

Montague Historical Commission Board Meeting



Thursday April 30, 2020
11am-1pm, 1 Avenue A, Turners Falls, MA

MINUTES

Role Call: Ed Gregory (chair), Jeffrey Singleton, Chris Clawson, David Brule,
T.O.M: Suzanne LoManto (vice chair), Walter Ramsey, John Zellman, Steve Ellis

11:01am: Meeting is opened by E.G.

No Public comments

Vote to accept the minutes of October 21, 2019. J.S. argued that the October minutes do not give the reason why we put off the discussion of the Strathmore demolition project until January (and then why it did not appear on the agenda of the next meeting, which turned out to be February), A key reason we did not discuss it during these meetings was that we were led to believe there would be no demolition in the near future, only an abatement. **MOTION FAILS.**

Vote and accept the minutes of February 20, 2020
EG (Y) CC (Y), SL (Y) DB (A) JS (Y) MOTION PASSES

11:13am: Allocation of M.H.C. funding: Two recipients are being considered: Spinner Park sculpture and the Doug Smith mural in Millers Falls. JS has questions about the sculpture surface why the project is short money. W.R responds that funding for the park project come from a community block grant; a small match is required by the Town and a separate obligation. The Town cannot tap into other funds for this sculpture. Walter recommends splitting the two projects in two fiscal years, funding both projects. D.B. highlights the importance of the mural as part of the new river walk.

MOTION by J.S. to accept WR's suggestion to fund both projects in two consecutive fiscal years. DB Second the motion. S.L. recommends the mural project FY20 and the sculpture project FY 21. VOTE CC (Y), JS(Y), DB (Y) EG (Y) SL(Y) MOTIONPASSES

11:26 Montague Historical Commission support: Gill Historic Commission to remove the historically incorrectly-worded plaque on the west side of the Gill abutment of the Turners Falls-Gill Bridge installed by MassDot. CC supports the Gill petition since there is documentation of the correct name of the bridge. DB supports Gill's petition. JS asks if we want a correct replacement plaque. (No. just a removal. The bridge is well marked.) JS comments that the MHC should have all documentation for anything coming up for a vote.

MOTION by EG to support the Gill Historical Commission petition CC (Y) DB (Y) SL(Y) JS(Y) EG (Y). MOTION PASSES 11:31am. Ed Gregory will write a letter of support which will be circulated in the commission. SE will get the petition on the Select Board agenda and request their support for the Gill petition, as well.

11:35 Montague Historical Commission role in evaluating Strathmore abatement and demolition projects, including update on building condition and any related developments from of smoke stack demolition from Town staff.

WR update: The smokestack will be demolished as part of the abatement project for safety reasons siting falling bricks, and 8 cubic yard of soot

JS objects to the demolition of the smoke stack strongly as well as process by Town hall. JS wants a feasibility study, especially to save the “KPC” part of the stack. JS does not think we should be demolishing the smokestack this without considering other option, remarking “it hasn’t been on the agenda for over a year.” JS emphasizes that the project was always framed as an abatement project, not a demolition project. In February 2020, the smokestack was part of the RFP but not part of the February MHC meeting. “It’s wrong. We had an evaluation a little less than 2 years ago, and that evaluation said it is NOT ready to collapse.”

It is JS’s recollection is that he “ accepted putting off the discussion of the Strathmore because he believed that the town had decided not to implement a demolition - only an abatement- because we did not have funds for a demo. So an MHC discussion of Strathmore demolition, which all town officials seem to support as consistent with state MHC policy, was not time sensitive. Note the committee voted to delay the discussion until Jan 20 but there was no Jan meeting and at the Feb meeting town officials did not inform the MHC of the smoke stack demo and it was not on the agenda.” JS plans to file a protest with the Mass Historical Commission based on the chronology.

DB discusses a May 24, 2019 letter from **V. Simon**. Because the smokestack is listed as a National Historic Places, DB doesn’t have paperwork that forgoes the demolition or discusses alternatives that mitigate the removal of the smokestack. 1) Does not have the letter to proceed. 2) The MHC has status and should be respected. Asks for clarification from the Town.

WR: Mass Historic has been notified and there is mutual agreement in the safety issue. Another grant from Mass Development for abatement by the company Tighe and Bond who reached out to Mass Historic (E. Shevon?) and reports they will not go against human safety. But we need to file notification on the project. We can file a PNF about the stack demo and feedback from the commission would be helpful.

John Zellman (fire chief and emergency manager) sites October 31, 2018 letter to the Montague Select Board reporting the serious deterioration of the smokestack which poses a danger to workers/ staff/ and abutting property. Top 15’ of the smokestack are without mortar.

11:52am: JS comments that he wants to preserve the “KPC” part of the smokestack as a historical relic, and notes that the MHC wasn’t given the opportunity because demolition was NOT part of any agenda. Also, there is documentation that the smokestack is not as unsafe as being described. Furthermore, JS questions the application for State abatement funds, which lists the goal of “reuse of the Stathmore” – misrepresentation as a restoration project.

CC: What is the goal for this agenda item? Clarification requested.

WR: "Request would be if the commission is going to object to the smokestack being demolished."

JS: When they deconstruct the tower is it brick by brick?

WR: Bricks will remain on the site.

JS: Can we keep the bricks for the KPC for a future rebuild?

SE: Questions whether we can keep those bricks, and warns against making an assumption about a step in a work process that we do not understand. The precision to remove these bricks would add considerable cost so we cannot promise that.

November 10, 2018 and December 10, 2018 Findings are exactly the same: the smokestack is not exactly safe and the top should be removed as a temporary safety measure. The majority of the stack has no mortar and coming down in parts. (*Documents to be included*)

SE encourages more robust conversations in the future with the MHC, mentioning the Strathmore footbridge (from Canal St.) also in unsalvageable condition.

JS Wishes there were earlier discussion about the footbridge project and asks why there is not a feasibility study about the foot bridge. Is it still part of negotiations with FirstLight?

SE Without abatement there is little chance to redevelopment the site. Requests that the Strathmore footbridge should be on a future MHC meeting.

JS: Can we at least request that we separate the bricks.

SE: Yes. It will be investigated as an option.

12:12pm Agenda Norms for getting an item on the agenda.

CC: The role of the MHC is an advisory board, and should consult the Town for agenda items.

J.S disagrees with CC and states the default position of the chair and committee should be to put requested items on the agenda. DB and SL agree, wanting a more open process.

SE: The Town does not need to micro manage the MHC.

CC yields to the group.

DB sites Massachusetts law "...responsible for preservation planning in the community.

Which includes sites, research, etc?" (*Included in the record*)

JS: It is his recollection that "we voted to follow the Selectboard policy re public comment which is to have public comment at the beginning of the meeting on items not on the agenda and to allow limited comment and questions during items that are on the agenda after they are discussed by board members and respecting time constraints. "

*J.S. Makes a MOTION that agenda items to accept agenda items Seconded by D.B.,
CC (Y) SL (Y) DB(Y) JS(Y) EG(Y) MOTION PASSES.*

12:29 Construction of a solar farm on Millers Falls Road

DB Requests an archaeological survey prior to ground disturbance, siting the ceremonial hill as the center of a 16 mile cultural landscape. DB believes it is entirely within our prevue to request

this survey. There are likely paleo /Indian and early colonial remnants.
DB requests that the committee weigh in on “due diligence.”

WR: This project went through zoning several years ago, and a re-hearing recently. WR notes that the MHC did not exist when this project was originally permitted and the project is cleared for a building permit. Because of the small size of the project, State requirements were not triggered. The Town of Montague has no further responsibilities.

DB and JS acting as commissioners of the MHC will like to get in touch with the State archeologist and has experience with the French King solar farm. DB stresses how important that particular parcel is because of known burials.

Topics not anticipated within the 48-hour posting requirements:

JS Oldest building in Montague Center (17 Old Sunderland Rd., Montague Center) is for sale. Do we have a responsibility? (None, because it does not use State historic funds)

DB We should inventory historic structures?

WR: We have an inventory in four villages.

WR is writing a description for the Preservation Massachusetts *Storytelling Series* about the Redevelopment work in Millers Falls, using historic tax credits.

DB would like the commission to take their responsibilities seriously and requests a monthly meeting and a single point person for communication.

Suzanne will send out a doodle poll.

MOTION to ADJURN 12:54 pm Seconded by DP. Meeting is adjourned.

Minutes Submitted by Suzanne LoManto, Vice Chair

Signed:

Ed Gregory, Chair

Date: