

TOWN OF AMHERST  
Historic District Commission Meeting

March 11, 2024

**APPROVED**

1 In attendance: Doug Chabinsky – Acting Chair, Tom Grella – Board of Selectmen Ex-Officio,  
2 Tom Quinn – Planning Board Ex-Officio, Bill Glenn, Martha Chabinsky (remote), and Nicole  
3 Crawford  
4 Staff present: Nic Strong, Community Development Director

5  
6 Doug Chabinsky, Acting Chair, called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

7  
8 **Work Session Topics:**

9 **1. Meet with consultant regarding design guidelines**

10  
11 Josh Lapp, Designing Local, Ltd., explained that his firm was started with the concept of  
12 approaching urban planning and historic preservation differently. The firm has worked all over  
13 the country but is located in Ohio. The firm’s first project was in Georgia and was focused on  
14 arts and culture. The firm’s work that is focused on historic preservation has been to date mainly  
15 in Ohio and Kentucky, but the arts and culture work is nationwide. Most of the firm’s work is out  
16 of state and the group is used to traveling. The firm likes to employ a lot of stakeholder  
17 engagement, such as through focus groups or online engagement

18  
19 Josh Lapp explained that the firm is focused on visual communications, including graphics and  
20 photos. He reviewed the scope of services. The firm would have a kickoff meeting that focuses  
21 on how to approach this project’s timeline. The firm will then carry out a lot of background data  
22 collection and research. This will lead into stakeholder meetings, such as one-on-one meetings  
23 with everyone on the Commission. The firm would carry on analyses of buildings in the  
24 community. The firm completed a design guidelines project in Frankfort, Kentucky which was a  
25 bit controversial,

26  
27 Doug Chabinsky asked what made the project controversial. Josh Lapp explained that Frankfort  
28 has an historic district, but he would consider it more of a conservation district. Frankfort  
29 approved the use of vinyl siding, which is not something most people in preservation approve of.  
30 There were a few other items suggested that are not universally supported, such as the use of  
31 vinyl windows on non-primary façades, that were not included. Curb cuts also had to be written  
32 into the guidelines.

33  
34 Josh Lapp explained that the first two components of the project, the initial kickoff, and the  
35 research, would take a couple of months. The project will be based on what is desired by the  
36 client and the community. Task three is to draft a visual document, including the draft guidelines  
37 and some diagrams. The intention is to produce something that is easy to understand for  
38 individuals while using plain language, and visualizations to show example buildings within the  
39 District. The document would have a couple of drafts, with opportunities for input from  
40 stakeholders. As this work is being completed through a CLG Grant, the document may have to  
41 be reviewed by the State Historic Preservation Office. The firm’s final delivery is meant to be  
42 both virtual and in print.

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44 Bill Glenn asked what information the firm will expect to readily have access to in order to  
45 support the work from a remote location. He also asked what information might be difficult for  
46 the firm to obtain from a remote position. Josh Lapp stated that the most difficult thing to obtain  
47 is a clear picture of exactly what the Commission wants. In producing the final document, the  
48 firm will want a bunch of pictures that illustrate what is being discussed within the District. The  
49 firm will work to coordinate this with Commissioners and Staff to obtain images that are good  
50 examples of things within the District. This is part of the reason that stakeholder conversations  
51 are emphasized. Most of the data such as GIS maps, will go towards feeding into the document,  
52 and this should not be a problem to obtain remotely. The biggest downside of working remotely  
53 is that the firm cannot be on the ground in Town, walking the streets and getting a picture of it.  
54 Josh Lapp stated, however, that he anticipates at least two visits to the Town.  
55

56 Nicole Crawford noted that this grant has to be used by September and asked about the six-  
57 month work schedule. Josh Lapp stated that this will require a lot more intensive work over a  
58 shorter period of time, which the firm is okay with. He stated that he does not anticipate any  
59 issues accomplishing that timeline.  
60

61 Tom Quinn asked if the firm has worked in small towns before. Josh Lapp stated that the firm  
62 has worked in a variety of communities. The firm completed a downtown revitalization plan for  
63 Caldwell, OH, with a population of 1,000. The firm has done a lot of work in mid-size and small  
64 cities, such as a public art master plan for Montpelier, VT. He stated that engagement tends to be  
65 much better the smaller the community. Small towns tend to be more engaged with better  
66 networks of people communicating with one another. The firm just completed a project in  
67 Corning, NY, with a population of approximately 10,000.  
68

