

Historic District Commission

Meeting Minutes

2025-01-28

7:00 PM

Online, Town Hall, 472 Main St, Acton, MA 01720

Present: David Honn (DH), Art Leavens (AL), David Shoemaker (DS), Anita Rogers (AR), Zach Taillefer (ZT), Barbara Rhines (BR) (Acton Cultural Resources Coordinator). Fran Arsenault (FA) (Select Board Liaison) joins at 19:41.

Absent:

Opening:

David Honn opened the meeting at 7:06 pm. DH read the “remote meeting notice” due to COVID-19.

1. Regular Business.

- A. Citizen's Concerns – None.
- B. Approval of Meeting Minutes – 14 January Minutes. DS moved their adoption, seconded by AL. AR, DH, DS, AL approve. ZT Abstains (missed the meeting). Minutes approved.
- C. Review Project Tracking Spreadsheet / Chair Updates:
Outstanding and Completed COAs/CNAs/Denials
 - 468 Main Street (Red House) (AL) DONE
 - 543 Mass. Ave. #2501 (CNA) – DH to look at this
 - Town Reports due Feb. 28 to Town Report Working Group. DS to look at statistics; BR will send a pointer; DH will incorporate and update the text. To review at the 11 Feb meeting.
 - Proposed Warrant Article re: trees & shrubs in decisions (see below) due to Select Board by late February
 - Remote meetings set to expire 3/31/2025. If in-person meetings are mandated, BR has a room reserved in the Public Safety Building. BR will look around a bit more for a more suitable place.

2. New/Special Business or other applicable agenda items

- A. 7:15 Application #2422 (cont.) 49 Windsor Avenue windows. Applicant could not attend. A time extension is expected to be completed. AR provided some pointers to resources. DH will offer additional contacts. BR has explored mounting location with the owner.

- B. 7:33 Application #2502 565 Massachusetts Ave. (Acton Pharmacy) mural. BR presents the application on behalf of the Town. AR: Likes it and the 'front' placement; asks and indeed the one-way sign can be removed. AL: agrees. DS, ZT likes the location. A drip edge may be advisable. DH: Suggests painting the conduits the wall color. Washers behind the ledger boards can help with longevity. AR recommends vertical ledger boards if consistent with the mural. Rain screen may suffice. AR: Moves we approve the installation of the east side of the Acton Pharmacy on the concrete block closest to the side door. If conduit makes that location impossible, further back on the side would be appropriate. Installation as the Building Inspector thinks best. AL seconds. AL, AR, ZT, DH, DS all approve. ZT will write it up.
- C. 7:45 Application #2503 5 Concord Road (Town Common) Davis interpretive sign. Applicant not available for this meeting. DH Recaps the previous discussion. A mockup was made, and the HDC is invited to find a time to meet and look. The best time appears to be 10AM on Saturday, in front of the horse trough as a point of departure. AR notes that the panel at the horse trough could obscure the trough. DH raises the possibility of placing the granite monument with the names of Minutemen at the entry to the march when the path leaves Main St after Post Office Square. A couple of benches would be welcome; this location would not be in the Districts so no longer in our purview.
- D. 8:00 PM Application #2504 17 Woodbury Lane interpretive sign & Minuteman Monument – See discussion above.
- E. 8:15. Application #2327 AMENDED Renewal 53 River Street Park Elements. DH, an abutter, recuses himself. Vice-Chair AR, assumes Chair for this discussion. Thomas Begin, Assistant Town Manager, (TB) joins. TG: Goes over the application. Soil issues requiring removal of significant quantities of contaminated soil, using financial resources. Getting started on the design, with some changes to reflect limited resources. Existing boulders will be used to form informal seating. Only corners of the original foundations will be indicated, placing boulders to mark those corners. Historical signage would be covered by CPC funding which has been requested, and landscaping also requested from CBC. Alternative resources are being sought for other elements. A stockade fence would offer visual shielding of portable toilets. One accessible parking space is preserved, along with a van path if needed. West overlook walkway and stairs, previously approved, were eliminated in this phase to save money. Additional state funding is being sought as well. DS: could the simplifications be reversed at a later time? TB: the Echowalls and amphitheater would be hard to recreate, but most elements could be brought back. AL: This application is to renew the previously approved Certificate of Appropriateness. Is it correct that this application is not adding anything new? TB: substantially correct. TB shares plans. Public Comment: Citizen Honn (DH) raises a question. DH thinks the stockade fence requires discussion. The Gardner Field fence would be a good design choice. The Echowalls are an unfortunate loss. Could a few more boulders be used to sketch the building foundation? The walkway to the overlook was an early and important feature of the park. Believes this should be a high priority for any additional funds. On the soil, a 21E soil analysis in the early 2000's came out clean. Any clarification? Has the disconnect been understood? TB: Agreed on the overlook. On the contaminated soil – it was principally under the foundation of a building that was not tested

