

Ipswich Historical Commission Minutes
Meeting June 17, 2020
Via Zoom

Members in attendance: Gordon Harris, John Fiske, Steve Miles, Tess Schutte; Alternate Members: Bill Effner, Tom Schutte.

Also in attendance: Jaime Novak and Town Planner Kristen Grubbs

Chair Gordon Harris convened the meeting at 7:01pm.

Citizen queries: None

New alternate member Jaime Novak was appointed to the Historical Commission (IHC) by the Select Board on June 15, 2020. Jamie introduced herself and was welcomed by the other members. She will be sworn in by the Town Clerk and will officially join the IHC thereafter.

Review demolition request for shed at 217 Argilla Road

The Historical Commission received notice from the Building Department of a demolition request for an old barn/shed at 217 Argilla Road. The information in Patriot properties dates the buildings at that address c. 1910; thus, the Demolition Review Bylaw and review by the Historical Commission was triggered. The owner, Elizabeth Townsend, told the town that the barn shows up on a 1941 plot plan she has, and a 1910 Ipswich map shows several outbuildings on the Charles Wendell Townsend estate at that location.

Photos from the property owner revealed the state of the barn as in severe disrepair, and the owner is very concerned it is going to fall down any day. Her current plans are to rebuild on the same footprint. She has been advised to file with the ZBA for a special permit for alteration of nonconforming structure - to demolish and reconstruct in the nonconforming location.

Committee members discussed the structure and were of the opinion that there was no historical value to the falling down structure. John Fiske made a motion to authorize the Building Inspector to issue a demolition permit. Tess Schutte seconded the motion. All members voted in favor.

New Business and general discussion

- High Street Project: Steve Miles reported to the Commission on developments since their June 8th meeting regarding the inclusion of historic considerations in the Town's planning for reconstruction and repaving of High Street. DPW Director Rick Clarke requested that the IHC help the Town to hire a historic landscape architect to work on the next phase of design plans. Kristen Grubbs stated that the Planning Department can assist the Historical Commission in finding consultants with the appropriate skills and expertise, and in developing a scope of work to procure proposals. Several consultants were suggested, including Martha Lyon who worked with the Town previously on historic planning for restoration efforts at the Old North Burying Ground. Members will seek other consultant suggestions and report back to the Planning Office. The Town will not be moving to this next design phase until FY'22; however, the IHC will work with Planning staff to move this research forward this summer and fall.
- Chair Harris requested that the Town seek a legal opinion from Town Counsel regarding the process outlined by the Town's Demolition Review bylaw. Specifically, Harris wondered: Does the current demolition review bylaw language allow the following process:

- *Demo permit is filed with Building Dept.*
- *Building Dept assesses that the structure is more than 75 years old.*
- *Building Dept notifies IHC Chair.*
- *Chair reviews permit request, gathers information about the property, sends that information to all Commission members by email, and asks Commission members by email if anyone is interested in meeting to discuss.*
- *If no Commission member replies they would like to meet, they do not meet. (If at least one member replies they would like to meet, the IHC meets within 10 days.)*
- *If they do not meet, the Chair notifies the Building Dept that the structure is not historically significant and the demo permit can be issued.*

Kristen Grubbs stated she will look into this on behalf of the IHC. She also noted that this question has been discussed previously among town staff, former IHC Chair John Fiske, and other IHC members; the opinion of Planning staff is that that what is outlined above is not an allowed process per the current language of the bylaw and per the Open Meeting Law. (The Open Meeting Law is quite clear that public bodies shall not deliberate outside of a public meeting, and the Attorney General interprets deliberation to include all but purely administrative matters such as whether or not to meet.) This question about the demo review process has been one of the primary drivers in the current effort to revise and clarify the language. Revisions to the bylaw were proposed for the Annual Town Meeting warrant for this spring; however, all non-fiscal warrant articles were postponed to the 2020 Special Town Meeting warrant this fall. Planning staff will keep the IHC informed of fall Town Meeting timing and plans.

Next IHC meeting will be the second Monday in July at 7 p.m.

Meeting adjourned at 7:55 p.m.

Minutes submitted by Town Planner Kristen Grubbs

Minutes approved – July 13, 2020