

Webster Historical Commission
Meeting Minutes, January 26, 2021

A meeting of the Webster Historical Commission was held on Tuesday, January 26, 2021 via conference call in accordance with Governor Baker's emergency order Suspending Certain Provisions of the Open Meeting Law, G.L. c.30A, §20 due to the public health emergency relating to the Corona virus pandemic.

Present: Chairman Ted Avlas, Clerk Elaine Davies, Member Curtis Cleaves

Also Present: Ann Morgan - Director of Planning & Economic Development; Olivia Mason

1. Chairman Avlas called the meeting to order at 11:03 a.m. and read the Governor's Orders regarding Open Meeting Law, G.L. c. 30A § 20. He noted that the meeting was being recorded. The Chairman took attendance of the Board by roll call vote: Ms. Davies – Present; Mr. Cleaves – Present; Mr. Avlas – Present.

2. Action Items

- a. **Draft Meeting Minutes - November 24, 2020.** The Chairman noted some edits he had made to the draft. Ms. Davies noted a change in item 3a. Mr. Avlas asked if there were any additional changes or edits to be made to the draft meeting minutes. There were none. Motion to approve the minutes as of November 24, 2020 as edited made by Mr. Cleaves, seconded by Ms. Davies. Motion passed unanimously, 3-0 by roll call vote: Cleaves - YES; Davies - YES; Avlas - YES.

Mr. Avlas noted that Olivia Mason was present at the meeting. Ms. Mason has applied to fill one of the Commission vacancies. Mr. Avlas welcomed her and asked her to say a few words. Ms. Mason noted that she had recently graduated from Fairfield University and was presently working for the State of Connecticut. She noted that she has a strong interest in Webster's history and was excited to serve on the Commission. Mr. Cleaves and Ms. Davies both noted that they are pleased that Ms. Mason applied, that they looked forward to working with her and were pleased that she brings a new perspective and skill set to the Commission.

3. Old Business

- a. **Tercentenary Marker - Thompson Road:** Mr. Cleaves provided an update. He had been in contact with Mary Hafferty of MassDOT who is planning to embark upon another round of sign restorations in Central Massachusetts. Webster's sign has been placed on MassDOT's list. However there is no funding at this time. MassDOT is compiling a list of towns who wish to have their signs restored and they are working on prioritizing that list. MassDOT has a conservator who restores these signs based on the guidelines of the Secretary of the Interior.

Mr. Avlas asked what the potential cost would be if the Commission opted to restore the sign themselves. Mr. Cleaves noted that he had some experience in sign restoration. Based on the size and condition of the sign estimated that it might be approximately \$1,000 per side to restore. Mr. Cleaves stated that he would do additional research to better define the costs.

Mr. Avlas noted that the second issue was the potential relocation of the sign. He reviewed the draft content of history of the sign including the location. Based on information and maps provided in "The Great Trail" and "The History of the Nipmucks" it appears that the current sign

location, while close, is incorrect. He noted that the Commission should identify a more appropriate site based on the historical evidence, seek public comment and then petition the proper authorities for permission to relocate the sign. One suggestion would be locating it to Memorial Beach which appears to be on the documented locations of Nipmuc settlement and where more people could see it safely today. Mr. Avlas noted that he would send copies of the draft document out to everyone for review and for discussion at the next meeting.

Ms. Davies noted that the draft project overview as very good and right on track for providing good public information about the project. Mr. Cleaves agreed noting that the use of maps and other details from the existing documentation should be of interest to the public while raising awareness of the work of the Commission. Ms. Morgan noted that MassDOT is technically responsible for the signs and that it would be a good first step would be to ask Mary Hafferty at MassDOT how to proceed with gaining that permission. Mr. Avlas stated that he would make that inquiry.

The Commission discussed the possibility of moving the sign to Memorial Beach. Mr. Avlas noted the Town was in the process of improving the facilities and that this might be a good time to discuss a future location. Ms. Morgan noted that Carole Marchand, Recreation Director, was heading that effort and recommended a site visit with her to discuss the matter. Mr. Avlas stated that he would contact Ms. Marchand and arrange that meeting with Ms. Morgan's assistance.

Ms. Davies suggested that the Commission reach out to the Nipmuc Nation to discuss the project and potential relocation sites.

4. New Business

- a. **Membership:** Mr. Avlas noted that Ms. Mason is expected to be appointed by the Selectmen on February 8th and that he didn't foresee any issues that would prevent that appointment. Ms. Davies asked how Ms. Mason came to apply for the position. Mr. Avlas noted that she had applied via the Town's on-line system form which was forwarded to him. He had spoken with Ms. Mason and recommended appointment to the Selectmen.

