Groton Historical Commission

May 3, 2023

Groton Town Hall

7:00 PM

Aubrey Theall called the meeting to order at approximately 7:05pm.

Commissioners in attendance: Aubrey Theall, Michael LaTerz, Allen King, Joshua Vollmar

Guests in attendance: Anna Eliot, Olga Box, Ginger Vollmar, Nancy Berringer, Gary Shepherd, Camilla Blackman, Paula Martin, Judy Anderson, Eileen Cantrill, Barbara Seeber-Wagner

**A public hearing was held relative to the application for a demolition permit for 170 Old Ayer Road** (Prescott House). Aubrey Theall read the public meeting notice into the minutes (attached) and delivered remarks regarding the situation, a summary of which follows:

The Historical Commission has been discussing this issue with IHM/GHM for years now. These discussions have become more in-depth with the formation of a sub-committee.

Based on those discussions Aubrey believes GHM is sympathetic to the situation but the house has no utility to them at this time while being a liability to them in a variety of ways.

House is in what GHM views as the buffer of the music center. It has been made very clear that future public access to the house is not up for discussion. Residential use is off the table given the proximity. Many ideas have been put forward by the Commission and various members of the public but none so far have been viable.

There are two potentially viable options we see for preservation going forward. Figure out a way to preserve in place (requires substantial funding to take the liability off GHM's hands, they have their hands full with the music center) or figure out a way to move the house away.

We plan to move on parallel paths as the clock is now ticking. A real estate listing is being prepared.

We will also continue dialogue with GHM regarding on-site preservation, essentially "mothballed".

HistComm, Town of Groton have no mechanism to compel preservation. If the demo delay bylaw is enforced then at the end of 18 months a demo permit will be issued.

Three potential courses of action as it pertains to the demo delay:

* Demo delay the whole project
* Allow GHM to do some demo work they'd like to do on a structurally unsound portion of the barn and a small cape style house on the site. Demo delay the Prescott House.
* Allow GHM to do a limited demo of the non-historically significant portions of the house (it has a series of additions, some of it rather young) to reduce the maintenance burden and perhaps the demo cost for a future move as the whole thing is unlikely to be moved.

**Public discussion and questions followed**.

* There were questions from the public regarding why the house cannot be re-purposed for lodging of guests or sold.
  + GHM views the house as within its "buffer".
  + The lighting, commotion and noise from the site would make any future residential use challenging.
  + GHM does not wish to have the public within this "buffer".
* There were questions from the public regarding what steps the Historical Commission has taken to date to encourage preservation.
  + The Historical Commission's meeting minutes are likely the best source of information.
  + It was pointed out by Ginger Vollmar that past minutes (especially pre-COVID) are somewhat incomplete. The Historical Commission will endeavor to attempt to locate any missing minutes.
  + Aubrey Theall mentioned that there has been contact with our State and Federal level elected officials, MA Historical Commission, Preservation Massachusetts, the Trustees of Reservations and others for advice.
* There was discussion of possible future use of the lot by GHM.
  + Gary Shepherd (ShepCo, Inc., the entity responsible for the development of the new music center) stated there are no current plans for re-use.
* Mr. Shepherd delivered various remarks and pointed out that the house is in the music center's buffer and that the music center has looked at all possible uses of the house for its purposes and has found none that was economically viable.
* Mr. Shepherd offered to consider a contribution to offset the cost of publishing the availability of the house for re-location. The Commission offered thanks and will circle back with estimated cost.
* Ginger Vollmar expressed opposition to allowing a partial demolition of the Barn and asked that portions of the barn be salvaged.
  + Aubrey Theall pointed out that the barn is the private property of GHM but that the Commission would encourage that any salvageable materials be salvaged. Historical Commission will provide Gary Shepherd with contact information regarding individuals that may be able to assist.

**Discussion among the Commission followed public comment.**

* Aubrey Theall stated that he believed that a partial demo of structurally compromised portions of the barn had the potential to enhance the survivability of the remainder of the barn, which is believed to be structurally sound. Joshua Vollmar believed the barn to be a little over 100 years old. It was agreed that its historical significance is low. Aubrey Theall stated that the cape style house has no historical significance.
* Allen King was in favor of permitting a partial demo of the barn and of the cape style house on the property.
* Joshua Vollmar asked about the condition of the portion of the barn to be demolished. Gary Shepherd stated that it is beyond reasonable repair. Michael LaTerz mentioned having been in the barn and that he did not disagree with that assessment. Joshua then agreed with Allen's position.
* Michael LaTerz brought up that the Historical Commission has invested an extensive amount of time and energy into this effort, well beyond our mandate. This should not be considered precedent setting for every historical property in town that is considered for demolition.
* A motion to permit a partial demolition of the barn and the demolition of the cape style house but to place the entire Prescott House itself under the protection of the demolition delay bylaw was made, seconded and voted on, passing unanimously. The Building Inspector will be notified that a demolition permit for the barn and cape style house may be issued but a demolition permit for the Prescott House itself may not be for 18 months.
  + Mr. Shepherd asked for clarity regarding the partial demolition of the barn (what, specifically, could be demolished). As the barn's historical significance is deemed minimal it was determined that the demo permit for the Barn would not be conditioned.
  + The public hearing was closed.

**April meeting minutes** were reviewed and accepted by unanimous vote.

**Inventory of Historic Assets:** Michael Danti (remains on the agenda as a placeholder until Michael returns)

**Old Meetinghouse Updates:** Allen King stated that the 4 windows on the south side are done, the 4 on the north side are being worked on and the windows in the stairwells are next. Storm windows will be installed.

**Deluxe Corp. site redevelopment**, letter was drafted by Joshua Vollmar for submission and will be submitted by the Chair on behalf of the Commission. Was submitted the following day.

**New member recruiting**, filling Vice Chair and Secretary & alternate roles. Aubrey reached out to two potential candidates. If we have not heard back by the next meeting we will begin a public outreach.

**Mile Markers**- Michael LaTerz raised a topic not anticipated prior to the posting of the meeting agenda. A concerned citizen brought to Michael's attention that 1 of the mile stones restored years back by the Historical Commission using CPA funding has been overturned and another is broken. Others have overgrowth issues. Mr. LaTerz mentioned that the Boy Scouts may be willing to contribute to maintenance. A CPA grant may need to be sought to fix the broken stone and re-set the overturned one. Aubrey Theall will reach out to Tom Delaney to see if the Highway Department might be willing to re-set the overturned stone.

**Community Outreach-** Michael LaTerz suggested Aubrey Theall appear on the Groton Channel to discuss HistComm and our efforts around the Prescott House, offered to make a connection.

Next meeting was scheduled for 6/7/23, 7pm at Town Hall.

Meeting was adjourned at 8:44pm by unanimous vote.