sent them. No response from the P&D Committee has been received to date and recommendations about revisions and the best ways to move forward are needed.
- b. Once the initial P&D recommendations were incorporated into the draft DR language and into the DR Slide Show, the GHC should present it to the Mayor and Jim Destino for their review. Constructive suggestions should be incorporated.
- c. After further revision, the DR text and DR Slide Show should be formally presented to P&D Committee for their consideration.
- d. Pending P&D input, the DR text and DR slide show should be formally presented to the Gloucester City Council.

Revisions as needed would be made during this process. It was pointed out that numerous Massachusetts towns and cities already have Demo Reviews. Gloucester is in fact very much behind in this regard. [Mary Ellen has helpfully added that data on demo delays in surrounding cities and towns is in the "Demo Delay" folder on the thumb drive along with other useful information, including the MHC's slide show on the subject. It might be useful to list nearby municipalities to illustrate how behind Gloucester is.]

3. Review Of The Demolition Review Draft Slide Show. Mary Ellen presented her draft of the slide show, which included numerous historic photos (before) and more recent (after) photos of the same locations to demonstrate the remarkable loss of Gloucester's build heritage in the past decades. Much was lost to urban renewal in the early 1970s, but this is a continuous process. There was significant discussion on this topic including the following points:

- a. The process of demolition and rebuilding has been taking place for a very long time and is continuing. The example of the YMCA showed repeated demolitions and new constructions on the same site. Many beautiful buildings have been lost and very often what follows seems of lesser quality.

- b. Mary Ellen mentioned that Gloucester needs to ask specific questions:
 - What do we want to save?
 - What do we want Gloucester to look like?

The larger preservation questions are what do we value and what are we willing to do to protect this heritage? Without the zoning protections of the Historic District, there are no clear legal ways to stop demolition and new construction of aesthetically questionable designs that meet building code requirements.

- c. Jude made the point that we are not against development per se - we are simply trying to find ways to adapt and reuse historic buildings instead of tearing them down.
 - d. In consideration of ways to educate and assist Gloucester residents to better appreciate the historic heritage, Lillian asked about the availability of historic preservation experts to assist new home owners in understanding the value of their properties and what strategies might be followed to both preserve their heritage and achieve whatever architectural goals they might have. Bill suggested that architects specializing in historic preservation could be consulted to brainstorm with clients to ensure that they did not make big mistakes. Mary Ellen mentioned that the GHC had served as a sounding board for individuals in the past, but not many people had availed themselves of the GHC's services.
 - e. Bill noted that many local firms selling architectural salvage had recently closed due to a lack of interest from the public. This seems to be a symptom of the larger social trend of disinterest towards history and historic preservation. The interest and connoisseurship demonstrated by Henry Sleeper when he built *Beauport* in Gloucester with re-used architectural fragments does not seem part of the present culture.
4. Decision Regarding Off-Cycle CPC Grant Application For Archaeological Excavation At Stage Fort.
- The importance of Stage Fort, first built in 1637, cannot be over stated. It is the oldest fort in Massachusetts and never has been professionally excavated or documented. It needs to be properly excavated and the results presented to the public with on site signage, publications and other forms of outreach. Such excavations would be an excellent way to help celebrate the 400th anniversary of Gloucester's founding in 1623. Several points were made:
- a. Mike Hale, head of Gloucester's DPW which controls the park, has agreed to support such an excavation. He apparently has been unwilling to put this in writing however and needs to be further consulted about this issue.
 - b. The most likely candidate to undertake the excavations, UMass Amherst, is no longer in the business. This is most unfortunate.
 - c. Since the Massachusetts Historical Commission (MHC) must issue a permit for excavations and MHC has a short list of approved archaeologists. PAL is on this list. However, MHC's recent difficulties with Gloucester related to the National Register listing of Annisquam and Dogtown may sour MHC on Gloucester in general and may make getting MHC cooperation problematic.
 - d. Mary Ellen mentioned battlefield archaeologist Prof. David Starbuck, [Plymouth State University in Plymouth New Hampshire], as a potential lead to conduct excavations. Academic affiliation is highly recommended as students can participate pro bono and the entire operation does not have to be on a for profit basis. In addition, the education aspect of the excavation can potentially be expanded to the general public and local schools. [Starbuck directs the summer SUNY Archaeological Field School that recently excavated historic Fort William Henry in New York. He recently published a book on it, "The Legacy of Fort William Henry." He has also written numerous relevant books including "The Archaeology of Forts and Battlefields." He certainly seems like someone to contact.]

