

Webster Historical Commission
Meeting Minutes
April 26, 2022

REC'D WEBSTER TOWN CLERK
JUN 2 '22 PM2:26

A meeting of the Webster Historical Commission was held on April 26, 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 (joining at 12:06 p.m.)

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

1. Call to Order: Mr. Avlas called the meeting to order at 12:01 p.m. and read 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, 2022: Mr. Avlas asked if there were any edits. There were none. Motion to approve the meeting minutes of January 25, 2022 made by Mr. Cleaves, seconded by Ms. Davies. Motion passed unanimously 4-0 - Ms. Keegan - yes; Mr. Cleaves - yes; Ms. Davies - yes; Mr. Avlas - yes.

February 22, 2022: Mr. Avlas asked if there were any edits. There were none. Motion to approve the meeting minutes of February 22, 2022 made by Ms. Davies, seconded by Mr. Cleaves. Motion passed unanimously 4-0 - Ms. Keegan - yes; Mr. Cleaves - yes; Ms. Davies - yes; Mr. Avlas - yes.

March 29, 2022: Mr. Avlas asked if there were any edits. Ms. Davies stated that she had sent to minor typographical errors to Ms. Morgan. There were no other edits. Motion to approve the meeting minutes of March 29, 2022 as edited made by Ms. Davies, seconded by Mr. Cleaves. Motion passed unanimously 4-0 - Ms. Keegan - yes; Mr. Cleaves - yes; Ms. Davies - yes; Mr. Avlas - yes.

3. Old Business

a. Historic Bell Tower: National Register Nomination: Mr. Avlas stated that he had no updates since the last meeting. The Commission was looking to gather more information beyond what the Massachusetts Historical Commission (MHC) already has on file. Mr. Cleaves noted that he did see on the National Register that they accepted something that wasn't a building which might make it possible for the Tower to be listed. We will have to wait and see how MHC rules on the matter. The Commission discussed the types of information required for a NR submission noting that it would be helpful to have some guidelines. Mr. Avlas asked if there were any examples that could be reviewed. Ms. Morgan noted that a NR application had been submitted by her predecessor and that she had electronic copies that she could send along.

Ms. Kuzdzal joined the meeting at 12:-06 p.m.

b. Tercentenary Sign Update: Mr. Avlas provided an update. Patio construction is underway. The mason has been working on preparing the site and installing the pavers. It's close to being finished which he believes will be at the end of the week. It looks very nice. Mr. Avlas noted that the project cost \$4,000 which will be paid through the Commission's budget. Once paid, there will be a balance of \$1,000 left in the account. He asked if the Commission was interested in using that balance to further dress up the

site. Ms. Keegan suggested that plantings be installed and recommended shrubs instead of flowers. Mr. Avlas noted that the plantings would need to be suitable to the site given the soil conditions and the fact that the site can be very windy. He suggested planters. Ms. Morgan recommended that someone speak with Highway Superintendent Kenny Pizzetti before making any decisions. His crew is responsible for maintaining / watering landscaping on Town-owned property. The Commission should be seeking a solution that requires minimal upkeep by DPW. She further suggested that staff at a local nursery would be able to provide recommendations. Mr. Avlas stated that he had recently been on site and seen some people tending to the plantings near the Veterans Memorial near the bridge. There was further discussion about potential planting varieties. Ms. Morgan suggested taking a trip to a local nursery to get some advice and stated that she would be willing to go. Ms. Davies said that she would also like to go. Mr. Avlas asked that this matter be put on the agenda for next meeting so that some recommendations can be put forth.

Mr. Cleaves provided an update on the sign restoration. Tom Kokosinski at Metalogic in Southbridge continues to work the sign between other work assignments. As noted before, the crack turned out to be more significant than originally anticipated. It had once been filled with putty which was not the right solution. It is being stabilized with steel strips and screws. Other work includes painting and potentially a stainless steel strip around the edge of the sign to provide additional stability and a bit of sparkle. He noted that the site at the Beach is windy and that additional stabilization was needed. The work is almost complete, possibly this week. They will coordinate with Kenny Pizzetti to have the sign reinstalled at the new location. Mr. Cleaves noted that Metalogic will absorb all the costs of the project. MassDOT had estimated the cost of restoration to be \$13,000 which didn't include the repair work. Mr. Avlas asked that contact information be provided so that the Commission can send a thank you letter. Ms. Davies asked if there was going to be a press release recognizing this work and donation. Mr. Avlas stated that he would reach out to determine if that would be okay. He may or may not want the attention for any number of reasons. Mr. Avlas said the Commission should invite him to see the site once all the work is complete.

- c. WWII Observation Station Update: Mr. Avlas noted that an article for restoration costs have been placed in the Town Meeting Warrant. The amount is for \$30,000. Recently two Selectmen have raised some concerns about the purpose and cost of the project. Some of the issues include actual costs, what does the Town get from the renovation, and nothing can really be done with it once renovated. Mr. Avlas expressed his displeasure with this recent change in heart since the Board had been previously supportive and some members seemed to have forgotten information received earlier. One of the big issues is the cost. Originally the warrant article language had no amount but rather the language that would allow the Town to raise a sum of money to pay for the costs. The amount denoted in the warrant article was added after the Town Accountant had pressed for a finite amount. Mr. Avlas agreed that it wouldn't be used for its original purpose again but that was not the point. It's a monument to those who served and, in particular, to those local men who performed an important war time service in the Station. Mr. Avlas stated that he was meeting tomorrow (4/27) at 9:00 a.m. with Don Wayman who remembers the Station when it was in operation and may have some good information on what it looked like on the inside and other things that will assist them putting together a final cost estimate.

