

Historical Commission Meeting Minutes – Approved

DATE: June 13, 2022

TIME: 5:00 P.M.

PLACE: Zoom Virtual Meeting

MEMBERS PRESENT: Gary Leveille, Don Howe, David Rutstein, Paul Ivory, Marilyn Bisiewicz, Malcolm Fick

MEMBERS NOT PRESENT: Bill Nappo

1. Chairman Fick called the meeting to order as a virtual meeting authorized by the Governor's March 15, 2020 and June 16, 2021 orders. A roll call was conducted to determine members present.
2. The draft minutes of the March 28, 2022 meeting had not been distributed to members for review, so the approval of the minutes was deferred to the next meeting
3. At the request of Ed Abrahams, the commission agreed to reorder the agenda to discuss the issue of potentially offensive references contained in town historical markers. Mr. Abrahams said that his remarks on this issue were personal and that he was not acting on behalf of the Selectboard.
 - Mr. Fick introduced the topic by stating that this was a preliminary discussion to see what action, if any, the Historical Commission might take to investigate and remediate any issues that might arise. Mr. Abrahams had raised the issue in relation to the historical marker near the Bridge St. bridge which reads:

“TWENTY RODS NORTH OF THIS STONE WAS THE OLD INDIAN FORDWAY ON THE MIDDLE TRAIL FROM WESTFIELD TO THE HUDSON RIVER. NEARBY WAS THE SITE OF THE GREAT WIGWAM WHERE MAJOR JOHN TALCOTT OVERTOOK AND DISPERSED A PARTY OF INDIANS, AUGUST, 1676.

DEDICATED BY
THE THURSDAY MORNING CLUB AUGUST 1904
REDEDICATED 1989”

- Mr. Rutstein pointed out that the Thursday Morning Club still meets and should be the proper forum for any complaints. He questioned whether the marker was offensive.
- Mr. Leveille asked if anyone had expressed any objections to the sign and stated that for 1904, the language was careful.
- Mr. Fick asked if evaluating the language in the context of cultural norms in 1904 might be equivalent to defending the Robert E. Lee statue in Richmond.

- Mr. Rutstein pointed out that Robert E. Lee was a racist and traitor and that the statue in Richmond was erected to foster racism. There is no equivalence between the Lee statue and the language or purpose of the Bridge St. historical marker.
- Mr. Bernie Drew pointed out that the marker commemorates an event involving Connecticut militia and Native Americans from Eastern Massachusetts. There were no local people involved. He further stated that the event may have never actually taken place and that if it had, there is no indication that a ford in the river existed near the site of the marker.
- Mr. Drew, Mr. Leveille and Mr. Rutstein engaged in a discussion of the historical accuracy of the marker with no clear agreement. It seems that in 1676 there were no actual residents in Great Barrington to take proper note of the event.
- Mr. Ivory and Mr. Leveille suggested that an interpretive sign could explain the marker and the historical issues. It was suggested that such a panel should involve the River Walk and Stockbridge/Munsee people.
- Mr. Leveille and Ms. Bisiewicz volunteered to follow up with these groups.
- The consensus of the Historical Commission was that, even though most markers in town were created by various independent groups, the Historical Commission would be an appropriate forum for reviewing and discussing complaints that may be lodged in the future.

4. Old Business

- *Great Barrington: Here & Gone* status and distribution discussion
 - i. Ms. Bisiewicz reported that Fairview Hospital still has ten copies and does not need more at this time.
 - ii. Mr. Howe will email teachers at the middle and high schools to see if they would like a set of books for classrooms.
- Walking tours
 - i. Mr. Fick reported that there is continued interest by the Clinton Church Restoration for a companion walking tour using the app.
 - ii. Mr. Leveille said that he has some corrections that he will forward to Mr. Fick.
- CPA Update
 - i. Mr. Howe reported that all the CPC-approved projects were passed at Town Meeting, including the bonding for the Memorial Field improvements..
- Updates on various projects of historical interest
 - i. Housatonic School – No news was reported
 - ii. Searles School – No updates
 - iii. Newsboy Park
 - 1. Mr. Leveille reported that the park is being mowed but that the weeds have already taken over the juniper patch.

2. Mr. Howe reported that removal of the shrubs would require funding of a DPW contractor and that funds for this would likely have to come from the Historical Commission budget. Mr. Leveille said that he was assured several years ago that DPW would do the cleanup.
3. Mr. Fick will contact the new DPW head, when hired, and will also contact Daedelus, the statue cleaning contractor, about this year's work.
- iv. Trolley Shelter – Mr. Howe reported that the final design and bid documents are being prepared under the direction of Chris Rembold. The Selectboard was meeting concurrently with the Historical Commission and one of the items on their agenda was approval of the removal of a tree that threatened the shelter.

5. New Business

- Historical Markers commemoration
 - i. Mr. Fick introduced the topic by asking if the Historical Commission would consider participating with Mr. Drew in making his recent historical marker commemoration an annual event.
 - ii. Mr. Ivory suggested tours, brochures and a restoration program might be considered.
 - iii. Mr. Drew had left the meeting at this time and Mr. Fick suggested that Mr. Drew be invited to the next meeting to discuss such an annual event.
 - iv. Mr. Howe referred commissioners to a web site that includes details about the town's historical markers. The site is <https://www.hmdb.org/results.asp?Search=Place&?Search=Place&Town=Great%20Barrington&State=Massachusetts>.
- Letter to Berkshire Aviation Enterprises
 - i. Mr. Fick introduced a letter drafted by Mr. Ivory to Berkshire Aviation Enterprises urging an adaptive reuse of the office building they are planning to demolish and replace. The letter contains the full text and images of the inventory forms for the airport Area and the opinion that the Area qualifies for listing the National Registry of Historic Places.
 - ii. Commissioners approved of the letter.
 - iii. A discussion was conducted concerning the procedure for obtaining a listing on the National Register. Mr. Howe will send Mr. Fick information on the procedure.
- Mr. Howe announced that he would not be seeking another term on the commission. All commissioners thanked Mr. Howe for his tireless work on the Commission's behalf and were pleased that Mr. Howe would continue serving on the Historic District Commission.
- It was noted that the "Bryant House" law offices on Main Street recently replaced the windows on the building to ugly windows that were less historically appropriate. While the house is in the National Historic District, it was noted that this designation has no preservation restrictions on the properties within the district.

- Mr. Leveille reported a possible source of additional town artifacts and/or archives. He will report back to the commission if successful.
6. Other Member Issues
 - Mr. Leveille is working with Jim Mercer to create images that will be attached to transformer boxes around town.
 - Mr. Leveille volunteered to work on a tribute to historian and former Commission chairperson, Jim Parrish, who recently passed away. This will be presented at the next meeting.
 7. Citizen's Speak – None
 8. Next meeting date – August 8, 2022 at 5pm
 9. Having concluded its business, the meeting was adjourned without objection.

Respectfully submitted,

Malcolm Fick
Chairman