69 In response to a question from Tom Quinn, Josh Lapp explained that Corning has a successful  
70 Main Street, and the intention of the project was to express the creative spirit of the community  
71 in the built environment through a public art plan.  
72

73 Tom Quinn stated that it sounds like a lot of what the firm does overlaps with a town or city's  
74 master plan. He asked if this is a duplication of efforts in any way. Josh Lapp explained that  
75 Corning, for example, is working on its comprehensive plan right now. The firm has urban  
76 planners and not architects. It approaches projects wanting to include all of the work already  
77 completed to use it as a basis for the work. The intention is to utilize documents such as master  
78 plans and design guidelines and align them within the work that the firm does.  
79

80 Tom Quinn asked if Amherst's newly approved Master Plan Factor factored into the firm's  
81 proposal at all. Josh Lapp stated that he has not yet reviewed Amherst's Master Plan, so it did not  
82 factor into the proposal, but it would absolutely factor into the end result. It would not  
83 necessarily change the firm's approach, but the information gathered would help inform it.  
84 Regarding design guidelines, the existing building stock and how it's treated will factor in, but  
85 also where growth is anticipated in Town and how it can be planned for. Many design guidelines  
86 were created almost 50 years ago and were not created with the sense that development might

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87 come into a town. Having a strong understanding of where the community is intended to grow or  
88 the changes that are supposed to happen would be very important.

89

90 Tom Grella asked about travel to the area, as there may be snowstorms coming up. Josh Lapp  
91 stated that the firm is willing to drive through storms. He stated that he would expect his firm to  
92 hit the ground running as there is a deadline to meet. He noted that the firm will have another  
93 team member starting in May to work on historic preservation.

94

95 Doug Chabinsky stated that Amherst is a small New England village with an historic district that  
96 has many significant and unique historic homes in it. There are also some newer houses that are  
97 intermingled and there are still some available building lots. The Commission recently finished  
98 updating its regulations. Many applicants that come before the Commission do not understand  
99 the regulations well enough. The Commission decided to come up with design guidelines to help  
100 applicants understand what information is needed. The idea is to allow new additions to blend in  
101 and not detract from the original structure. Many applicants do not understand massing and how  
102 to allow an addition to maintain the historic structure. The design guidelines should contain  
103 information that the Commission needs in order to be able to make a decision. The document  
104 should help guide applicants through the regulations and give some examples. Doug Chabinsky  
105 stated that the guidelines should contain examples of the key elements of the district. He noted  
106 that Amherst does not allow vinyl as a material in the district. He noted that the Commission  
107 wanted to make it easy for people to configure their property in an appropriate manner to provide  
108 them use and enjoyment while not detracting from the quaint New England nature of the  
109 village. Doug Chabinsky stated that each time a building is added onto it creates its own unique  
110 definition of history.

111

112 Josh Lapp stated that this is what excited him about the project, noting that he served on an  
113 Historic District Commission and lived in an historic district. He agreed that it is important for  
114 design guidelines to be clear and act as a resource for people, while improving the application  
115 process. He noted that through creating the design guidelines they may create a new application  
116 form with links to connect to things in the guidelines so applicants coming in will already know  
117 what they need to bring in. He stated that the guidelines cannot solve every issue but can make  
118 the process easier.

119

120 Doug Chabinsky stated that the historic district cannot conserve properties as they used to  
121 be. He stated that people had to be allowed to live a comfortable life. Tying the guidelines into  
122 the application form and simplifying the procedures and having a knowledgeable review of what  
123 the Commission had already done with the regulations will assist in not having applicants  
124 dreading coming to the HDC.

125

126 Tom Quinn asked what the objectives were for the Caldwell, OH project. Josh Lapp explained  
127 that the town had guidelines in place already. The majority of the project was to help visualize  
128 the guidelines and make them clearer. The town wanted to support growth in the community, in a  
129 way that preserved the feel of the community.

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130  
131 Doug Chabinsky asked if Josh Lapp had any questions for the Commission. Josh Lapp stated he  
132 did not. He stated that the style of the guidelines would be visual and reinforce the sense of the  
133 community. They would tell a story and feel like they belong to the Town. He stated it was  
134 important to discuss with the Commission what the guidelines would look like and how they  
135 would be different from other work.

136  
137 Tom Quinn explained that he believes the Commission is only looking for design guidelines and  
138 asked if the scope of the project should be narrowed down a bit. Doug Chabinsky added that this  
139 should specifically address the Historic District, as houses and properties outside of this are  
140 covered elsewhere by town building and planning documents. Josh Lapp agreed that the firm did  
141 not envision anything beyond creating design guidelines for the Historic District, though the  
142 document itself may contain some history of the community.

