

Minutes Gloucester Historical Commission

29 August 2016

Attending: Mary Ellen Lepionka, Jeff Crawford, Sandy Barry, Bob Whitmarsh, David Rhineland, Jude Seminara, Holly Clay.

Maggie Rosa, Beverly McKean, Ken Whittaker, Richard M. Clark, David Dow.

1. Approval of July Minutes. Additions and Corrections include:

Mary Ellen Lepionka and Holly Clay met with Cape Ann Museum management to discuss including “walks” in the updated *Gloucester Landmarks*, slated for publication in 2017. The walks designed by the Cape Ann Museum (CAM), ones that docents continue to guide, will be available to the public through CAM only, not through GHC *Landmarks*.

Rocky Neck has been entered correctly (not Rock Neck).

Item #8 concerns the GHC conversation with Steve Harris and David Teale of Annisquam. They wanted info about National Register nomination process.

Mary Ellen moved that we accept the July Minutes as amended and corrected.

2. Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Parking Area requirement for City Hall. Maggie Rosa, City Hall Restoration Committee member, attended the August meeting to present a proposal for an ADA-compliant parking lot on the side of City Hall. ADA state and federal law says City Hall must have an ADA parking lot (Americans with Disabilities ACT).

The Massachusetts Architecture Access Board (MAAB) is involved and enforces the ADA compliance. Rosa represented the Restoration Committee which deals with ADA and CPA Grant (\$2.6 million restoration grant) specification compliance in behalf of the city.

The Committee is seeking a letter of support from the GHC for the parking lot proposal. The Massachusetts Historic Commission (MHC) reviews all projects so historic integrity of listed properties is not damaged. The MHC has a requirement that GHC review and decide if proposed projects, like this handicap accessible parking lot, would be harmful historically.

Completion of the parking lot phase of compliance is set for November 30, 2016. Gloucester received \$180,000 from CDBG, to complete construction of an ADA-compliant parking lot that meets MAAB standards.

Rosa distributed site plans for the proposed parking lot. The plans include elevations. Trees have to be removed and land dug out. The GHC members reacted negatively to the proposal. Co-Chair Mary Ellen Lepionka said, “This would definitely destroy the historical integrity of the lot...this property is on the National Register.” Committee member Jeff Crawford agreed, “This is not a good way. I don’t like it. Taking all the grass out

of there from what I can see. And trees.” Jude.... Said, “I’m with Jeff.” Would destroy “City on a Hill” concept.

Bob Whitmarsh added that he thinks the proposed parking lot construction will be “costly and disruptive.” Bob came up with other ideas that would expand the sidewalk, with parking inside, that will not require grass and trees removal. He pictures a basement level entrance, accessed from the Post Office side parking area.

The GHC decided we cannot write a letter in support of the City Hall Committee’s proposal. We shall explore alternatives, before we can write a letter supporting any option as the best option.

3. Cemetery Advisory Committee.

Cemetery committee members include Bev McKean, Patti Amaral and Sandy Barry who also sits on the Gloucester Historical Commission. Richard M. Clark, another member, attended our meeting to help update the GHC on the Cemetery Committee’s activities and status.

The Committee was formally appointed the third week in August 2016 (last week) and will be accountable to the Mayor. Members are in the process of setting a first meeting, hopefully in September, aiming to establish a third Monday night of the month for regular meetings. The Committee’s purview will be the city-owned cemeteries. Members hope to conduct an inventory of the cemeteries in the city, determining where the Committee has influence and where private ownership takes precedence. The committee will work with and through the DPW to learn more about private cemeteries and their owners. (From time to time residents have adopted cemeteries (like Walter McGrath in Lanesville), as can be seen on cemetery signs reading, “adopted.”)

David Rhinelander inquired about community-owned cemeteries i.e. the second parish cemetery which is owned by a church and the ones at St. Ann’s, Our Lady of Good Voyage, and the Unitarian Universalist Church. Oak Grove cemetery is on a Washington CPA grant which is contributing to work on the chapel. It is not church-owned, however.

The Committee is currently assessing the needs and requirements of restoring and repairing the First Parish cemetery.

Although the GHC mandate comes from the state (state law), not via a city ordinance, we should collaborate in grant writing. A number of cemeteries is on the National Register and we should weigh in. Mary Ellen Lepionka mentioned opportunities for writing grants for First Parish and Clarke Cemeteries, to find and analyze unmarked graves.

