

**Webster Historical Commission  
Meeting Minutes, June 26, 2021**

A meeting of the Webster Historical Commission was held on Saturday, June 26, 2021 in the Community Meeting Room of the Webster Police Department, 357 Main Street, Webster, MA.

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

Absent: Members Kelly Baldarelli and Olivia Mason.

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

**1. Business Meeting**

- a. Call to Order: Mr. Avlas called the meeting to order at 9:10 a.m.
- b. Action Items
  - i. Draft Meeting Minutes – May 25, 2021. Mr. Avlas noted that he had reviewed the draft and made minor edits. He asked if there were any other edits. There were none. Motion to approve the meeting minutes of May 25, 2021 as drafted and edited made by Ms. Davies, seconded by Mr. Cleaves. Motion passed unanimously, 3-0.
- c. Old Business
  - i. Tercentenary Marker – Relocation Plans: Mr. Cleaves asked if the Commission had any money in the Town's budget. Mr. Avlas stated that the next fiscal year's budget will begin on July 1<sup>st</sup> and that he expected the Commission to have a \$5,000 budget for FY22. Mr. Cleaves noted that he would like to see the marker moved sooner rather than later and that plans for restoration should be addressed soon. Options include moving the sign to the Beach in its current condition and seek out funds for restoration. Another option would be restore the sign as much as funding will allow which may involve just restoring one side at this time. A third option would be to spend funds on a replica sign to be placed at the Beach until such time as the State completes or pays for the restoration. Ms. Davies stated her preference to have the sign moved and restored all at once. Mr. Avlas noted that the sign needed to be assessed to determine the extent of the repairs and the cost.

Mr. Avlas stated that he had recently met with a group of Veterans noting that they were key stakeholders in this process as the Beach is under their jurisdiction. The Commission would need their permission to move the sign to the Beach. The Veteran's group was open to the idea but wanted to make sure that the location didn't interfere with other memorials already situated on site. Mr. Avlas noted that he will reach out to the Nipmuc Nation as they, too, are key stakeholders. Ms. Davies suggested that rededicating the marker at a new location at the Beach on Indigenous People's Day might be interesting.

The Commission discussed potential locations. Mr. Cleaves noted that his ongoing research shows that the marker was likely intended to be located at the Beach. Mr. Avlas stated that the Commission should scout out a preferred location and present it along with landscaping ideas to the Veterans. He suggested a location near the bath house which would provide an optimal location for the public to fully and safely view it. Mr. Avlas noted that once the Commission receives approval from the Veterans then they need to present the plan to the Recreation Director, Carole Marchand who is overseeing the current renovations at the Beach. Ms. Davies suggested that there may be a Webster Times article about the original installation of the marker. That article may would be in the archives of the library. Ms. Davies volunteered to look into the matter.

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d. New Business

- i. World War II Volunteer Air Observation Station – Memorial Athletic Field. Mr. Avlas noted that the meeting with the Veterans regarding the marker also included a discussion about the Station. Norman Deptula was present at the meeting. Mr. Deptula was 14 when he volunteered as an observer at the station. There was enough room for a pot belly stove, one person comfortably and binoculars. The job was to record all aircraft flying overhead, friend or foe, and report it to the Civil Defense base in Worcester. Information included type of aircraft, altitude and direction of travel. Mr. Deptula recalled that there was a “hot line” phone in the Station as well. This work continued throughout World War II. The station was reactivated again during the Korean War. Mr. Deptula confirmed that the current location of the building is the original location. The building has never been moved from that spot.

Mr. Avlas discussed the two options - restore or replace. The Veterans first preference is to restore and replace only if necessary. The Commission needs to find out the cost of both options based on the condition of the building. Mr. Cleaves asked what the threshold was for a building to remain historic if replacement is the only option. Ms. Morgan said that she'd give a call to Mass Historical. Mr. Avlas noted that Bay Path Regional Vocational Technical School might be able to assist. Ms. Davies volunteered to conduct some research on these types of Stations in the area. She knows that there were several including one on Airport Road in Dudley and that there was one in Charlton. That information would be helpful in better understanding the history and Webster's role. Mr. Avlas noted that the Board of Selectmen were supportive of the project.

Tasks were assigned. Mr. Avlas will reach out to Bay Path regarding a restore or replace plan; Ms. Davies would conduct research; and Ms. Morgan would reach out the Massachusetts Historical Commission regarding the restore vs. replace threshold. She would also reach out others through the Historical Preservation ListServ.

- e. Next Meeting Date: Tuesday, August 24, 2021 at noon via remote participation.
- f. Adjournment: Motion to adjourn the business meeting made by Ms. Davies, seconded by Mr. Cleaves. Motion passed unanimously 3-0. The business meeting was adjourned at 9:39 a.m.

## **2. Workshop**

The purpose of the workshop was to start developing a framework for producing a historic preservation plan for Webster that includes many elements including updating the architectural survey from 2000. Topics and ideas included the following:

Ideas for What Would be Included in the Plan: State Historic and National Register Districts; signage - tie to branding; explore tools such as demolition delay; assess the information available on MACRIS and the two previous surveys; review local by-laws; develop an outreach plan including website, social media, publicity, working with schools - curriculum connections, Webster History Day; build partnerships with stakeholders; advocate with the State; identify funding sources for projects; disaster preparedness; digitization of materials; oral histories; mapping; marketing / branding / tourism connections.

Elements to Include / Explore: history of Main Street as a regional destination; Webster History Day; regional connections such as the bike trail; Webster's railroad history, public and private cemeteries and burial grounds;

scenic roads; landscapes and scenic views; monuments and markers; the people factor - gathering oral histories before they are lost.

Available Resources and Community Connections: Veterans groups; people connected to local points of interest; Central Mass Regional Planning Commission; Massachusetts Historical Commission; Historic New England (formerly Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities); Town staff; National Parks Service; MA Department of Conservation and Recreation; local business community; Webster Dudley Historical Society; Gladys E. Kelly public library; National Parks Service; Senior Center; Massachusetts Historical Society.

Next Steps: staff to type of notes from the workshop and send out to Commission; prepare structure and outline of plan including worksheets for projects; schedule second workshop - scheduling to take place at the August meeting.

Motion to adjourn the workshop made by Mr. Cleaves, seconded by Ms. Davies. Motion passed unanimously, 3-0. The workshop was adjourned at 11:01 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,



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Ann Morgan, Recording Secretary

**EXHIBITS**

- None.