

Webster Historical Commission  
Meeting Minutes  
March 29, 2022

A meeting of the Webster Historical Commission was held on March 29, 2022 via remote participation / Zoom in accordance with Governor Baker's June 16, 2021 Act Relative to Extending Certain COVID-19 Measures Adopted During the State of Emergency.

Present: Chairman Ted Avlas, Vice Chairman Curtis Cleaves, Clerk Elaine Davies, Members Judith Keegan and Reanna Kuzdzal

Also Present: Ann Morgan, Director of Planning & Economic Development

1. Call to Order: Mr. Avlas called the meeting to order at 12:05 p.m. and reads the notice on the agenda noting that the meeting is being recorded for the purposes of minute taking. Anyone wishing to record the meeting for their own purposes must notify the Chairman. There was no response.
2. Action Items:
  - a. Draft Meeting Minutes - January 25, 2021; February 22, 2022; tabled to next meeting
3. Old Business
  - a. Massachusetts Historical Commission FY2022 Survey & Planning Grant: Mr. Avlas reported that he attended the meeting when the grant awards were made. Webster did not receive a grant. Mr. Avlas communicated to Ms. Doherty how disappointed he was in the MHC decision. With his considerable experience in grant applications, if required information was not included, a representative would contact the writer and give the applicant an opportunity to fulfill the obligation. This did not happen. There were 17 applications before the Commission of which 15 were approved. He called Jenn Doherty at the Massachusetts Historical Commission offices to discuss. She noted that the screening subcommittee found that several sections on the application were vague and that a scope of work was not included. She encouraged the Webster Historical Commission to reapply next year. Ms. Doherty noted that there had been some miscommunication with Mr. Avlas when the Town was preparing their application packet. She also noted that the MHC was concerned about the fact the Webster Historical Commission had only recently been reactivated after a 30 year hiatus.

Mr. Cleaves suggested that the Commission apply for a Janet Malser Foundation grant to fund the preservation plan. He thought that seven copies of the application had to be mailed on or before April 1<sup>st</sup>. Mr. Cleaves noted that Helen Kessner helps the Historical Society prepare their applications and that maybe she could assist.

Motion to authorize the Chairman to apply for a Janet Malser Foundation grant made by Mr. Cleaves, seconded by Ms. Keegan. Motion passed unanimously 5-0 by roll call vote: Ms. Davies - yes; Ms. Keegan - yes; Mr. Cleaves - yes; Ms. Kuzdzal - yes; Mr. Avlas - yes.

- b. Slater Experience Opening: Mr. Avlas thanked Ms. Kuzdzal for the invitation to the Commission to attend the grand opening noting that it was a great time - truly and experience. Ms. Kuzdzal noted that the events went well and thanked the Commission for their support. Staff of the Slater Experience will continue working and collaborating with local groups engaged in historical activities including the Commission and the Webster Dudley Historical Society. Mr. Cleaves added that it was a very impressive event and hopes that it does well and that it helps continue to build the momentum of interest in local history.

- c. Update: History Coordination Meeting - March 11, 2022: Ms. Davies thanked everyone who attended the meeting. Webster will be celebrating its bicentennial in ten years and now is the time to start preparing. The group will come together quarterly to develop events and apply for grants. Some ideas include lectures / talks on local history topics and finding ways to display artifacts. There's a possibility of combing some efforts with Dudley and they will be reaching out to Ed Bazinet who is Chairman of the Dudley Historical Commission. Mr. Cleaves thought that was a good idea. He suggested working with children in grades 4 and up and that it was important to educate them about the history of the Town. Ms. Davies asked if some of the Society's artifacts could be borrowed and displayed at the Library. Mr. Cleaves noted that the Society's current Janet Malser Foundation grant application did not include the cost of a display case but he thought that there were some at Town Hall.
- d. Historic Bell Tower: National Register Nomination: Mr. Avlas stated that he had discussed the nomination application process with Jenn Doherty at the Massachusetts Historical Commission (MHC). Ms. Doherty reviewed the process with him noting that the property owner must consent and that the State inventory form could be used but more information and updated pictures would be required. The application would then be reviewed and voted upon by MHC. If approved, the application would then be advanced to the National Park Service (NPS) for final determination. Ms. Doherty noted that the Tower, as it exists now, is only a piece of the original and has been moved from its original location both of which might negatively impact the nomination. Mr. Avlas stated that if the Commission were going to move forward then they would need to compile a lot more information about the history of the Tower. The State inventory sheet doesn't cover it all.

Mr. Cleaves suggested reaching out to Carla Manzi who is an excellent source of information regarding the history of Webster. He noted that the current location of the Tower was the site of Green Mill, Slater's first mill and that it was later the site of the Town's first postmaster location. Ms. Davies noted that the Tower would have had bells that were rung not for emergency purposes (fire). Mr. Cleaves added that the bells were also rung to call people to work.

Regarding the submission of an application, Mr. Cleaves noted that he was not opposed to moving forward. Mr. Avlas noted that if the application is approved by MHC then the Town will have to hire a consultant to compile and complete the full National Park Service application which can cost between \$6,000 and \$10,000. Jenn Doherty has indicated that there is 18 to 24 month back log of applications before the NPS. If the application got to that point then the Commission could approach the property owner for assistance in funding. Concern was raised about submitting an application to MHC at this time given recent rejection of the Planning & Survey Grant. Mr. Cleaves stated it might be best to put a hold on this work item until a later date. There were no objections.

