

TOWN OF AMHERST
Heritage Commission

January 9, 2020

APPROVED

In attendance: Will Ludt – Chair, Conor Frain – Vice-Chair, John Bement, Mary Mahar, Tom Grella, and Brenda Perry.

Staff in attendance: Nic Strong – Community Development Director and Dean Shankle – Town Administrator.

Will Ludt called the meeting to order at 6:35 pm.

TOPICS OF DISCUSSION:

1. “Throw Back” Thursday – Amherst Heritage

Chairman Ludt stated that he’s done research on the railroad line that went from Milford to Manchester that went through Amherst. He found the actual notice that terminated the line January 3, 1926. It was noted as the shortest railroad line in New Hampshire. There were also photos of 107 and 104 Ponemah Road with the station in the background.

Brenda Perry noted that the Historical Society has a photo of the stagecoach entering the station.

2. Discussion with Nic Strong, Director, Community Development

Will Ludt explained that he invited Nic Strong, Community Development Director, to discuss the process of how comments get from different Commissions within the town to the Office of Community Development and out to the intended audience, such as the Planning Board. He is interested in how the comments get rolled into the decision making process. The comments by the Heritage Commission are very rarely acknowledged and he’s interested in how the system might work better.

Nic Strong explained that the Planning Board requests comments from all Commissions and town departments for certain applications. The comments are received by the Community Development Office, emailed directly to the Planning Board, included in their hard copies of the application, and become part of the record and file. The process is complex when it comes to the Integrated Innovative Housing Ordinance (IIHO), as there are many parts and pieces to those applications. Sometimes comments received from Commissions, Committees and Department Heads regarding the IIHO go beyond the scope of the Conditional Use Permit (CUP) and may not be usable at the time. There will be a further request during the site plan/subdivision application, and that is the time to reiterate or give new comments.

Will Ludt stated there was a request to take pictures of the structures on site at Camp Young Judaea, for example. The Heritage Commission never heard back regarding the timing of this request and when it could be completed. Nic Strong stated that the work hasn’t been done yet, but the Building Inspector does receive a note regarding the request in his file as well.

Nic Strong explained that if someone is proposing a development under the IIHO, first an application for a CUP must be submitted. That is a threshold issue that needs approval before the next stage and general comments will be reviewed. Once approved, there is no time limit for the

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applicant to come back for the next step, the site plan approval. At that time, there would be another request for comment.

Will Ludt stated that he has heard concerns regarding the IIHO and density bonuses being discussed too early in the process, at the CUP stage. Nic Strong explained that these decisions happen at that level because then the developer knows how many units are approved to be on that property. An up-to number is usually approved. This way an engineer can determine how many units can fit in the space.

In response to a question from Brenda Perry, Nic Strong explained that under state law any developments that involve multi-family dwellings are to be called “non-residential”. This deals with the layout being seen on the property. One and two-family residential plans don’t need a site plan under non-residential site plan.

In response to a question from Conor Frain, Nic Strong stated that the checklist item is “Redevelopment of Existing Structures” – historical importance is not mentioned. The Planning Board would ask for Heritage Commission comments if there is any question as to whether the density bonus is of benefit to town.

In response to a question from Will Ludt, Nic Strong stated that the applicant can receive up to 4 bonus units from the Redevelopment of Existing Structures section. This is a Planning Board discretionary item.

In response to a question from Will Ludt, Nic Strong suggested that the Heritage Commission can include comments regarding why they believe a building should/should not be redeveloped due to the nature of its heritage and can also include a number from 1-4 for recommendation of that bonus.

Will Ludt suggested that there should be a summary of which groups/departments submitted comments and what the comments were, so that the public can see these items and the submitters feel acknowledged. This is educational to the public.

Conor Frain brought up “rural character” and questioned which entities should comment on it, how is it defined, and how does the Planning Board take it into account, as it is part of the current Master Plan. Nic Strong stated that the Planning Board does sometimes refer to the Master Plan but also needs to follow the zoning ordinances. The revised Master Plan should be used to inform zoning ordinances.

Nic Strong explained that the overall definition of “rural character” should come from the Master Plan. If a developer comes in with an application that meets the zoning ordinances, it is to be assumed that the design meets the “rural character” aspect because the zoning should have been drafted from the vision of the Master Plan. If the town believes there is a problem with the type of development currently being sought in town, this needs to be made clear in the Master Plan process so that the zoning ordinance can be changed to reflect this.

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In response to a question from Brenda Perry, Nic Strong explained that the Master Plan process will probably continue forward after Town Meeting, due to the large volume of applications the Planning Board is currently processing.

3. Louisa May Alcott – Video

This will be shown during a future meeting.

4. 100th Anniversary Celebration of 19th Amendment and Amherst WMD

Will Ludt explained that he is currently drafting an email trying to get organizations in town to remember that this is a year of celebration and to find if there are any events that could be hosted in town regarding the 100th anniversary.

5. Minutes: 12 December 2019

**Tom Grella moved to approve the meeting minutes from December 12, 2019, as submitted. Mary Mahar seconded.
All in favor.**

6. Chair Topics and Discussion/Roundtable

Conor Frain explained that he was researching other towns' Heritage Commission activities, and found that many of them have historic marker programs. Residents can apply and pay for a standardized marker/plaque that gives the home's year and historic features. The Commission is responsible for approving the applications.

Conor Frain also stated that Concord, MA, has preservation awards every two years. There are three categories: adaptive reuse, sensitive addition or alteration, and appropriate new construction.

Will Ludt suggested the Conor Frain work more on these ideas for the future.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:10 pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Kristan Patenaude

Minutes approved: March 12, 2020, as submitted