Ms. Davies noted that she, too, had expressed her displeasure to two of the Selectmen about their change in position. She said that some of them didn't appear to be familiar with the project despite an earlier discussion in June. Mr. Cleaves noted that this is more than just a building. This project is about the Town supporting efforts to preserve important history and that the Town owes this to the Veterans. Ms. Davies asked if the Veterans planned to submit a press release in the Webster Times in

advance of Town Meeting to provide important information about the project to the public. Mr. Avlas wasn't sure but it was noted that the deadline for articles for next week's Webster Times is Monday, May 2nd.

Ms. Keegan asked if there is a contractor and how the figure of \$30,000 was arrived at. Mr. Avlas reviewed the process. The estimated renovation costs from a couple of years ago was \$10,000 to \$15,000. Since then the cost of materials have sky rocketed and adjustments need to be made. The Station is on Town-owned property. All Town projects are bound by procurement laws which require a minimum of three quotes if the project is greater than \$10,000 and under \$50,000 which this is expected to be. The Town has to demonstrate that it solicited three quotes. Once the Town Accountant pushed for a finite number an estimate was developed combining the original estimate, anticipated rise in materials costs and contingency. If approved the full amount will be available even if it is not fully utilized. Mr. Avlas anticipates a motion at Town Meeting that specifies the approval of amount not to exceed \$30,000. Mr. Cleaves pointed out that there are already signs that the cost of materials will be decreasing which will benefit the project.

Mr. Avlas noted that Don Wayman can likely provide good information as to what the Station looked like when it was in use. Ms. Davies noted that it's likely that plans for these types of structures are probably of file somewhere in Washington as these structures were built all over the country along East and West coasts in particular. She pointed out that the Webster Times printed articles about the Station in 1942. Mr. Cleaves added that there may be information on the National Register of Historic Places.

Ms. Davies noted that someone needs to go to Town Meeting to advocate for this warrant article. Events at the Samuel Slater Experience (across the street) could tie in the history of the Station. She asked Mr. Avlas if he planned to speak to the article. Mr. Avlas stated that he wasn't planning it as he would be serving in his role as Town Moderator. He felt that it was more important that the Veterans speak to and advocate for the article and that it would mean more coming from them. Ms. Davies pointed out that it would come down to how many people line up to speak to the article either for or against. Mr. Cleaves noted that Don Wayman would be a good advocate and that he was very articulate.

- d. FY22 and FY23 Budget: Mr. Avlas noted that the remaining \$1,000 in the FY22 budget was available for projects but had to be expended on or before June 30th. Ms. Keegan asked if a project had to be completed by June 30th. Mr. Avlas reviewed the process by which bills dated on the last date of the fiscal year could be encumbered by Town Meeting for payment after June 30th. Mr. Avlas stated that the Historical Commission FY23 budget has been submitted in the same amount as FY22 which is \$5,000. The line item for the Commission will remain as part of the annual budget unless someone seeks to cut it. Mr. Avlas said that the Commission should be thinking about project ideas for the upcoming fiscal year. Ms. Davies said that she would be interested in exploring the idea of installing an interpretative panel at the Tercentenary Sign site noting that it could be an Eagle Scout project.
- e. Town Meeting: Mr. Avlas noted that Town Meeting will be held on May 9th. The Special Town Meeting starts at 6:30 p.m. and has one article - the High School renovation project - which could take some time. The Annual Town Meeting is scheduled to start at 7:00 p.m. but won't begin until the Special Town Meeting has adjourned.

Mr. Avlas asked if there was any other old business to discuss. There was none.

4. New Business

- a. Historic Plaque Program: Mr. Avlas noted that this was an idea that came out last year's workshop. He's been looking at a few programs from other Towns and asked Ms. Morgan to further explain as she has had some experience. Ms. Morgan noted that there are a number of towns in Massachusetts who have these programs including Beverly and Salem. She reviewed the program in Grafton which was sponsored by the Grafton Historical Society. Applicants would submit an application which included some research on the property. The Society would review and make a decision. If approved, a sign would be commissioned by the Society's vendor and that all signs were the same size and format which makes them easily identifiable around town. She wasn't sure about who paid the fees. Ms. Morgan stated that creating clear guidelines and a simple application process was essential for both the applicant and the town. Mr. Avlas reviewed the process that Lenox uses which is sponsored by their historical commission. He read through the criteria. If approved, the Commission pays the \$85 fee for sign which takes 4-6 weeks to produce.

Mr. Avlas stated that this would be a nice way to engage the public and promote the Town's history. Ms. Keegan agreed that it's a great idea but was concerned about the willingness of property owners to go through the application process including completing some research. Mr. Avlas noted that the Commission could assist and that much of the research for historic properties in Town already exist through the State's historic survey which is on line. The Commission could publish that list and provide a resource list as part of the application. Ms. Davies suggested that the Commission get the ball rolling by completing the process for an historic Town-owned building as an example. Ms. Keegan added that the Commission could approach a private home owner with an historic property and assist them in the process which would set an example for other private property owners. Mr. Avlas asked that this subject remain on the agenda for the next meeting.

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


5. Next Meeting Date - May 31, 2022 via Remote Participation

6. Adjournment: Motion to adjourn the meeting made by Mr. Cleaves, 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 12:43 p.m.

Submitted by:



Ann V. Morgan, Recording Secretary



Date

EXHIBITS - None.