Ms. Morgan noted that she had not received any confirmation that Mr. Heroux had officially resigned from Commission as discussed at the last meeting. As such he has been receiving email intended for all members. Mr. Avlas noted that he had spoken with Mr. Craver, Town Clerk, who had reached out to Mr. Heroux but that he did not know if the resignation was finalized. Mr. Avlas stated that he would look into the matter and let Ms. Morgan know so that adjustments can be made to the website and vacancy list. It was noted that there is a provision in the Town's by-laws that provides the Commission with the option to petition the Selectmen to remove a member. Ms. Davies noted that they should check those requirements.

- b. **Commission Meeting Schedule:** Mr. Avlas noted that the Commission needs to consider its meeting time in light of new members who may not be able to meet during the day. He noted that Ms. Mason has indicated that she could meet during her lunch hour as she is working remotely from home and that meetings are held remotely. She could also meet any time after 4:30 p.m. Mr. Cleaves stated his preference for meeting during the day if possible. Ms. Davies noted that if

the Commission intends to continue to meet on the last Tuesday of each month either the lunch time or afternoon meeting time would work. The Commissioners agreed to continue to meet on the last Tuesday of the month. Mr. Avlas stated that he would reach out to Ms. Mason to discuss the matter and would get back to everyone regarding the time.

- c. **Donation of Old Photographs:** Mr. Avlas reviewed an email received from the Town Administrator's office regarding a resident who wishes to donate some old photographs to the Commission. Mr. Cleaves reviewed some of the issues associated with accepting donations such as provenance and permissions. He also reviewed the various ways in which historic documents are cataloged and made available to the public including the work of Digital Commonwealth. Ms. Davies asked if the Library was using the services of the Digital Commonwealth and what their protocol was for accepting and cataloging donations to the local history collection. Ms. Morgan stated that she would look into it. Mr. Cleaves pointed out that the Commission should be working to clarify its role in relation to the Webster Dudley Historical Society to better help the public understand each resource and how to utilize them.
- d. **Review of Massachusetts Historical Commission Workshop:** All members noted that they had attended or have signed up for a variety of on line workshops offered by the Massachusetts Historical Commission which were found to be informative and well presented. Topics covered included financial resources, the role of Commissions / Commissioners and preservation planning.

Ms. Davies noted that she had done some research on MACRIS (Massachusetts Cultural Resource Information System) which carries data on historic resources surveys completed in towns and cities across the state. She noted the information is old and may be incomplete. She recommended that the Commission seek funding through the Town and grants to get this information updated.

Mr. Avlas noted that he had researched the past meeting minutes of the previous Commission which outlined the work completed for the survey initiated in the late 1970's. Full copies of documentation submitted to the State were given to the Chester Corbin Library, the Board of Selectmen and the Webster Dudley Historical Society. Ms. Morgan stated that she make see if a copy can be found.

- e. **FY22 Budget:** Mr. Avlas recommended that the Commission seek funding from the Town for both the tercentenary sign restoration / relocation project and an update of the Town's historic survey. He noted that the Massachusetts Historical Commission has an annual grant program which will cover some of the costs for updating the historic resources survey but they typically require matching funds from the community and would likely required full payment up front with later reimbursement. He stated that he contacted MHC about the price for updating the survey and was quoted an average cost ranging from \$30,000 to \$35,000. Mr. Cleaves and Ms. Davies agreed that both projects were important to the Town and that said budget request should be made. Mr. Avlas stated that he would meet with the Town Administrator to discuss the budget requests.

Motion to request \$30,000 for the purposes of updating the historic resources inventory and plan update and to apply for a survey and planning grant from the Massachusetts Historical Commission made by Ms. Davies, seconded by Mr. Cleaves. Motion passed unanimously, 3-0 by roll call vote: Davies - Yes; Cleaves - Yes; Avlas - Yes.

Motion to request \$3,000 for restoration costs and \$2,000 for relocation costs of the tercentenary sign currently located on Thompson Road made by Ms. Davies, seconded by Mr. Cleaves. Motion passed unanimously, 3-0 by roll call vote: Davies - Yes; Cleaves - Yes; Avlas - Yes.

5. Staff Report

Ms. Morgan noted that there are a number of outstanding work items from the November 24th meeting that she will complete in advance of the next meeting.

6. Next Meeting: The next meeting is scheduled for February 23, 2021. Mr. Avlas noted that he would confer with Ms. Mason regarding the meeting time and would let everyone know.

7. Adjournment: Motion to adjourn the meeting made by Ms. Davies, seconded by Mr. Cleaves. Motion passed unanimously, 3-0 by roll call vote: Cleaves - AYE; Davies - AYE; Avlas - AYE. The meeting was adjourned at 12:15 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,



Ann Morgan, Recording Secretary