143  
144 In response to a question from Doug Chabinsky, Nic Strong explained that the Commission can  
145 deliberate and decide whether or not to move forward with the proposal at this time.

146  
147 The Commission thanked Josh Lapp for his time. Josh Lapp stated he would let the Commission  
148 deliberate on their own and if there were any questions to let him know. Josh Lapp left the  
149 meeting.

150  
151 Nicole Crawford stated that she liked the scope of work as presented and believes that the firm  
152 understands what the Commission is looking for.

153  
154 Bill Glenn stated that he believes the Caldwell, OH, document best represents what the  
155 Commission would like to see. The firm's qualifications seem beyond adequate for this project.  
156 While this will be done mostly remotely, the project seems possible using the firm's process.  
157 Doug Chabinsky stated that he believes the firm will spend time and get a real feel for the  
158 community during the town visits.

159  
160 Tom Quinn stated that he is not comfortable with this proposal, as the firm seems to deal with  
161 larger communities that have other aspects that Amherst does not have. He would feel more  
162 comfortable if this was a more limited scope for a project. Most of the places mentioned were  
163 large cities with small pockets of historic areas. The firm has no knowledge of Amherst or its  
164 Master Plan. Doug Chabinsky noted that the document may not have been sent to the firm. Tom  
165 Quinn stated that this seemed like a good sale pitch, but he is unsure what the Commission wants  
166 that it does not already have.

167  
168 Doug Chabinsky explained that he would like the design guidelines to contain examples and  
169 descriptions of what is needed for projects in the Historic District. This should expand upon the  
170 existing regulations to make the process easier for applicants. He noted that the guidelines could  
171 list the ancillary items that go along with the items required by the regulations and provide  
172 pictures and photos and dimensions. Doug Chabinsky also stated it would be important to have a

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173 section on massing. He noted that if an applicant did not have an architect, they may not be able  
174 to follow the ins and outs of the regulations. Tom Quinn stated that he does not believe focus  
175 groups are necessary and Doug Chabinsky agreed that these could be removed from the scope in  
176 order to pull upon the preservation and design expertise of the firm more specifically.

177  
178 Tom Quinn stated that he believes it will be important for the firm to take photos and walk  
179 around the Village when they come. This should not be done by Commissioners. He stated that  
180 he is a little skeptical regarding spending money on this project that may be of limited use. Doug  
181 Chabinsky stated that there was a handful of different building styles in the village and the  
182 consultant could get that information from the National Register and the 2019 survey.

183  
184 Nicole Crawford stated that the firm previously completed design guidelines for Sandusky, OH,  
185 and this created a great visual document. Bill Glenn stated that was a very well done document.  
186 Tom Quinn stated that he would like the cost for that scope of work instead of what was quoted  
187 to Amherst. Nicole Crawford stated that because the company has already done this kind of  
188 work they will have a baseline to start from and add things specific to Amherst. She also noted  
189 that the historic district in Sandusky was not very big and that she liked the visuals provided in  
190 the design guidelines.

191  
192 Doug Chabinsky stated that it is easy to get people to comply with guidelines if they are easy to  
193 follow. This document has been discussed for a long time.

194  
195 Tom Grella stated that this document will help the applicants by streamlining the process. He  
196 thought it would be a good idea to move forward with this project. This will be a win/win for the  
197 Town and applicants.

198  
199 **Bill Glenn moved to accept the proposal from Designing Local, Ltd. Seconded by**  
200 **Tom Grella.**

201 **Roll Call Vote: Doug Chabinsky – aye, Nicole Crawford – aye; Bill Glenn – aye;**  
202 **Martha Chabinsky -aye; Tom Grella – aye, Tom Quinn – nay. 5-1-0.**

203  
204 Nic Strong stated that she would work through a contract with the firm and start to layout  
205 additional dates for meetings.

206  
207 **OTHER BUSINESS:**

208  
209 None at this time.

210  
211 **At 8:13 p.m., Tom Grella moved to adjourn. Seconded by Tom Quinn.**  
212 **Roll Call Vote: Doug Chabinsky – aye, Nicole Crawford – aye; Bill Glenn – aye;**  
213 **Martha Chabinsky -aye; Tom Grella – aye, Tom Quinn – aye. 6-0-0.**

214  
215 Respectfully submitted,

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216 Kristan Patenaude  
217  
218 Minutes approved: