

Town of Amherst, New Hampshire
Historic District Commission
Minutes
April 16, 2015

The Amherst Village Historic District Commission met on **Thursday, April 16, 2015 at 7:00 pm** in the Barbara Landry Meeting Room in Amherst Town Hall.

In attendance were Jamie Ramsay, *Chair*; Tracy Veillete, *Vice Chair*; Sally Wilkins; *Planning Board Representative*; Doug Chabinsky, *Regular Member*; Thomas Grella; *Board of Selectmen Representative*; Larry McCoy, *Alternate*; Christopher Hall, *Alternate*. Also in attendance was Colleen Mailloux, Community Development Director.

Jamie called the meeting to order 7:10 pm.

The Commission reviewed the minutes of March 19, 2015. Sally stated that in line 25, Jim Sickler is spelled incorrectly. There was a brief discussion of line 25 referring to a “new home” versus a home that was not as old as previously thought. S. Wilkins made a motion to approve the minutes of March 19, 2015 with the name correction noted, Doug 2nd. *VOTE: All in favor.*

Jamie – Mr. Farnham was next on the agenda for a conceptual discussion of a proposed porch at 5 Old Milford Road. Mr. Farnham is ill and not able to attend today and will come in next month.

Bruce Berry will be updating the Commission on the Manchester Road Bridge. Colleen stated that Bruce will arrive at 7:30. A member of the audience asked the schedule for the bridge – we will ask Bruce when he arrives.

Jamie stated the next item is general business. Tom stated that he wanted to discuss some approvals from the past, including the house across the street from his property at 14 Manchester. Tom stated that in July, the Commission discussed 5 items that should be presented prior to approval. Some of those items were presented but not all of them. No renderings were provided. They held a site visit and were told that trees would remain. None of that was documented and trees were removed. The size of the house does not conform with the open area to build in. There should have been a balloon, stick or something showing the height of the structure. Tom believes that the HDC would be flabbergasted to see the height. It is disheartening to see an approval when items that the HDC asked for in earlier meetings were not addressed. Tom stated that trees were taken down that we were told would remain. Tom stated that trees were taken down without approval, the house sticks out like a sore thumb, buffer markers were moved. If the neighbors were not paying attention, how would this project look? How did this get approved?

Larry asked if drawings were presented. Tom- yes, drawings were presented but with no dimensions. Larry asked if building plans were submitted. Tom- no. Doug and Tracy looked at the file from the

43 original application with the site plan and the building plans. Doug stated, the height is on there. Tom
44 stated that he was asking for an artists' rendering from the road that would show how the house
45 would appear on the lot.

46

47 Tracy asked why is the commission looking at this application? Tom stated that the application was
48 not complete.

49

50 Sally- we cannot rehear this application. We can have a discussion about how applications are
51 handled, if the ordinance says there should be a balloon test, we can require it. Sally stated that we all
52 agree there were flaws in the process, things fell through the cracks. This project has been approved.

53

54 Colleen stated that you cannot change this project. These are issues that need to be resolved for
55 future applications. The work on the property has been done in compliance with the plans approved
56 by the Planning Board and the HDC. At one point the site contractor moved some wetland buffer
57 placards. The property owner's engineer was required to reset those placards.

58

59 Tom – the septic system is supposed to be put in. The owner of 3 Mack Hill will have a right to graze
60 his animals – horses can't graze on a septic field. Sally – that is a civil matter between two property
61 owners. Tracy – that is not an HDC issue. If it is out of HDC jurisdiction, there is nothing we can do. If
62 something comes up that we can act on, we will.

63

64 An audience member stated that a staff member should be fired for this. Colleen stated again that the
65 work on the property is being done in compliance with the approved plans.

66

67 Sally stated that no one has the authority to go back and revoke an approval. We cannot change what
68 was approved.

69

70 There was a discussion of site visits. Conversation takes place during site visits. Colleen – no testimony
71 is to be taken at site walks. Any discussion during a site walk is non-binding. It is very important that if
72 something is identified during the site walk and promises are made, those need to be identified during
73 the meeting and identified as conditions of approval and/or noted on the plans. Larry – the discussion
74 in the street should have been brought back to this room.