until the building was removed. AL: asks for more precision on the fencing around the portable toilet. Could incorporate the change in this meeting. TB: Funding is not yet obtained and the fencing is not part of this application; can modify the design as desired in a future application once funding is obtained. AR: Falling short of original scope, but no grounds not to grant the extension. AL: moves to Vote to renew the CoA: AL, AR, ZT, DS in favor. AR will (once again) write it up.

DH rejoins the meeting and assumes role as Chair.

- F. 8:45 PM 48 School Street barn pre-application discussion. Matthew Killam, Architect, and Tim Hess (TH) join. TH: representing Owners Brian and Anne Berkowitz. TH shares screen. The building in question is 28' high, order of 28' wide, 42' long. AR: Will need to see cut sheets etc., but later. Why replace the siding? TH: aluminum or vinyl currently. Would like to distinguish it from the house. Demolishing may be necessary; this is yet to be determined. The structural engineer recommends to take down the structure and rebuild. AL: The HDC Design Guidelines provide that the preferred siding would be painted wood clapboard siding. TH: The proximity of the barn to the house asks for something different to make it properly subordinate to the main house; the aging of the wood will be a nice touch. AL: The windows are not original in their placement. The Guidelines provide that windows should remain in their original location. TH: The current windows have moved around over the decades and do not reflect historical purity or principle. Some windows are old, but not original. AL: want to be sure you are familiar with the Demolition Guidelines. DS: Structural insulated panels? TH: One face – the North – is structurally intact. 2x4 spray foam in a new structure is planned. DS: Foundation? TH: appears that it can be preserved. DS: Like the idea of something new for the building design. ZT: Also likes the idea of something new. Want to be careful about setting precedents. The primary role of the HDC is to preserve. Want to be sure that there is a strong argument that there is insufficient old building to make it worthwhile to reproduce. DH: The demolition is a key question for the HDC. On the more modern sense of the building – DH thinks it does not go far enough. Could eliminate eaves and rakes, put on a slicker, standing-seam metal roof. Feels the current design is half-way. Could just recognize the volumetrics of the barn, but the rest follows the recognition of an abstract volume. TH: Standing-seam roofs are expensive! If the barn does not need to be demolished does it change the perspective? DH: no. Jacobson is an architect who might be an interesting model. AR: is looking for something white, crisp. Brian and Anne Berkowitz join. The barn is not really used, and will be torn down if not put back in good structural condition.
- G. 8:45 PM 2025 Property Owner Letter – draft review. Delay substantial discussion to the next meeting. AL: Refer back to our mission – don't want to give the impression we are imposing our vision of what's right. And, all buildings in the Districts are subject to and can profit from the HDC's attention and help.
- H. 9:00 PM (started discussion at 19:21) Proposed Warrant Article re plantings & HDC decisions. AL found Concord's language on the topic: "The fact that public view is currently blocked by vegetation does not eliminate the need for a COA". AL proposes this or similar language could be placed in our Rules and Regulations. DS, ZT think this is a good approach. BR/AL note a public hearing is needed, but the process is clear. DS asks if there are other changes we want to make; AL notes that there may be. Topics will include but not

be limited to shrubs and vegetation. Plan is for 25 February or later. AL will gather any topics for the meeting, and separately will look at state and other references for the best language.

3. Consent Items

None

1. Adjournment

At 22:00 DH moves to adjourn the meeting, AR seconds. DH takes a roll call vote: DS, AL, AR, ZT, DH all approve.

Documents and Exhibits Used During this Meeting.

- All relevant Applications and Documents, in Docushare