Minutes of the Sandwich Historical Commission
March 2, 2022

SHC Members present via Zoom: Lisa Hassler (Chair), Mahlon Peterson, Brenda Kelly, William (Bill) Daley, Julia Blakely. Ralph Vitacco, Director of Planning and Economic Development for the Town, joined the meeting.

The Chair called the meeting to order at 6:00 pm.

1. The Minutes from the February 2, 2022 meeting were approved unanimously as written.

Before continuing with the Agenda, in New Business (no. 5), Ralph Vitacco presented an update on the Deacon Eldred House at 4 Water Street. The Town is looking anew to sell the property as previous attempts, including leasing, have not been successful. There is a new focus on residential use. RV thanked Lisa Hassler for her considerable help with suggestions and the RFP which closes on March 28th. RV forwarded information on the house to other local Historical Commissions and posted on the Circa Old Houses website. A 3-D walk thru was produced. RV then shared the Push Piece with the Commission. An Open House is scheduled for March 3rd at 10 o’clock. There have been six inquires and one candidate indicating a serious proposal. The starting bid is $5,000. It is estimated that the structure will need $450,000 for renovation. The Town is concerned not just with the price but promise of maintenance is a priority and will favor a team with experience for the rehabilitation. Any plan will be reviewed by the Massachusetts Historical Commission.

Bill Daley inquired about the $50,000 for stabilization of the Deacon Eldred House approved by the Town years earlier. RV reported that the funds were spent in totality to “patch” the roof and foundation of the property. BD also asked if CPA monies would be available to a future owner as it is a private property. RV reported that an individual could apply. LH then stated that CPA funds usually are awarded to non-profits but could go to a private owner if certain restrictions are accepted. BD, following up on an earlier inquiry by the Chair suggesting that the requirement of public access to the Pond from the property and the house be open to the public twice a year, would be a disincentive to some prospective buyers. RV replied that the Town Selectmen will review but proposals accepting public access will be favored. RV mentioned that the Town does need access to the dam for maintenance work. The SHC favors owner use for private residence versus Airbnb and summer rental use of the house.

BD thanked the Town for undertaking the sale of the Deacon Eldred House; RV thanked LH again for her help and advice. The SHC Facebook page will feature the proposed sale.

2. Correspondence / Statements / Announcements.

Future meetings will be held either on Zoom or in person, to be decided on a month-to-month basis as the Town has extended official virtual meetings until July 15th.

LH reported on the response to an email inquiry from the SHC about the security and safety of the Commission’s asset files, stored in the Public Library’s basement. Deb Rich, Town Archivist and Reference Library, replied to the Chair that the Library is working to implement a disaster plan to safeguard materials. The Mass Board of Library Commissioners and the Northeast
Documentation Conservation Center have been contacted for guidance. The Library Director will be informed of the need to inform appropriate Town offices and the Fire Department in the event of an emergency. DR did inform that the basement sprinkler system is a “Dry” system, with no water-bearing pipes in the ceiling. The Archive area of the Public Library remains unlocked although locks are planned. DR provided the hours of open coverage in the Library for the historic archives. DR reported that the SHC Asset Files are slated to be moved upstairs. LH thanked DR for her hard work.

LH alerted the SHC of the March 8th Cape Cod Commission Historic Preservation Roundtable Virtual Workshop and urged members to attend if they are able to do so. Topics to be discussed: Zoning Incentives for Historic Preservation and Using the Community Preservation Act for Historic Preservation Projects.

BD reported on an inquiry from Jim Fasoli about public access to the historic pathway at 36 Asa Meigs Road. The SHC has no knowledge of the property or of the issue of the recently sold house.

LH sent an email with the SHC Strategic Plan to the LCP. There will be opportunities still to contribute to the document as meetings are ongoing.

Mahlon Peterson was questioned about the removal of an historic tree on 6A. The Town does not have a designation for Historic Trees. Julia Blakely will investigate jurisdictions that do. BD mentioned that the idea has been talked about previously. Brenda Kelly stated that there was already more than enough work already for the Commission and should be cautious of undertaking anything more at this time.

3. There was no Public Forum.

4. Staff Meeting. Bill Daley announced that, after 18 years of service, he would be resigning from the Commission and that this would be the last meeting he would be attending. In expressing her appreciation, the Chair noted BD’s extraordinary breath of knowledge and tremendous amount of work he has undertaken for the SHC, including leading wildly successful walking tours of the Historic Village. BD expressed willingness to help train someone to take over the successful and popular historic home marker program.

5. New Business. BD reported on 20 Church Street and its marker that he had researched several years ago, labeled Thomas McDermott, c. 1850. A descendant, Phyllis Provost McNeill, of a family who long occupied the house, questioned the accuracy of the sign, believing that McDermott was just the developer of the property. BD believes that the cost of the recorded sale ($1250) to James Park indicated that structures were already on the property at the time of the transaction. BD asked the Commission if the marker should be changed to McNeil’s recommendation, who offered to pay for a new one. The current owner will accept whatever the SHC decides. MP asked if the lettering could include both names. Members formally approved this solution.
6. Old Business.

JB reported on her work for a draft of Town bylaw to discourage the destruction of historic properties. She attended a Massachusetts Historical Commission webinar entitled “Adopting a Demolition Delay Bylaw or Ordinance” where she learned that such a bylaw would not be applicable in local historic districts. There would therefore be no need to have such a bylaw apply only in Sandwich’s Old King’s Highway District. Since the SHC draft document applied to houses 100 or more years old within its historic districts, there was discussion of how to proceed with preserving the Town’s historic structures from demolition. After some talk of new zoning regulations, RV stated that the Town does not have “Spot Zoning” and suggested forming a new strategy. Discussion followed on how, or if, the Commission should focus on the few houses of that age outside of the districts or concentrate its efforts elsewhere to help preserve the historic fabric of the Town. It was decided to bring up that matter at a future meeting. BK will work on compiling a list of structures of 100 or more years outside of established historic districts in the Town of Sandwich.

MP reported on his previously suggested idea of promoting a history project that involves working with high school students studying video production. The first subject he suggested would be the Wing Fort House in East Sandwich. This undertaking has been met enthusiastically by David Wheelock and the High School.

BK continues to work on compiling a database of all the historic houses in Sandwich, listing dates of 858 homes that the Town records and comparing it to the dates provided in MACRIS [Massachusetts Cultural Resource Information System], a resource maintained by the Massachusetts Historical Commission. BK is still in the process of sorting the information but is finding significant discrepancies between the two lists, some as much as a hundred-year difference.

The Chair adjourned the meeting at 7:35 pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Julia Blakely