

## **Minutes, Gloucester Historical Commission Meeting, City Hall, December 22, 2014**

Present: David Rhineland, Co-Chairman, Jeff Crawford, Tom O'Keefe, Bob Whitmarsh, Mary Ellen Lepionka, and visitors J. Jamieson and city councilors Melissa Cox and Steve LeBlanc.

We reviewed the November minutes and accepted them into the record.

### **CPC Work**

David reviewed our new role in helping the Community Preservation Committee to evaluate historical impacts of Community Preservation grants and said that we would soon be receiving a package of grants to go through.

### **Meetinghouse Green**

We expressed praise for Mike Hale and the DPW for the wonderful work they did to improve Meetinghouse Green. They moved the marker stone, cleared the brush, pruned the trees, and gave notice to abutters not to encroach on the pocket park, and it looks great. Ward Councilor Steve LeBlanc also praised the work. David will communicate our thanks to Mike and that of J. Jamieson, the neighbors, and the local chapter of the DAR.

Mike had requested information about signage for Meetinghouse Green. Bob suggested granite markers at the two front corners of the lot, saying "Meetinghouse Green". Others thought there should be more information, such as the dates of the First Parish Church and how the green was used in colonial times. No decision was made on what to have for signage, which will be decided in the next meeting.

### **First Parish and Clark Burial Grounds**

Melissa Cox made it clear that the problem with taking care of the First Parish Burial Ground and the Clark Cemetery, which dates to the Civil War, and other closed cemeteries is that they are not in the DPW budget and need to be added. The cemetery committee has no members, so there has been no advocacy. She is requesting that the required number of members for that committee be reduced from 5 to 3 and will publicize the need for the 3 new active members. That committee and/or the DPW can suggest an increase in burial fees and send the request to the City Council. Melissa researched the burial fees of surrounding towns and noted that Gloucester's is the lowest and has not been increased since 1999. The increased fees would provide enough money to offset pay for work on the closed cemeteries. Initially, we should ask for a small amount, say \$2000, just to get into the budget.

Melissa said that the real source of money for this is the Mayor's office, not the City Council. She suggested we see the mayor about allocating free cash before she leaves office and also that we come at the beginning of a City Council meeting to speak on the need for an addition to the DPW budget for maintenance of closed cemeteries by raising burial fees, to which the Mayor must respond within 2 weeks. Time is of the essence because the Mayor is leaving her post to work for the Governor.

The work to be done involves cutting and mowing and possibly headstone repair in the future. Note was made of the scheduled professional workshop in headstone repair being conducted in 2015. Praise was given for the volunteer efforts of Rachel Meyer and her associates. Melissa said that in no circumstances should the GHC spend money on purchasing equipment. Both she and Steve LeBlanc said that in addition to DPW resources they each have plenty of chainsaws and other tools in accessible toolsheds that they will readily make available to Rachel or other volunteers for the cemetery work they do. David will contact Rachel to ask her not to plan to purchase equipment after all, with details to come for when and where to get whatever equipment they need.

Melissa will provide newspaper publicity for recruitment to the newly reconstituted Cemetery Committee. Prospective members simply send a letter of intent to the Mayor. Melissa also suggested we solicit donations for projects like Meetinghouse Green before winter. The decision was made to see the local DAR representative about a donation for Gloucester's old cemeteries, with any money to be put into Gloucester Fund for this use. Melissa encouraged us also to consider investing money in the Cape Ann Savings Bank and let them manage a portfolio to grow funds we receive.

### **Survey and Planning Grant**

We were successful in our letter of intent to the Mass. Historical Commission and have been invited to apply for a \$15,000 reimbursable 50-50 matching grant from the MHC to complete the area surveys from previously abandoned or unsuccessful National Register applications on file for Gloucester at the MHC. However, because mail was not picked up or was misdirected, the package of specific instructions was lost. Mary Ellen will ask for another set to be sent, and Mary Ellen and Amanda will spearhead the application effort. David will ask Mr. Coolidge for the seed funding. The deadline for submitting the full application is Feb. 9.

### **Certified Local Government**

David reported no progress on getting Gloucester reclassified as a Certified Local Government (CLG). Mary Ellen will contact David Porper of the Gloucester Historic District Commission to discuss the matter, as CLG status requires an annual report on the work of both the GHC and the GHDC. The HDC does not meet on a regular basis, but minutes of their meetings are posted on the City web site.

### **Stacey Blvd. Seawall**

David led a discussion of Mike Hale's request for our input on work the DPW will be doing to rebuild part of the seawall on Stacey Blvd. After review the group voted to approve the plan, determining that the work as planned would not have an adverse effect on the historic character of the site.

### **Harbor Loop Coal Tar Removal**

Because mail was not picked up or was misdirected, we did not learn of the need for the GHC to address this matter until after the deadline for responding. David called and emailed the contact at the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, leaving messages, to explain the situation in hopes that we will still have an opportunity to sign the Memorandum of

Agreement, which would give us some voice in the mitigation of adverse effects of this work on historic features in Harbor Loop, including any old seawalls and wharves and the Marine Railways. We also read a letter from the Massachusetts Historical Commission describing their intended oversight of the work. After reviewing the plans for the Harbor Loop cleanup and reconstruction, we voted unanimously to approve the project and sign the MOA if given the chance.

### **Cell Tower on Concord Rd.**

We read a letter from the Mass. Historical Commission saying that the siting of the proposed cell tower would not have any adverse effect on historic or prehistoric resources, as these did not exist at the site. No response is required by the GHC.

### **Records Storage**

An archive for GHC papers is one of the requirements of achieving CLG status, which benefits local governments seeking state funding. CLGs get the top 20% of federal funds allocated to the states for redistribution. The plan was to move crates of papers currently in David's house to the Post Office basement, which, however, makes them difficult to access. Jeff mentioned that the City Archives needs better space and a more aggressive program of digitizing documents for easier access. There is a rule that City Archives need to be in reach of the City Clerk's office. If more money could be found, remodeling the City Hall basement as a proper archives facility would solve the problem, and GHC records could go there too. No decision was made on when and where to move the GHC archives.

### **GHC Alternate Members**

David will write a newspaper ad soliciting new alternates to the GHC, specifying Gloucester residents who have professional backgrounds in history, historical archaeology, architectural history, historic preservation, or property law.

### **Next Meeting**

January 26 at 6:30 in the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor meeting room in City Hall. (The January meeting was canceled due to snow conditions. The next meeting was February 23, 2015.)