75

76 Chris – trees are no longer part of the jurisdiction of the HDC. Some of the issues being brought up are
77 ZBA or PB issues, not HDC issues. Sally asked about the massing of the building – does it say in the
78 regulation that we can dictate the mass of a new building? The regulation says that for existing
79 structures, massing of an addition needs to be in scale with the existing structure. Sally stated that
80 there is no massing requirement for a new structure – we cannot just say no. The max building height
81 is 35' under the zoning ordinance. Is the building 35'? Jamie stated it is less.

82

83 Audience asked – so HDC has responsibility for remodeling older homes, but nothing for new
84 structures? New structures do require HDC approval, but there are different standards for new
85 construction on vacant lots vs. renovations to or additions on existing homes. Tracy – from what we
86 can tell, the house is meeting the HDCs requirements so far. Chris- the fixtures are not approved yet.

87 Tracy- they will have to come back for approval of lights and fixtures. Larry asked who has control
88 over the trees? Can we have an ordinance prohibiting the removal of trees? Sally- that would be hard.
89

90 Chris – abutters are not happy with trees and septic, those are issues beyond the HDC’s authority. The
91 house is higher than abutting properties, this is a concern we missed. Sally stated that she has never
92 seen the HDC do a balloon test. Chris – maybe we missed the balloon test/massing/scaling –the
93 project has been approved. Cannot revoke approval.
94

95 Audience – are inspections being done and is this house being built per plan? Colleen – yes, the
96 building inspector conducts inspections for building code compliance. Colleen as zoning administrator
97 enforces zoning compliance.
98

99 Jamie stated that the lot has existed since 1994 and has been for sale since that time. Someone could
100 have bought it. It is being constructed within the building envelope engineered for water mitigation,
101 etc. Sally – fact of our lives and the law that we do not control land we do not own. Tracy – we feel for
102 the abutters. Hope that when the house is finished, it does not appear as massive and overwhelming.
103 Sometimes everything is softened with landscaping. Audience – this house is not appropriate.
104

105 Sally – in the village there are houses that are not all identical. Small houses and great big houses next
106 to each other – it is authentic. Tracy – this is a lesson learned on massing and the scale of a house as it
107 is situated on a lot.
108

109 Tom suggested that we need different criteria for new construction. Colleen and Deb will work on
110 draft checklists, changes in the application forms.
111

112 Larry stated that it was apparent during the site walk that the house on the hill would dominate the
113 lower properties, but it is not within our purview. Tom stated that vegetation should be marked in the
114 field as well as on the plan to show the limits of tree clearing.
115

116 Jamie- no further discussion? Bruce Berry is here to discuss the Manchester Road bridge. Plan to
117 break ground in late spring, early summer and be complete by November. Bruce discussed the color
118 concrete and showed samples of the guardrail color. Jamie – this looks like Jones road, rust. Bruce –
119 this is more durable. Sally – what happens when it chips? Needs to be touched up. We can’t use
120 wood guardrails. Discussed the concrete stain color – should be a grey-granite color.
121

122 Bruce discussed a potential sidewalk project around Jones, etc. If and when a retaining wall is needed.
123 Tracy does not want to see the sidewalk and retaining wall. Will not fit the character of the village.
124

125 Chris discussed the village strategic planning project. He attended one committee meeting. Other
126 groups are addressing traffic & safety, utilities, community development. They are all putting an
127 emphasis on capital investments the town may want to make over the 15-20 years. Should the HDC
128 put together a wish list of capital investments that will enhance the historic character of the district.
129 Signage was discussed. This is an opportunity to solicit feedback for ideas that would help the historic
130 character of the district.

131 Jamie – HDC could be proactive instead of reactive. Larry – signage, on main roads only? Chris –
132 plantings, granite post marker, landscaping, educational component. Continued discussion on the
133 village strategic plan. Colleen – public input sessions on May 19 and 21. Please attend and express
134 your opinions.

135

136 Colleen – complaint received and enforcement letters were sent to 110 Boston Post Road and 117
137 Boston Post Road. Please email or send other written complaints to Colleen and she can follow up
138 with property owners.

139

140 Hearing no other issues before the Commission, Jamie motioned to adjourn at 9:10 pm, Doug 2nd.

141 *VOTE: All In favor.*

142

143 Respectfully Submitted,

144

145 Colleen Mailloux