



## Town of Stow HISTORICAL COMMISSION

Stow Town Building  
380 Great Road  
Stow, Massachusetts 01775  
[www.stow-ma.gov](http://www.stow-ma.gov)

December 9, 2009

Brona Simon, Executive Director  
Ryan Maciej, Technical Consultant  
Massachusetts Historical Commission  
220 Morrissey Boulevard  
Boston, MA 02125-3314

Dear Ms. Simon and Mr. Maciej,

The Stow Historical Commission (SHC) has learned that a Project Notification Form (PNF) was filed in November by Symmes Maini & McKee Associates (SMMA) on behalf of the Stow Elementary School Building Committee (ESBC, or the Applicant). Your commission's identification number for the project is 47391.

The PNF discusses the Applicant's proposed demolition of a structure, the Peter Larsen Apple Barn (also referred to as the Stone Building), that the SHC considers significant to the historic character of the town as a tangible artifact of Stow's agricultural heritage. Past proposals for renovation of the Center School campus called for the retention of the Apple Barn, and the SHC was caught unawares of a change in direction under the present membership of the ESBC and the current school architect. A similar situation exists with regard to the 1914 Larsen Blacksmith Shop, a wood-frame building on the edge of the property.

The Applicant states that demolition is necessary for the construction of the new/renovated school and associated facilities and suggests the relocation of the Blacksmith Shop. The area at issue involves parking spaces and access lanes. It is important to note that a recent Special Town Meeting and following election overwhelmingly approved the school project. However, the question of the Apple Barn's removal was not considered other than being wrapped into the overall project. The concomitant dismantlement of the Apple Barn was not generally known until raised at the Town Meeting by the SHC, which noted its opposition to the planned removal of an historic structure.

SHC members do not in any way wish to jeopardize the funding or viability of the new school project. However, in its role as guardian of historic structures in the town, the SHC

opposes dismantlement of the building until it is clear that there are no feasible alternatives. It does not appear to us that any alternative plans have been seriously considered – the Applicant has stated that it has “explored multiple options during the Schematic Design phase” but at no time did it seek to consult with the SHC.

The SHC hopes that minor modifications to the current plan, involving traffic circulation and parking, can be made to prevent its demolition. As has been demonstrated by knowledgeable and concerned citizens of the town, the Apple Barn can be easily retained; demolition is not “required.” A sketch plan and memorandum from the town’s former Highway Superintendent, an engineer by training, are attached for your consideration.

We have been told by the Applicant that the Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA) “won’t allow” the ESBC to retain this building. In fact, MSBA project managers stated in a conversation with an SHC member on December 7<sup>th</sup> that the operative issue would be the extent to which it would impact the scope and education budget of the project – suggesting that while this would require some study it was quite possible. They also noted that if the building were not used to house an educational program, it most likely would not count against the school’s allowable square footage.

For MHC's consideration, we specifically hope that the MSBA will document whether retention of these buildings will somehow jeopardize funding of the overall project, as we have been told by the ESBC.

We note that demolition of this structure would trigger review under the Massachusetts Environmental Policy Act (MEPA), unless the project is subject to a Determination of No Adverse Effect by the MHC or is consistent with a Memorandum of Agreement with the MHC that has been the subject of public notice and comment.

Clearly a finding of No Adverse Effect is inapplicable, and we would urge the MHC to direct the Applicant to develop alternative parking and traffic circulation approach that would allow for the preservation of the Peter Larsen Apple Barn.

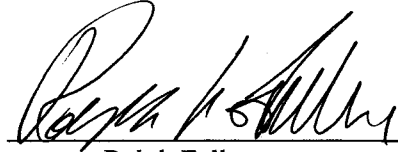
We note that, in response to recent public questioning about the proposed dismantlement, the Applicant has made some effort toward exploring the possible relocation of the Apple Barn. The SHC understands that relocation of this fieldstone building would be extremely costly. More importantly, relocation would mean the loss of the cultural value associated with the structure's preservation as an on-site artifact of Stow's historical landscape, as well as the role of agriculture in the very center of the town in the early half of 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

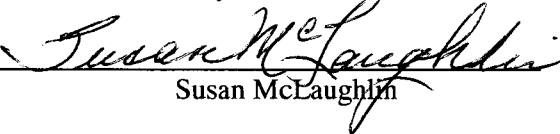
The SHC thanks the MHC for the opportunity to comment on the proposed demolition of the Larsen Apple Barn and we look forward to working cooperatively with the ESBC toward a plan that retains the Apple Barn on its current foundation.

