

RYE HERITAGE COMMISSION
Thursday, January 4, 2024, 5:30 PM
Rye Town Hall

Commission Present: Chair Alex Herlihy, Vice-Chair Gail Hughes, Treasurer Peter White, David Choate, Selectmen's Rep Bill Epperson, and Alternate Mae Bradshaw

Members Not Present: Bev Giblin, Frank Lagana, and Alternate Elizabeth Sanborn

I. Call to Order

Chair Herlihy called the meeting to order at 5:32 p.m. and members of the Commission introduced themselves.

II. Approval of Minutes

- November 2, 2023 & November 14, 2023

Motion by Peter White to approve the minutes of November 2nd as presented. Seconded by David Choate. All in favor.

Motion by Peter White to approve the minutes of November 14th as presented. Seconded by Gail Hughes. All in favor.

III. Treasurer's Report – Peter White

Treasurer White reported that the Commission has \$41,599 in the checking account with \$5,490 in restricted funds for Town Hall. He reported that the annual fundraising mailer was sent out. The Commission received \$7,175., which is the second-best response to a mailer. He added that as of year-end (12/31/23), the number received was \$5,975., of which \$125 was restricted for the Town Hall stairs and \$5,850 was unrestricted. He pointed out that the flyer had asked for unrestricted donations. However, he recommended that the Commission earmark the \$5,850 from the unrestricted to the restricted Town Hall stairs account. He pointed out that's why the restricted Town Hall stairs account is showing \$5,975. The restricted gazebo account is \$1,810. The restricted town signs fund is \$18,245 and the unrestricted funds are \$10,077., for a total of \$41,599.

The deposit paid to Jeffery Hines on the gazebo was \$6,000., leaving a balance of \$4,000 for the project.

During 2023, the Commission disbursed \$2,029 or 42% of the operating budget of \$4,800.

Motion by David Choate to approve the Treasurer's report as presented. Seconded by Bill Epperson. All in favor.

Motion by Alex Herlihy to seat Alternate Mae Bradshaw as a regular member at this meeting. Seconded by Gail Hughes. All in favor.

IV. Gazebo construction update

Chair Herlihy reported that the contractor has been in touch with Susan, RCC Member, about opening the Goss Barn in order to start laying out the work. He added that whenever he is in touch with Mr. Hines, he communicates the information back to Member White and Member Choate. He stated that he will keep the Commission updated monthly, and if needed, by e-mail between regular meetings.

V. Stratham Heritage Commission ideas

Chair Herlihy reported that one of the ideas that the Commission heard about from the Stratham Heritage Commission is that they have a capital reserve fund. Stratham has accumulated money in a capital reserve fund, so if a building comes up that they want to buy and renovate to sell, or buy and maintain, they have the resources.

Member Choate noted that the Commission is allowed to do this due to enabling legislation regulating Heritage Commissions. However, the Commission has missed the window to put it on the warrant for this year, so it will have to wait until the fall to go through the process.

There was discussion regarding the farmhouse at 237 Locke Road. If the town found a private individual who wanted to save the house and move it, is there any town-owned land that could be used if there was not a private lot available? If so, how would one go about finding it? There is also a possibility that one could dismantle the house, store it, and put it back together, when land is available. The public hearing on this property is scheduled for January 25th.

Selectman Epperson will investigate it. However, there is not a lot of land that is not encumbered by water or restrictions through conservation.

Member White pointed out that if the Heritage Commission is going to ask the voters for a capital reserve account, they need to be diligent in coming up with examples of what the funds would be used for. It was agreed that the farmhouse on Locke Road is a good example, but there is a need to come up with others.

Member Choate noted the issue of the renovation of the Town Hall. He questioned if the Heritage Commission and the Historic District Commission should join forces to form a subcommittee to talk about the renovations. He recommended a subcommittee be formed to review all prior studies on the building to determine if any are still valid or relevant. If the renovations are projected to be a million dollars, then the Commission could ask for \$250,000 to be deposited into the capital reserve fund for four years.

Chair Herlihy stressed that the capital reserve fund would be for any property that they needed it for, not just for the Town Hall.

Member Bradshaw pointed out that as far as the Historic District Commission is concerned, they are only interested in the outside of the building and there are no changes being proposed to the outside of the building. There really is no need to have someone from the Historic District Commission involved. She added that half of its members are already on the Town Center Committee and the other half are on the Demolition Review Committee. She recommends trying to get new or different members involved.

Member Choate pointed out that it would be good to have an architect involved.

Motion by Alex Herlihy for the Heritage Commission to seek individuals to form a subcommittee for the purpose of researching all prior studies and reviewing the future feasibility of finishing the restoration of the Town Hall. Seconded by David Choate.

Member Bradshaw pointed out that it is not Heritage's prerogative to do this, as they do not own the building. The Select Board owns the building. She recommended that someone from the Heritage Commission go before the Select Board to get permission to form the subcommittee.

Alex Herlihy withdrew his motion.

Selectman Epperson will talk to the Select Board to get permission for the Heritage Commission to form a subcommittee for the purpose of researching all prior studies and reviewing the future feasibility of finishing the restoration of the Town Hall.

Someone from the Heritage Commission will attend the Select Board meeting when it will be discussed in order to answer any questions.

VI. Neighborhood Heritage Districts

Member Choate read the following:

A neighborhood heritage district is a zoning mechanism that focuses on protecting the key characters of an area.

The term neighborhood is significant. It reinforces that these districts are established as a result of direct citizen input and opportunities.

Member Choate explained that this would be an advisory board to the Planning Board. The Planning Board would have to be involved in establishing this.

Chair Herlihy pointed out some of the benefits of establishing a neighborhood heritage district:

- Help with prevention against demolition
- Helps to retain character.
- Helps with getting loans for fixing up houses.
- Helps to retain the historic character of the neighborhood.

- Businesses would have to maintain the appropriate frontage.
- It prevents the encroachment of larger commercial businesses.

Member Choate continued:

Establishment of a neighborhood Heritage District:

- *To achieve these purposes the town or city may designate one or more neighborhood heritage district/s.*
- *A neighborhood heritage district shall be established within the zoning ordinance with the applicable provisions.*
- *Boundaries are shown on the zoning map.*
- *The neighborhood heritage district shall be administered by the planning board*
 - *With the advice of the neighborhood advisory committee*
- *Created by the planning board.*
- *Not less than 3 or, more than 7 members*
- *May include:*
 - *One or more residents or landowners in the district*
 - *A person familiar with the history and character of the neighborhood*
 - *An architect*
 - *A business proprietor*
 - *A member of the HDC or Heritage Commission*
 - *A member of the Planning Board*

A homeowner's deed would not be affected by this designation. It would be like an overlay district. An example of an appropriate area for a neighborhood heritage district is the Jenness Beach Precinct.

Member Choate explained that the next step would be to start interacting with the Planning Board. The Planning Board needs to discuss this matter and decide that it is a good idea and then get it into the zoning process. The main objective would be to get this into the Master Plan. He added that Stratham has the only one in the State at this time. He proposed that with the Commission's permission, he would start the process of getting this matter before the Planning Board.

All agreed.

VII. Historic Graveyards

Chair Herlihy stressed the need to get more core people to actively take care of the historic graveyards. He reported that at this time, there are less than ten caretakers for sixty graveyards. There is also documentation that needs to be updated. He stated that he would like to see a group formed that would get this program up and running, so that there are caretakers for most of the graveyards and the documentation would be done.

Motion by David Choate to form a subcommittee to coordinate stewardship and future preservation of the historic graveyards. Seconded by Alex Herlihy. All in Favor.

Chair Herlihy stated that there will be publicity regarding this program going out starting in February in the Civic News, the Historical Society Newsletter, and in a special feature in the Herald.

Member White reported that during the annual fundraiser, he received three inquiries from individuals interested in getting involved in the Heritage Commission. He will forward the contact information to Chair Herlihy.

VIII. Pulpit Rock Tower

Discussion tabled, as Patricia Weathersby, Friends of Pulpit Rock Tower, is waiting on further information from Fish and Game.

IX. Permanent marker monument – land acknowledgment for native peoples

Chair Herlihy explained that he went before the Select Board recently regarding this endeavor. At monument park, there are two monuments; one from Rye400 and the other privately funded honoring the founding families. He feels it would be appropriate to have a permanent marker monument as a land acknowledgement for the native people that possessed the land for 12,000 years. He presented the idea to the Select Board, as he felt that the acknowledgement should come from the Heritage Commission. It would be a standard, boiler plate acknowledgement of one to two sentences, on a modest marker, regarding the native people. However, this idea was met with a lot of resistance from surrounding landowners.

X. Other Business

- **Next Meeting: Thursday, February 1st, 5:30 p.m., Rye Town Hall**

Adjournment

Motion by David Choate to adjourn at 6:40 p.m. Seconded by Peter White. All in Favor.

Respectfully Submitted,
Dyana F Ledger