

These minutes were approved at the August 1, 2024 meeting.

DURHAM HISTORIC DISTRICT/HERITAGE COMMISSION
Thursday, May 2, 2024
DURHAM TOWN HALL, COUNCIL CHAMBERS
7:00 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT: Larry Brickner-Wood (Chair); Charlotte Hitchcock (Vice-Chair); Eric Lund (Town Council Rep); Michael Hoffman; Carolyn Singer; Aaron Wolfson-Slepian and Tom Janosz (Alternate).

MEMBERS ABSENT: Jennifer Becker (Alternate)

ALSO PRESENT: Town Planner Michael Behrendt

I. Call to Order

Chair Larry Brickner-Wood called the meeting to order at 7:01 p.m.

II. Roll Call

Roll call attendance was taken. Mr. Behrendt noted that Bill McGowan is no longer serving on the Commission because he's not continuing with the Planning Board.

III. Seating of Alternates

IV. Approval of the Agenda

Mr. Lund *MOVED to approve the agenda as presented; SECONDED by Ms. Singer; APPROVED unanimously, 6-0, Motion carries.*

V. Approval of Minutes: March 7, 2024

Mr. Lund had submitted minor edits to town staff.

Mr. Wolfson-Slepian MOVED to approve the minutes of March 7, 2024; SECONDED by Ms. Hitchcock, APPROVED unanimously, 6-0, Motion carries.

VI. Public Comments: There were none.

VII. Staff Report: There was nothing to report.

VIII. Durham Community Church. 17 Main Street. Application for various changes to the existing building including replacement of the granite steps; replacing/rehabilitating numerous windows; washing, repairing and painting portions of the exterior; and rehabilitating the front doors, the steeple, and the copper roof. Community Church of Durham, property owner. Stephen Castoldi, Project Manager for Careno Construction, contractor. Map 108, Lot 6, **HDC**

Chair Larry Brickner-Wood recused himself because he's a longtime member of Durham Community Church. Vice-Chair Charlotte Hitchcock assumed chairing the meeting. She seated Alternate Tom Janosz as a voting member to replace Mr. Brickner-Wood on this application.

Doug Banks, 7 York Drive, and a member of Durham Community Church, and Ben Careno of Careno Construction, came forward to discuss the project.

Commission members had received detailed plans in advance and a note from Town Planner Michael Behrendt about which items are subject to their review. Mr. Careno and Mr. Banks gave an overview of the work:

1. Front Doors: The historic doors that are original to the building will be rehabilitated.
2. Windows: 12 single-hung windows will be removed; re-glazed as necessary and put back. In answer to a question, Mr. Careno said they will re-use the original glass when possible.

Mr. Banks said the Church has done significant fundraising and intends to apply for an L-CHIP grant. They are also applying for a grant from the National Fund for Sacred Places. Depending on success, they may be able to include new storm windows more suitable for the building.

3. Globe Window: will be removed, sent to re-furbisher in Connecticut to be rebuilt historically.
4. Chapel Windows (3): Mr. Careno said they are not very visible from the street. This portion of the building dates to 1962 and has steel windows. Mr. Banks said the intent is to replace them with double-hung fiberglass windows that operate better and are more energy-efficient.

5. Granite Steps: Existing steps aren't code compliant. Plans are to rebuild with granite. They will be adding a new platform and riser. Ms. Hitchcock asked about the landing being ADA-compliant and the applicant replied that's the main impetus for the changes.

Mr. Banks said the landing will be extended because currently people have to step back off the landing when opening the door. Mr. Hoffman asked about snow and ice accumulation. Will a roof overhang be necessary? Mr. Banks replied they don't anticipate any kind of porch or covering in the future.

There was discussion about snow and ice removal, the configuration of the landing and the fact there are other accessible entrances to the church. Vice-Chair Hitchcock commented she's in favor of the proposed changes to the main entrance to make it welcoming and accessible to all.

Re: Railings: Mr. Banks said the side railings aren't very functional due to positioning. Mr. Hoffman asked if the Fire Department or Code Enforcement have reviewed the handrail proposal and the applicants replied no.

6. Trim Replacement: Mr. Careno said they plan to power-wash the building and determine which pieces of trim need to be replaced. Ms. Singer doesn't advise power-washing the original historic clapboards. Mr. Careno replied some will be power-washed and other sections will be gently scrubbed.