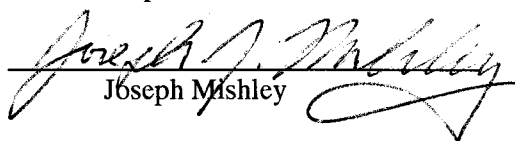
Very truly yours,

The Stow Historical Commission:

  
Wayne Fletcher

  
Ralph Fuller

  
Susan McLaughlin

  
Joseph Mishley

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Linda Stokes

Attachment: Memorandum, dated 11/27/09, and sketch plan, dated 12/6/09, by Bruce Fletcher

Cc: Stow Elementary School Building Committee  
Massachusetts School Building Authority

To: The Elementary School Building Committee

From: Bruce Fletcher

Re: Stone Building preservation

Date: November 27, 2009

I have spent much of my adult life trying to make a positive impact on the character of this town and the preservation of its heritage through decisions made in the many roles that I have played over the years. So, I find it extremely disturbing that Stow could lose a significant historic property needlessly. Saving the stone building could, in fact, be an asset to this project and to the site, for centuries to come, in my opinion. The stone building is *not* in the way of progress.

The townspeople made it clear that they wanted the stone building and blacksmith shop saved when the original school was proposed. Even back then, they recognized the significance of those two structures. Was it town character, culture, or heritage they had in mind, or perhaps all three? A single person or group of people at any given point in the long history of a town, during which those little things that define a town's character have accumulated, can make a significant and irreversible change to that character, through the addition or removal of one or more seemingly insignificant things.

The legacy of Chief Peter Larsen and his farm, and the way its remaining structures are representative of our town's culture and heritage in so many ways, are too numerous to mention here. This should not be taken lightly. The ESBC worked to save the Center School and should be commended for that. But, the ESBC voted to have the stone building removed, changing the character of Stow Center forever. Only the ESBC has the power to change that vote.

So, why are we being told it has to go away? Numerous arguments have been given to answer that question. I have listened to them all, and I have heard many reasons why it would be *difficult* to save, and no reason why it *can't* be saved.

The arguments and my responses are as follows:

1. Argument: *The educators say the building has no place in their educational plans.* Response: This apparently originated with the architectural team interviewing the "educators" (the Superintendent, et al). The architectural team was told by them that the stone building had no place in the future of education on that site. So, right from the start, the architects removed the stone building from the picture. The question they forgot to ask was whether or not the stone building had any other value, other than educational.
2. Argument: *The building is in the path of the most desirable traffic circulation.* Response: The stone building is about 76 feet from the main school building. The architect's plan shows the driveway with a jog to the west so that half the width of a 24-foot wide driveway is going over the footprint of the stone building. A one-way circulation does not require a 24-foot width (the current access is 20 feet wide which is wide enough for two-way traffic, and the standard for one-way traffic is 14'), so a reduction of width and a minor shift eastward could easily be made, leaving the stone building intact and actually

