

West Newbury

Historical Commission Meeting Minutes

Meeting date & place: 7:00 pm, February 6, 2024, Town Offices, 1st floor

Members Present: Chair Bob Janes, Elisa Grammer, Robert Belmont, Jennifer Munson, Historic District Commission Chair Jill Hudson, Garden Club President Lori Boudrow.

Training Field

Ms. Grammer said that when at a Select Board meeting about the Historic Sites Survey, she was asked if the Historical Commission would get together with the Historic District Commission to put into writing a request for removal of the overgrown shrubs on the Training Field. Ms. Hudson said that the remaining question is what to do once the shrubs are gone. The Garden Club will have a plant sale on May 18, so it would be best to wait until after that, and Mr. Belmont noted that the Training Field will be used heavily on Memorial Day.

The group also discussed the removal process. Mr. Janes said that former nurseryman Rick Thurlow said that the roots are likely shallow but spread out. All agreed that it is important to avoid any damage to the monuments.

Ms. Munson, a professional designer who designed the rehabilitated Elm Park in Groveland, noted that the monuments are a form of sacred space and should have some transition. Ideally plantings would be small, perhaps with ground cover. Ms. Boudrow said that the Garden Club plants annuals in front of the memorials. She added that the Garden Club has master gardeners among its number who could work on the design. Ms. Grammer noted that master gardener Kathy Mandeville had designed the Ferry Landing garden and has done work in Ocean Meadow.

After further discussion, the group agreed that rather than take the bushes out and plant grass as a stop gap, it would be best to have a plan for replanting to present to the Select Board. It was also determined that the timeline for doing the work would be after Memorial Day, with plantings to go in at a time of year to avoid the hot, dry periods in June-August—likely September or later in the fall. The Historic District Commission and the Garden Club, in coordination with Ms. Munson, will develop a plan for plantings after bush removal. Ms. Grammer will send the group (including Ms. Mandeville, who will be briefed by Ms. Boudrow) old photos of the Training Field with no bushes and smaller plantings.

Historic Sites Survey

Historic Districts

The Commission briefly discussed with Ms. Hudson the potential additional Historic Districts identified in the Historic Sites Survey. *Ms. Hudson will explore this matter with her Commission at their next meeting.*

Send-out to owners of surveyed properties

Mr. Janes identified some issues or potential issues with the addressee list Ms. Grammer had developed based on the spreadsheet the consultants supplied and the Assessor's data about owners of the properties surveyed. *Mr. Janes will check with the Assessor's Office and get back to Ms. Grammer with his corrections.*

The Commission approved the draft letter, so that once Ms. Grammer receives updated information about the addressees, she can do a mail merge for the letters, we can print out the survey forms, and stuff envelopes.

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Approved April 9, 2024*

Corrections

Mr. Belmont inquired what we can do when the Survey has errors. Ms. Grammer explained that we have set up a table of contents on the website that has a place for the Historical Commission to make comments and corrections. She showed this example:

WEST NEWBURY HISTORICAL COMMISSION
Historic Sites Survey Table of Contents
Whetstone Street

	Page ##	Individual or Group Form	WN Historical Commission Comments
24 Whetstone Street	2, 4, 7	Group	
26 Whetstone Street	2, 4, 7-8	Group	
32 Whetstone Street	4, 8	Group	32 Whetstone has a flat shale foundation topped with brick. The front part of the foundation facing Whetstone St. is three rows of cinder block on top of flat shale. The other three sides are a skim coat on concrete.

Town owned properties recommended for Historic Registers

The Commission briefly discussed whether any of the Town-owned properties recommended for Historic Register status should be on state or federal registers. Of particular interest were the two Town-owned cemeteries. *The Commission members will consider this and take it up at the next meeting.*

Binding the survey into a book

Ms. Grammer said that she mentioned to the Select Board the possibility of making the completed survey into a bound book. There are over 1600 pages and very many color photos, so this would be quite costly. The Commission may want to consider seeking Community Preservation Act funding, perhaps at fall town meeting.

Digitizing Materials

Ms. Grammer reported that the Clerk’s Office had been interested in pursuing CPA funding for digitizing certain records, but it appears that the idea has been deferred or abandoned because of questions whether this would qualify as a CPA expense. She noted that the Clerk’s Office has been in contact with Family Search, which may do digitizing of important Town records for free over a longer time frame.

Cemeteries

Mr. Janes reported that the Community Preservation Committee has approved the eligibility of the tree removal at the Quaker Cemetery. He now is working on the second part of the application to get the funding approval. He is gathering information about cost, the project summary, approvals from the Conservation Commission, the declaration of the cemetery as historically significant, etc.

Mr. Janes is continuing his work collecting epitaphs and other information as weather permits.

WN Veterans Oral History Project

Mr. Belmont and Mr. Janes met with Kevin Bowes of the Cable Advisory Committee. That committee was very enthusiastic about the oral history project and has new equipment. They will train the Historical Commission folks to use the equipment. The material can go to the Library of Congress unedited and other versions can be made and posted on local resources.

Mr. Janes and Mr. Belmont have also been in contact with the veterans eastern Essex agent in Ipswich, who is also very enthusiastic and pointed out that West Newbury is alone in doing this and could be a model for others. Mr. Belmont said that they will be working to develop protocols that others might use. They are hoping to get a list of West Newbury veterans to get the word out about the project.

Firefighters & Schools

Mr. Belmont said that now that the Historic Sites Survey is out, he has been connecting students not only to the schools but to their homes. He has been looking at the old maps that give locations of the school houses. With regard to the history of the fire department, he is waiting for springtime to get better photos of now and then. He has names of fire department members going back to 1884.

Native Americans

Ms. Munson noted that the description of the town history on the main website has been corrected to remove editing notes. She noted that because of the area's acidic soils, not much in the way of non-rock artifacts have been found. She has been considering memory of the landscape and the relationship to certain places. The Merrimack, for instance, has a history as a connector and divider. She noted that we will need to continue to take a fresh look at the role of Native Americans.

Minute Histories & Town Office Stories

Ms. Grammer reported that she received a Cultural Council grant for the book of collected minute histories and it looks like the book may come out in March. We will be doing the Minute Histories every other month this year.

Other Business

Ms. Grammer said that the question arose at the Select Board meeting about repatriating a historic Bardeen-Culver Barn to West Newbury. This barn is now in pieces in another state. *The Commission concluded that the Historical Society, which owns property and maintains buildings, would be better equipped than the Historical Commission to pursue this.*

Minutes

The Commission approved the minutes of the January 9, 2024 meeting.

Adjournment

8:46 pm

Meeting Documents

- Training Field information
- Bardeen-Culver Barn Information
- Draft letter to property owners
- Budget materials
- Draft letter to property owners

Respectfully submitted,

Elisa Grammer