Mr. Ken Whittaker, city conservation officer, attended the meeting to discuss wetlands in Clarke Cemetery. He has evaluated growth there, Identified trees and defined wetland boundaries. He is looking at developing a five year

program for restoration. Ridding the cemetery of Japanese Knot Weed (looks like bamboo, highly invasive, no natural predators) is a priority. Remediation will include a chemical spray. The acceptable use of herbicides on city land will have to be determined and Whittaker suggests hiring a certified applicator. Disposal must be done carefully. Gloucester DPW isn't segregating out the material that includes the Japanese Knotweed. He is suggesting following Rockport's protocol to separate out the Japanese Knotweed and double bag and burn it.

Mitigation will be under Whittaker's direction and he says maps are approximate, but he has a fairly good idea of where the boundary of the wetland is. It would be preferable to have a clear delineation of the wetland, but this would require hiring a wetlands scientist at about \$500. In any case, the Cemetery volunteers have identified an area to target. Jamie O'Hara counselor at large has been helping. Whittaker maintains, it "doesn't hurt to start whacking away at it now..." cut it, stack it, and in mean time a protocol will be developed. Councilman Steve LeBlanc has been talking about a community work day to undertake the first stage of cutting away. It was noted that someone on the team should be qualified to distinguish good shrubs and seedlings. Cape Ann Trail Stewards could fill this need.

Multiple organizations are trying to work on pieces of this effort, leading to jurisdictional debates and lack of coordination. The burial ground Restoration Alliance, previously organized under Rachel Meyer, is one such group. It is a committee of eight people. And, the Cape Ann Trails Stewards volunteers who remove brush in public areas like Dogtown and Pole Hill might also like to be involved. Sandy Barry heads this up. The planting committee of city of Gloucester might also be interested in contributing to the effort.

Mary Ellen Lepionka suggests Gloucester would benefit from a cemetery summit with complete transparency and a view towards problem solving and building an action plan. The initiative could come from the new cemetery committee. The GHC could take on an 'ombudsman' role to get everybody who's interested on a list to invite to such a "summit." Interested parties might also explore holding a community fund drive.

Discussion continued to the topic of burial fees and their uses. Sandy Barry plans to talk with Mike Hale and Mark Cole of DPW about the initiative to increase burial fees and earmark funds for cemetery improvements. Richard Clark noted there is a "special fund," governed by MA State Law and funded by taxes, to restore neglected cemeteries.

Sandy Barry commented on the workshop on Restoration of Head Stones she attended. During the workshop five of 55 falling headstones were righted.

On the GPR (Ground Penetrating Radar) Survey of the Cemeteries, Mary Ellen Lepionka noted that one grant proposal has been written, in this case to the MHS. If this is unsuccessful, she will write a grant to the National Park Service. Such a grant could include a request for training. The initial target will

the First Parish Cemetery. Surveys locate unmarked graves and compare findings to current maps. It is agreed that the Cemetery Committee will spearhead this.

Jude says historian in Marblehead is researching names from ship wrecks and connecting them to mass burial areas. He suggests the Cape Ann Museum could do a Saturday program on this topic.

Richard Clark and Sandy Barry will address the DAR on First Parish and Clarke cemeteries in the Friend Room in the Sawyer Free Library on 8 October.

4. New and Other Business.

Stage Fort Park: David Dow attended the meeting to draw GHC attention to the historic importance of Stage Fort Park, particularly in light of the upcoming 400th anniversary. Improvements are planned, but the Fort area itself has been ignored, where the canons are. Dow says, it his his “desire to have the Fort put back.” The canons are considered to date to the Civil War era, so restoration to the Fort’s state at that time would be appropriate. Dow will be on the next regular meeting agenda (last Monday in September, the 26th) to bring and show maps and plans.

The GHC Committee members agree that something needs to be done at the “park.” We would like to see more interpretative, educational materials there.

Historic District: The GHC rejects the proposal for vinyl siding at 31 Middle Street, a residence within the confines of Gloucester’s Historic District. We encourage the owner/builder to come back with another plan. This request also falls within the purview of the Historic District Commission. GHC members agree that as Gloucester is now a Certified Local Government, we need to collaborate more and attend each others’ meetings. A joint meeting in October or November will be proposed.

Demolition Delay: Bob Whitmarsh inquired about the status of the proposal. The proposal has “gone to” the O & A.

5. National Register.

The Rocky Neck National Register materials have been completed and submitted. The MHC will next send letters to residents. If opposed, residents are to return a registered letter saying they do not support the nomination. If as many as a third of the area’s residents object, the MHC will re-consider making the formal nomination to the federal government. The list of residents’ addresses was supplied, probably by Wendy Fontenero who did the historical survey in behalf of the City of Gloucester.

The prospective Annisquam nomination is currently with the MHC, but has been delayed.

WE are ready to attempt a National Register proposal for Lanesville next year.

The FY 2016 survey grant proposes more areas to be nominated, for example Magnolia and the Fort.

Mary Ellen Lepionka moves to adjourn.

Jude Seminara seconds the motion.