Mr. Hoffman asked if PVC (trim) would be at ground level and Mr. Careno replied most of it would be. Mr. Hoffman expressed concern about the use of PVC at ground level; when viewed up close it doesn't look or feel like wood. He recommends a rot-resistant wood like white cedar. Vice-Chair Hitchcock recapped they should use wood on the 1800's part of the building.

7. Rehabilitate Steeple: The wood spiral top will be replaced with mahogany painted white. They are proposing to wrap the original columns with PVC to protect them from the elements. Ms. Singer asked about the source for the mahogany and Mr. Hoffman noted it's illegal to purchase rainforest mahogany; Most likely it will be from the Philippines.

8. Rehabilitate steeple copper roof. The copper roof is being refinished with black rubber roofing. It's exempt from review, since most of it is not visible from the ground.

Ms. Singer said the Church should photo-document “before” and “after” work and submit photos to the Durham Historic Association (DHA) for their records. She would like approval of the application to state that it’s unlikely the Commission would entertain changes in the future to add a porch or portico.

Mr. Hoffman asked about water intrusion in the basement since there’s some evidence of caulking used for water control. Mr. Banks said it’s a dirt basement which is damp in the summer; only small amounts of water come in. They had a full historic assessment of the building and it’s in good shape.

Mr. Hoffman MOVED to accept the proposal as submitted, with three conditions (specified by Mr. Behrendt below), SECONDED by Ms. Singer, APPROVED unanimously, 6-0, Motion carries.

Mr. Behrendt clarified the motion: The Commission is motioning to approve as submitted with three conditions: 1.) Baseboard on three sides around original building would be cedar (or another rot-resistant wood) rather than PVC; 2.) The Church will submit before and after photo documentation of any changes to the DHA. 3.) There should be no expectation of future approval for a roof or portico.

IX. 1 Durham Point Road. Discussion about condition of the house which has been vacant for several years. **HDC.**

Larry Brickner-Wood resumed chairing the meeting. He invited Mr. Diberto, the owner of 1 Durham Point Road, to come forward.

The Chair said concerns have been raised about the condition of the historic home, which has been intermittently vacant for several years. The Commission would like to learn of any plans for improvement and find out if there are ways to support Mr. Diberto’s efforts.

Mr. Diberto gave an overview of how he acquired the property, the work that has been done thusfar and what he’s hoping to accomplish going forward. He noted it was one of the most complete historic homes that he’s encountered in 50 years of real estate and contained some of the original contents from the Sawyer family dating back to 1754.

The previous owner wanted to empty it out and take everything to the dump. Mr. Diberto has tried to salvage items of value. He repaired the septic and removed junk cars, mitigated oil leaks and removed a tenant living in the barn; replaced the porch roof; removed large trees that were hazardous and installed fire alarms in the house.

Mr. Diberto plans to do more work this summer and fall and most likely put the property on the market in the fall. It’s been difficult getting high quality people to do the work. He

owns seven other historic homes and is committed to doing things right. He's well aware of the home's unique historic value, including a mural by Mr. Hatch.

He assured the Commission the property is visited and checked regularly. There's been no vandalism. In answer to a question about utilities, Mr. Diberto said the water line got fractured when repairs were done on Durham Point Road. He needs to get the water turned back on.

Mr. Hoffman said the Commission became concerned about the potential for water to leak into the historic home about a year ago when they saw a blue tarp on the roof that appeared to be blowing off. Mr. Diberto explained the timing of the roofing project due to temperatures necessary for the adhesive and said the home is now watertight.

Chair Brickner-Wood thanked Mr. Diberto for the update and wished him well on the project.

X. Revolution 1774. Raid on Fort William and Mary. Update on planned events in Durham. HC

Joanie Osborn came forward and identified herself as a resident of 21 Newmarket Road, the General Sullivan House, and chairperson of Revolution 1774.

She gave an update on the latest developments for the Celebration of the 250th Raid on Fort William and Mary. The date is June 15, 2024, with a rain date of June 16th.

Ms. Osborn said coincidentally two books were published this year relevant to the celebration. One is Mike Geanoulis' *The Assault & Raid on Fort William and Mary: A Battle in Search of a Poet*. He will be the speaker for the indoor event in December. The other book is *Wentworth Cheswill's Ride: Chasing an American Patriot* by John Herman of Newmarket.

She said Doug McLellan, an expert on John Sullivan, will be mingling on the dinner cruises and then she gave an update on other details:

- The website is live. Recent changes haven't been made due to issues with the web developer.
- Notices will be in Friday Updates. A PR executive in NY is working pro bono to help publicize the event in the local press.

She said since this was (arguably) the first military action of the American Revolution, it could be of national importance; however, she doesn't think it will garner attention at that level.

- All events will be live-streamed.
- All abutters have agreed to allow firing of a cannon. Reenactors will do musket drills. Everything was cleared by the Fire Marshal.
- DPW has given approval with two caveats: one is for police protection and the other is for an evacuation safety plan.
- Ground volunteers will help crowds get into position for the parade; point out bathrooms and sell raffle tickets, etc.
- Businesses weren't willing to give cash, but rather offered in-kind donations for raffles. They are waiting for final permission to sell raffle tickets. Before the event, tickets will be sold through Freedom Café website. Typical prizes have \$250 value, like spa treatments; tickets to Fisher Cats, etc.
- Four porta-potties have been ordered; two regular and two handicap accessible.

Ms. Osborn said she needs to find out how large banners will be hung in the downtown and Mr. Behrendt offered to follow up.

Ms. Singer asked about the mission of the Freedom Café and Ms. Osborn replied "to eradicate human trafficking."

Ms. Singer said she believes there's a missed educational opportunity to link modern day slavery (trafficking) to slavery that existed at the Sullivan property. Ms. Osborn said they are aware of the history. The theme for the day is "Freedom for All" and the issue of slavery will be addressed in formal remarks before the parade.

While the public won't be invited onto the property, Ms. Osborn believes most people should be able to see the monument to slave quarters on the Sullivan property from across the river. She added that other groups also need to be recognized for the sacrifices they made for our freedoms. It was clarified she was referring to the indigenous population here.

She added that Wentworth Cheswill, the first African-American to be elected to public office in the US, will be featured during the event as well.

Vice-Chair Hitchcock said she recently attended a meeting of the NH Historical Society focused on the 250th anniversary of the American Revolution. Dover and Portsmouth are also holding celebrations on the raid of the fort; It's good that Durham is holding theirs in advance, so that everything won't be concentrated on one day.

The Chair and Mr. Behrendt thanked Ms. Osborn for the wonderful work she's done in coordinating and organizing the upcoming celebration and she noted it's been a collaborative effort.

XI. Preservation Month. Discussion about potential activities in May. **HC**

Vice-Chair Hitchcock said May is Preservation Month. They probably should have discussed ideas for an activity months ago.

The Chair said in the past the Commission has recognized individuals who had done significant work on historic properties. He asked for suggestions.

Ms. Behrendt said they'd recognized at least two parties in the past: Lori and Steve Lamb on Bennett Road and also Suzanne who is doing work at 10 Newmarket and another property. He noted the Letourneaus have done significant "adaptive re-use" at Tideline and suggested they could be recognized at the June meeting.

Mr. Hoffman MOVED to recognize the LeTourneaus for adaptive re-use at Tideline; SECONDED by Mr. Lund; APPROVED unanimously, 6-0, Motion carries.

Mr. Hoffman commented it's important to do this for Preservation Month each year since some people spend a lot of money to enhance their historic properties.

Ms. Hitchcock suggested submitting weekly articles to Friday Updates during Preservation Month. One piece could be on the town farm burial grounds at Riverwoods, for example. She agreed to write and submit three short articles.

The Commission discussed the best time to review yearly goals in part to be sure they start planning for Preservation Month earlier. The Chair suggested January as a good time to look at goals.

XII. Updating the HDC Ordinance. Zoning amendment to update the Old Map and Lot numbers to the current ones in the Historic District Ordinance. **HDC**

Mr. Behrendt said Vice-Chair Hitchcock pointed out the tax map and lot numbers are out-of-date in the ordinance. Changing it requires a zoning amendment.

Members had received an updated amendment, showing the new lot numbers.

Ms. Hitchcock asked if these changes should be bundled with other ordinance changes that have been discussed briefly in the past, such as changes to signage and solar energy in the Historic District.

The Chair said the lot number changes are custodial in nature and he would like to move it forward. Other changes will take more deliberation and time.

Mr. Lund MOVED that the amendment be referred to the Planning Board to make a change in the zoning ordinance; SECONDED by Ms. Singer, APPROVED unanimously, 6-0, Motion carries.

XIII. Oyster River Raid Sign. Update on Roundtable Discussions. HC

Chair Brickner-Wood said the Roundtables went well. While there were some hard conversations, the group reached general consensus on the wording for the sign. He feels the facilitators did a good job moving the discussion forward

Since then, the State Division of Historic Resources has offered alternate wording and there's still no agreement on final wording, but the Chair believes the two versions are close.