- e. Tercentenary Sign Update: Mr. Cleaves provided an update. The sign has been shop blasted down to the cast iron. The sign was then transported to Metalogic in Southbridge who is working on the final restoration steps. The crack was larger than it originally appeared which compromised the sign further. Tom Kobosinski of Metalogic has agreed to take on the project and will cover all the costs which could add up to about \$15,000 based on the previously received MassDOT estimate. Tom has a passion for these projects and grew up in the area. Work items include providing some structural support around the crack, painting and other finish items. It's estimated to take 2 to 4 weeks to complete. Mr. Cleaves noted the pole would have to be painted as well. The Commission expressed its appreciation to Tom and Metalogic for their expertise and donation of time and materials.

Mr. Avlas presented a draft design for the proposed patio area that will surround the sign. The design was done by a graduate of Bartlett High School. It will be an 8 foot by 16 foot rectangular paved area with stone border that will be set approximately 3 inches above grade. The scope of work includes digging out the area, covering it with gravel, sand and then laying the stone. The cost will be approximately \$4,000. Mr. Avlas noted that the Commission budget through June 2022 is \$5,000 so there is money available. Everyone liked the design and agreed it was worth the undertaking. Mr. Avlas noted the project could start immediately. A date for a ribbon cutting was suggested by Ms. Davies (May 1<sup>st</sup>) but she noted that the pole would have to be painted first.

Motion to approve the project as presented in an amount not to exceed \$4,000 mad by Mr. Cleaves, seconded by Ms. Davies. Motion passed unanimously 5-0 by roll call vote: Ms. Davies - yes; Ms. Keegan - yes; Mr. Cleaves - yes; Ms. Kuzdzal - yes; Mr. Avlas - yes.

- f. WWII Observation Station Update: Mr. Avlas stated that he had met with Veterans Agent, Paul Brodeur, and is working with Mr. Brodeur to secure a meeting with Korean War veteran Don Wayman. Mr. Wayman had once served in the Observation Station and will be a great asset in moving the project forward. They are working on compiling a history of the Station. A Town Meeting warrant article is needed to appropriate the funds for the project. Mr. Brodeur was working on putting that article together which will request \$30,000. The deadline for warrant article submission is Friday, April 1<sup>st</sup>. Mr. Cleaves noted that the increase in costs for building materials may be problematic. Mr. Avlas noted he would have an update for the next Commission meeting. Mr. Cleaves asked if the plan to renovate in existing location or to move it. Mr. Avlas said that it would remain in the same location which what the veterans want.

#### 4. New Business

- a. St. Anne's School - 12 Day Street - Follow Up from Tour with New Owners: Mr. Avlas noted that several Commission members and Town staff attended a tour of the building which is no longer serving as a school. The new owners are Cunningham Equities. Jeff Cunningham and Xaley Yousey, project manager, were there along with representatives of the Church to walk through the building and discuss potential reuse ideas. The intent is to reuse the building and retain as much of the historic character has possible. Cunningham Equities has experience with renovating . Photos were taken by Ms. Morgan who displayed them before the meeting started. Ms. Keegan asked what kind of uses were under consideration. Mr. Avlas noted that the Massachusetts Department of Children and Families is interested in a large portion of the building. Ms. Davies noted behavioral services agencies are also interested.

Ms. Morgan provided an update on the local permitting. The property will need to be made handicap accessible which will require the installation of an elevator. The Building Commissioner is also the Town's accessibility compliance officer and he's already spoken with the property owner as well as having been on the tour. The reuse of the building will require site plan approval from the Planning Board. There is very limited parking on site, not enough for the proposed uses, but the new property owner has secured a shared parking agreement with the Church who still owns the activity center property across the street. Mr. Avlas noted that Mr. Cunningham is interested in having the property nominated to the National Register of Historic Places which will make the project eligible for historic rehabilitation tax credits. Mr. Cleaves expressed concern that too many historic elements had been removed or will be removed as part of the interior renovation to have the property still be eligible for designation. Ms. Kuzdzal asked if there were limits to the number of properties in Town that can be submitted for nomination. Mr. Avlas didn't think so. He added that the tour brought back memories

of the recently demolished Filmer School, also an historic structure. That demolition was very disheartening. Ms. Keegan agreed that it was a shame but that it was great that there are so many good projects going forward.

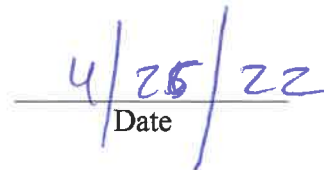
- b. Annual Town Meeting: Mr. Avlas noted that Town Meeting is scheduled for Monday, May 9<sup>th</sup>. He's hopeful that the warrant article for the funding for the WWII Observation Station will be submitted on time. He also thanked Ms. Keegan who volunteered to help he look in to demolition delay by-laws for future consideration by the Commission and to have something ready for Fall Town Meeting. Mr. Avlas noted that any proposed by-laws must be vetted by the By-law Review Committee.

Mr. Avlas asked if there were any additional comments or questions. There were none.

- 5. Next Meeting Date - April 26, 2022 via Remote Participation
- 6. Adjournment: Motion to adjourn the meeting made by Ms. Davies, seconded by Ms. Keegan. Motion passed unanimously 5-0 by roll call vote: Ms. Davies - yes; Mr. Cleaves - yes; Ms. Kuzdzal - yes; Ms. Keegan - yes; Mr. Avlas - yes. The meeting was adjourned at 12:54 p.m.

Submitted by:

  
Ann V. Morgan, Recording Secretary

  
Date

EXHIBITS - None.