- e. The City's current plans for Stage Fort Park in general, and for the 400th celebration, are unclear after the decisions was apparently made to not go forward with the major re-landscaping plan. The suggestion was made to contact Mark Cole to find out more.
5. Action Plan To Contribute To 1623 Studios' History Shorts And Podcasts And To The Committee For The 400th. The process of how Kory Curcuru prepares his historic podcasts was discussed. The GHC needs to continue to prepare timelines for various subjects while Kory tracks down suitable illustrations.
 6. Action Plan For The Revision And Publication Of The Land Marks Book. Various issues were discussed.
 - a. Wendy Frontiero prepared the original book in the 1970s. This book is now obsolete and needs complete revision. Because of copyright issues, a new book, with new images and new text, is needed.
 - b. Because of costs, this probably will be an online book only, although there certainly would be a need for printed copies as well.
 - c. Mary Ellen prepared a draft template for the book, which was put on line by Sandy, who also posted scans of the original book. A glossary and bibliography is envisioned.
 - d. The concept is an 8.5" x 11' format book.
 - e. The Cape Ann Museum already has walking tours of the neighborhood with handouts that include information on local architectural styles. It would useful to coordinate the new book with the Museums' activities. The new book should include walking tour maps with summary historical and architectural information about specific buildings.
 7. Discussion Of GHC Reorganization And Recruitment.
 - a. Mary Ellen reiterated the need for new members.
 - b. Mary Ellen related that she wanted to transfer 3 boxes of GHC files to the City Archives. Bill offered to pick these up for her and deliver them.
 - c. Mary Ellen handed to Sandy a thumb drive with all of her GHC files from 2014-2019. Sandy offered to make copies for each GHC member. The distribution of these files was discussed but the ultimate repository for these was not decided.
 - d. Mary Ellen announced that she was officially resigning from the GHC. This was a shock to some members. Various members stated that Mary Ellen certainly had done a huge amount of excellent work for the GHC and that she could not be replaced. Bob will continue as Chair.
 - e. The GHC committee members gave Mary Ellen a standing ovation as a token of our appreciation for her efforts.
 - f. With her letter of resignation to the Mayor, Mary Ellen had attached a list of recommendations for historic preservation in Gloucester. These recommendations included the following;
 - Provide a budget for the Gloucester Historical Commission and fund their participation in training workshops.
 - Hire a professional historic preservationist to work with the Community Development department and manage the volunteers.
 - Seriously address recommendations in the 2001 Community Development Plan.
 - Adopt policies and procedures to protect Gloucester from loss of character through the unregulated demolition of its historic properties and landscapes and their replacement by new constructions that are not in character.
 - Encourage the Historic District Commission to take a broader interest in historic preservation and to look into adding adjacent properties or streets to the Local Historic District.

Consider combining the Historic District Commission and the Historical Commission as one body.

- Undertake restoration of the exterior of the old Town Hall/Legion Memorial building without further delay, and support the preservation of the exterior of the Monell wing of the Sawyer Free Library.
- Undertake an archaeological excavation in Stage Fort, following the recommendations of the University of Massachusetts Archaeological Survey of 2018, and require that any restoration of the Fort be done in a manner that is historically authentic and explained accurately to the public.
- Have an active maintenance and management plan for Dogtown, take greater responsibility for this and other municipal property and conservation land, and resist the desires of some City Council members and special interests to undertake commercial and residential development in Dogtown.
- Support habitat restoration projects in Dogtown recommended and conducted by professional ecologists to save wetlands and threatened species, such as the blueberries, native orchids, rare turtles, and songbirds.
- Encourage City Council members to take a more active part in promoting historic preservation concepts and principles citywide and in educating their constituents.
- Encourage City council members to support the historical commission's annual Historic Preservation awards by recommending projects in their wards to recognize and by at least attending the award ceremonies.

g. Mary Ellen promised to keep in touch with the committee members as we move forward.

Next Regular Meeting: Monday, July 29, in the 3rd floor Conference Room, City Hall at 6:30 pm.

Upon motion duly made and seconded, it was voted to adjourn the meeting at 8:50 pm.

Respectfully Submitted,

Bill Remsen
June 18, 2019