

Royalston Historic District Commission
Minutes of Meeting

DATE: April 21, 1981
TIME: 7:30 P.M.
PLACE: Phineas Newton Library

PRESENT: Bob Gravley, John Poor, Doreen Simmington, Weino Kirkman,
Tom Musco, Colleen Richardson, Mary Jane Green.

Meeting was convened by Chairman Bob Gravley at approximately 7:35 P.M.
Secretary read the minutes of the meeting held on March 26, 1981,
and they were accepted as read.

REPORT FROM BOB GRAVLEY:

Bob Gravley stated that the general purpose of this meeting is to go over a few of the suggestions and facts that he learned while he attended the Local District Association meeting held on Saturday, April 11th. He reported that most of that meeting centered around certain issues to make sure that the individual committees were taking care of the legalities involved with decision making.

He found that the primary experience he had coming from the meeting was that we were an average commission. The types of problems we were encountering were similar to many other commissions. Some commissions have run into trouble and there are litigations: generally the courts are ruling in favor of the commissions if the point in question follows in general with what the commission has been doing. If it looks as if the commission has been sloppy, then the court rules against the commission.

Bob made a list of certain things we need to discuss, they include some of the following:

When an application comes in, there should be a check list of information needed on that particular subject: i.e. windows; stock used, general proportions, number of panes, etc.

The fourteen day period starts after the application is accepted, a check list would facilitate the process.

Bob will try to obtain a check list from those commissions he knows has them already.

Bob will make up a tentative check list for us to vote on from his own experience and from any lists he may obtain.

What is "14 days" in our by laws, paragraph Public Hearings.

What exactly do we mean when we say "14 days"? Does this mean straight, consecutive days, business days only, etc.

Abutters: what do we mean by abutters? Do we include these neighbors diagonally across from the property?

If an applicant comes in with an application and want to waive the hearing, we must be able to tell that applicant exactly what signatures he needs. This policy must be decided in advance and must show consistency.

FORMATION OF SUB-COMMITTEE:

It was decided that the best way to come up with working definitions of terms we must clarify, is to set up a sub-committee to work on this, and report back at the next meeting.

Sub-committee: Bob Gravley, John Poor, Mary Jane Green.

Insertion: this section is being inserted, because the secretary mis-copied the minutes when typing them over, and mistakenly left the following paragraphs out:

John Peer added that the applications we pass favorably on are not apt to be questioned unless there is action by a 3rd party. Most likely there would be litigation when we voted that an owner could not do something. The likelihood, since there are only 40 houses, is slim, but we must be realistic and tighten our loopholes so we do not invite it.

We need to set up a format for hearing: the usual is: proponents, opponents, then rebuttal. No decision can be made at a hearing. Bob reported that a written opinion must be written before rendering a decision. It is recommended that a viewing prior to a decision, but after a hearing, be made, taking into consideration proponent/opponent views.

Aspects dealing with Certificate of Hardships:

Bob continued to report recommendations from the meeting: Concerning Hardships: 1. can be granted when there is substantial hardship to the owner; must concern the building, not the lot on which it stands. 2. commission has the right to ask for financial reports. 3. hardship certificate can be granted if it does not "hurt" the public welfare. 4. ..can be granted ~~if/it~~ only if it does not violate the integrity of the district. (paragraph 2, 40C.)

Topics we need to define:

public way.....abutter.....14 days.....concurrent vote.....opinion on vinyl siding.

(continued on page 2b)

Bob Gravley's report, continued:

It was also learned that all alternative energy applications should be passed under Hardship.

We also need to put in writing, detailed descriptions of the houses in the district.

When making a decision, there has to be a written opinion as to how and why the Commission made the decision it made.

We need to make a detailed list; look at each house (porches, type of siding, size of windows) This description should be included in the opinion.

Bob has a copy of a written opinion from the Springfield Commission.

In general, rulings are in favor of commissions. If we ever have to go to court, it is recommended that we; 1. get an outside, expert opinion. 2. members need to memorize paragraph 7, dealing with the responsibilities of a commission. Most lawyers are unfamiliar with historic commission work; we would need to brief the lawyer well.

Tom Musco commented that it appears we should decide on our general view on various things, i.e. slate roofs, vinyl siding. Weino Kirkman agreed, saying we should decide in general, before personalities enter into it. → see page 2 A

Bob Gravley continued, stating that exterior lighting appears to be a common type of issue, both security and street lighting..

Another major issue concerns colors; in order to facilitate in this issue, it is recommended that a set of colors be available which the commission agrees are compatible with the district. (Secretary read from the by-laws on paint responsibility).

Also, sign dimensions can be an issue: Commission felt that the Town by-laws are fairly clear on this (secretary to check on this),

The afternoon session consisted primarily with problems concerning alternative energy devises. Generally, reasons are economic. We can not deny that the problem exists. Most people present felt that alternative energy changes could be done without interrupting the historic integrity if done reasonably, and incorporated reasonably into the surroundings.

The bottom line however, is that the commission should encourage people to tighten up their houses, before turning to alternatives; is the house well-insulated, etc.

Specifics on application: should be very detailed, giving angles, orientation. Should include financial savings. A third party opinion as to the over-all affect of the proposed system should also be given. (This should not be from the supplier). The commission should make sure that the system to be installed really works, is installed in the very best location. Pay back period needed in application. In general, commissions are encourage the placement of solar panels on the ground in the front roof of the building is south-facing.

If pay back period is too long, it may be longer than lifetime of installation.

John Poor stated, even if in the opinion of the third party, the pay back period is too long, what happens if the owner still wants to proceed with the installation.

Bob stated that legally, ^{alternative energy} which affects the exterior structure, can not be in an historic district.

Tom Musco stated that an economic analysis would be very costly. Bob Gravley said that is what we would require before accepting an application: it is the responsibility of the applicant.

It was recommended that the applicant meet with the commission before applying for an alternative energy application. Generally, the pay back for a hot water system is too poor, unless the family is larger than four people.

Vinyl siding: Generally, most commissions are anti-vinyl siding. Some commissions have had battles over this issue, and even almost became extinct (esp. on the cap). The historic commission in Springfield is allowing vinyl installation, but has stipulated some fierce controls on it. For example, the clapboards must be the same dimensions, corner boards must be the same. If the contractor can not duplicate the unique characteristics of trim, etc. then they can not cover it. Increased cost is so much, that applications are few, and door to door sales are down.

Question as to what was said about the structure when vinyl siding is used: the increased specifications used by Springfield, have actually increased ventilation allowing more breathing space, and may not do as much damage as the conventional vinyl siding.

We need to, as a commission, decide what our stand will be on vinyl siding. It was noted that we must compile data about characteristics of the Royalston houses, i.e. are clapboards 3" or 4"

Bob Gravley reported that the sense he got from the meeting April 11th was not fear of litigation, but that we should tighten up a little on our procedures.

Report from that meeting concerning Federal funding; basic reality of the economic situation, there is no federal money. There will be a skeleton crew of approximately 5 in Mass. to concern itself with the National Register money. The current registration has temporarily ceased until August to update guidelines and procedures.

Brief discussion about the houses in the Royalston district:

1. all are white, except French residence.
2. extreme rural setting
3. in the common area, there are no 20th century buildings, except the school.

Comment about the Anderson-Notter report: believe Art Plant has our copy. Bob Gravley will ask him for it.

Bob Gravley said that there will be another meeting in the fall, possibly in Fitchburg.

NEW BUSINESS:

We have received a letter from the Massachusetts DPW concerning the proposed road work to be done on the South Royalston Road. THE DPW letter stated that it is our responsibility to comment on the effects (if any) on any historic sites that the road might have.

*after the
Public hearing.*

Bob Gravley reported that John Peer, M.J.Green, and he went to view the old school house site; current recommendation is to move marker up onto old foundation. Although it is difficult to tell exactly how close the road will go to the old foundation, it appears that the new road will not affect the drive or schoolhouse site. We are prepared to give a tentative go ahead only, until we can see a specific map which shows us exact location.

Subject of cow path or pass; Tom Musco brought up the fact that at the hearing concerning the new road, a cow path which goes under the road, above the church, would be affected. This cow pass is constructed of stone. Tom reported that as a member of the Conservation Commission, he wrote a letter concerning the environmental impact of the brook. John Peer stated that he would call Mr. Lawrence (owner of property on which the cow pass is located) and ask him his concerns.

Back door on Town Hall:

The secretary reported that Willard Newton had called her regarding the rear door of the Town Hall. Money has been appropriated to fix this door, and the question came up at the last Selectmen's meeting as to whether the Historic District Commission had any jurisdiction over the type of door to be used. Question was brought up as to definition of public way, and whether the parking lot was one. Consensus from the members present is that the door needs to be fixed, and since the money has been appropriated, and it can not be seen from the street, that the door should be replaced without further action from the Commission. Bob Gravley will call Mr. Newton regarding this.

Meeting adjourned at approximately 9:55.

Respectfully submitted,

Mary Jane Green

Mary Jane Green
secretary