Vice-Chair Hitchcock commented that communication was poor, in her view. She said the consultants sent a report to those who took part in the Roundtable, but the rest of the Commission didn't initially see it.

Mr. Behrendt said he forwarded emails from the NH DHR – one from March 18th and one from April 16th, which he only shared today. He apologized for the delay.

Ms. Hitchcock said she's concerned the Division of Historic Resources hasn't incorporated important changes to the wording from the Durham Historic Association.

Chair Brickner-Wood said it's been clear from the start that the State has the final say on the wording. In his view, the Commission shouldn't review what the Roundtable group came up with.

Vice-Chair Hitchcock said she found the Roundtable wording excellent, with every word carefully chosen. She thinks Janet Mackie's latest corrections to the DHR version should be followed. She would like to see the Commission push back on this with the State.

Mr. Behrendt noted the April 16th version from the state did incorporate most of the changes; there are only a few small grammatical corrections to be made. He went over them briefly. The state chose to omit the line, "The surprise was complete."

Vice-Chair Hitchcock noted that line is important because the English were unprepared and surprised by the raid. There was consensus among Commission members that this line should be included.

There was brief discussion of the dates on the proposed timeline (for side two of the plaque).

Vice-Chair Hitchcock then MOVED to support the consensus wording from the Roundtable and to add, “The surprise was complete.” It was also noted the Commission was speaking as the hosting body for the Roundtable; SECONDED by Ms. Singer, APPROVED unanimously, 6-0, Motion carries.

XIV. Oyster River Dam. Update on discussions about mitigation for the dam. **HC**

Mr. Behrendt said DPW put out a request for construction bids due in March; he believes removal of the dam will start this summer.

The Chair asked about the status of the Section 106 process and Ms. Singer replied they’ve concluded meeting on this. She believes there will be a working group to address specific mitigation projects.

In answer to a question from the Chair, Mr. Behrendt said he believes there will be a Section 106 report issued.

XV. Wagon Hill Bickford Chesley House. Update on plans for renovations. **HC**

Ms. Singer reported Steven Bedard withdrew from the project, but price estimates are being finalized with Milestone Construction. They haven’t been formally retained yet.

Ms. Hitchcock gave some background about Milestone Construction, noting they are highly qualified. She said since they have multiple construction teams, it will be easier for them to oversee and complete the project rather than the Town relying on one individual to do the work.

XVI. Old Brick Town Hall Plaque. Update on creating a historical plaque. **HC**

Vice-Chair Hitchcock met with the Durham Historic Association to get information about the building. She distributed copies of preliminary language for the plaque, noting the draft still needs work. She’s proposing a square plaque with an arched top for the seal, like the one at Smith Chapel.

There was discussion about the personal histories surrounding some of the building’s previous owners, including Mary Pickering Burt and Reverend Coe. The town acquired the building in 1840.

Vice-Chair Hitchcock proposed mounting the plaque on the left side of the building where a window was filled in. It's a blank area and would be readable from the ground.

There was discussion about including a QR code so that more information could be available. Ms. Singer said people at Preservation NH in Manchester have suggested a solid removable square in case the [QR] technology changes.

Mr. Behrendt said he does not believe it's correct to say the building "was entered into the National Register." It was a contributing resource to the Historic District but has never been nominated for the National Register.

Mr. Hoffman said the town of Newmarket uses a woman with a PhD in English to edit all their historical markers. She often corrects small things that were missed. He suggests that Durham do the same. Ms. Hitchcock said there are retired professors at Riverwoods who might be able to help.

XVII. Election of Officers. HC/HDC

Mr. Hoffman MOVED to nominate the current officers to continue: Larry Brickner-Wood as Chair and Charlotte Hitchcock as Vice-Chair; SECONDED by Mr. Lund, APPROVED unanimously, 6-0, Motion carries.

Both accepted the nomination and Ms. Singer thanked the officers for their willingness to serve.

XVIII. Other Business

XIX. Adjournment

Mr. Hoffman made a motion to adjourn at 9:12 p.m.; SECONDED by Mr. Wolfson-Slepian, APPROVED unanimously, 6-0, Motion carries.

Respectfully submitted,
Lucie Bryar, Minutes Taker
Durham Heritage Commission

Note: These written minutes are intended as a general summary of the meeting. For more complete information, please refer to the DCAT22 On Demand videotape of the entire proceedings on the town of Durham website.