

Ipswich Historical Commission Minutes

Meeting March 8, 2021
Virtual Meeting via Zoom

Present: Members Bill Effner, Lee Hathaway, Linda Grimes, Gordon Harris, Laura Gresh, Steve Miles, Jamie Novak

Nancy Carlisle and Chris Morse of APDC
Kristen Grubbs of the Planning Department

Citizens Query: none

Minutes February 2021

Lee motioned to accept the February 21st meeting minutes. Linda seconded the motion. All members voted in favor.

Gordon provided an update on Linebrook Parish Church.

The Parish members are applying for an MHC grant to assist with repairs to church building. Gordon sent a letter to the MHC on behalf of the IHC in support of the grant application.

Prior to the meeting Gordon emailed members 2020 IHC Annual Report.

87 High Street

Lee observed that there is a trend to multi-family development on elongated lots -- particularly within the High Street APD as well as other neighborhoods near the center of town.

There has been resistance in town to this kind of development. Chris Morse mentioned that the first example of multi-family development within the APD is at 83 High Street. It is uncertain if there is a limit this sort of development with the current zoning laws.

Another example of expanding dwellings on lots in a historic neighborhood is 67-68 County Road. Here a special permit was granted for 4 condos to be built on a lot where there was a two-family historic house. Laura reported that "These condos sold for \$640K to \$750K. The value of real estate in Ipswich is soaring and developers are taking advantage by building multi-family or condos in historic neighborhoods."

Both Chris and Gordon mentioned that the by-laws mandated by the State require the IHC to protect the historic assets of the town.

Nancy Carlisle said the APD by-laws do not specifically restrict building multi-family dwellings within the APD -- currently the APDC has limited power to restrict this kind of development.

Kristin said that these elongated lots are zoned RA and IR. The owner can choose the IR zoning for their lot which permits the construction of multi-family homes or condos. Some town boards have advocated increased density in the downtown area. Construction of multi-family/condos does require the owner to obtain a special permit issued by the Planning Board to build.

Steve noted that the current APDC by-law requires the APDC to review alterations that affect more than 30% of the existing structure. It does not specifically address the size of new construction.

The APD by-law calls for the review of all new construction within the district. Nancy said the current by-law does not address limiting the size of proposed structure and that the APDC is in the process of revising the by-laws to address these issues.

Gordon suggested that the IHC work with the Planning office and the Planning Board to make changes to zoning laws in the Architectural Preservation District. He noted that our mandate is to maintain the historic assets of the town. He said we have the most 1st period houses in the country, and that we are the best preserved puritan town with houses going back to the 17th century. We need to save our historic landscape – “High Street is a remarkable national treasure.” Our argument is to protect the “unique historic character and especially the architecture and neighborhoods that make up Ipswich.” The goal would be to bring this issue and proposed by-law changes to the fall Town Meeting.

Chris said the house lots within the APD are unique – they are long lots that historically may have had accessory buildings --- not large buildings such as those being proposed in the past few years.

Linda pointed out that “all of Ipswich is historic including Woods Lane, Old England Road, Turkey Shore Road. All of these neighborhoods have historic houses.”

Gordon suggested the possibility of allowing owners to petition for their individual houses or neighborhoods to be included in the APD.

Jamie said she talks to her neighbors about ownership of a first period house. She suggested having meetings and inviting residents and owners to promote preserving their neighborhoods.

Laura said at many meetings neighbors are opposed to the development such as these recently proposed multi-family houses. Central Street is an example with many neighbors attending a Zoom meeting and opposed.

Lee volunteered to draft a statement on behalf of the IHC regarding over-development in the APDC.

Gordon suggested having a joint task force including the APD, IHC and eventually inviting the Planning Board.

The next APDC meeting is on March 15th at 7 p.m. via Zoom. Nancy invited all IHC members.

Election of Officers

Gordon agreed to continue as Chair of the IHC for no more than one more year.

Steve nominated Linda for Vice Chair, Bill seconded the motion. All voted in favor of Linda as Vice Chair.

Lee agreed to continue serving as Treasurer.

Laura agreed to continue serving as Secretary.

It was noted that we need younger residents for additional alternate members to join the Commission. Jamie was encouraged to ask her neighbors to consider joining.

Linda motioned to adjourn the meeting. Gordon seconded the motion to adjourn. All voted in favor. Meeting adjourned at 8:41 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Laura Gresh
Secretary

Minutes approved April 13, 2021