- making the driveway straighter. The currently proposed circulation of traffic can be maintained and perhaps even improved. Even with sidewalks on each side of the driveway to accommodate foot traffic, this could easily leave 45 to 50 feet of playground width at its narrowest area, between the driveway and the main school building.
3. Argument: *The building will displace 7 parking spaces, and to replace them will require blasting and tree removal on the grassy knoll.* Response: Most of the western half of the present footprint of the stone building appears to be shown as a planting strip, not parking spaces. The adjacent spaces impacted could be shown as compact car spaces, and the entire lot could be drawn a few feet to the west. And/or the one-way flow on the western side of the lot could be reduced in width, and/or the proposed planting strips that take up a huge amount of parking space could be dramatically reduced or eliminated. They are in the way of snow removal anyway. Also, the number of spaces shown in the proposed lots off of Hartley Road was reduced significantly from earlier plans, and all the parking spaces in front of the existing gymnasium have been eliminated from the plans. So there is plenty of room on the site for parking. Additionally, putting parking on top of a septic system is not only permissible, but prudent, when trying to minimize site disturbance. So the argument that parking off Hartley Road was eliminated to make more room for the septic system is not logical.
  4. Argument: *The MSBA won't allow the building to stay, because if it stays, there will be more square footage of building on the site than the MSBA allows.* Response: The ESBC states that they would be "assessed" its square footage, yet the architect is presumably planning on providing space on the site for storage of maintenance equipment. This could be that space. Even if it exceeded the allowable space eligible for reimbursement, and if there aren't enough funds already appropriated for excluded items, local historical preservation funds could be used for the balance. The architectural team has admitted that the stone building was never included in any plans ever submitted to the MSBA. So, by the sounds of it, the MSBA has never been asked nor given an argument for saving the building. According to MSBA regulations [963 CMR 2.06 (4)(b)], the space standards may not necessarily be applicable to reconstruction, renovation or repair projects; further stating, "The Authority shall consider Proposed Projects on a case-by-case basis and in some cases different square footages may be determined at the discretion of the Authority." I think a compelling argument could be given to the MSBA for the preservation of a significant historical structure, if someone was willing to make that argument.
  5. Argument: *If the building stays on the site it will have to be brought up to all current codes and be made entirely handicapped accessible, even if it's just used for storage.* Response: If the building was left alone or modified to be used just for storage, there is no requirement under the ADA for it to be entirely handicapped accessible inside. ADA Accessibility Guidelines actually state: "Areas that are used only as work areas shall be designed and constructed so that individuals with disabilities can approach, enter, and exit the areas. These guidelines do not require that any areas used only as work areas be constructed to permit maneuvering within the work area or be constructed or equipped (i.e., with racks or shelves) to be accessible." What that means is that all that is required is a door the proper width with proper hardware and a proper ramp. That's pretty easy to accommodate. And since it's less than 12,000 square feet, the Building Code does not require fire sprinklers even if it was used as a garage for motor vehicles. To utilize the

stone building for storage would be the logical alternative to an educational use, since that is what it was originally built for. And since it is a totally separate structure from the main school building it would be classified differently under the Building Code, so it would not fall under educational requirements.

6. Argument: *It will cost between \$700K (down from \$750K originally quoted) up to a million dollars to save.* Response: The amount of money being given as the cost to save the building just plain defies logic. Three quarters of a million to a million dollars to *save* a 2000 square foot single-story building? The argument is that it would need to be completely refurbished. Even if that was true, a reality check is in order. One has to assume that the cost given to the ESBC was based upon square-foot costs to equip the building with all the bells and whistles needed for educational purposes, as if it was all new construction. I don't hear anyone suggesting that it be used that way.
7. Argument: *The MSBA won't allow the building to be used for any purpose not associated with the educational uses of the site.* Response: If it isn't used as a storage building for the school, this building could be excluded from the project. Being divorced from this project and just left alone, its future could be left up to the townspeople. With no MSBA funds being expended, their ability to tell us what to do is diminished. There are other items in the scope of work that are excluded by the MSBA. But, I doubt that any compelling argument has been given to the MSBA that would allow them to make an informed decision about any proposed use of that building, since it was never on the site plans to begin with.

Our school administrators and architects will be long gone in a few years. They have no incentive to save the stone building because there is nothing in it for them. All architects want to show off their masterpieces, and you can't fault them for that. I suspect that in their minds the stone building would detract from their design, giving them a distinct disincentive to try to save the building.

But, there is no reason to assign blame. Having listened to the story several times, I think an unfortunate series of events took place that convinced most of the players involved that the building should be removed, starting with the architect's interview with the educators, who gave honest answers to simple questions. Hopefully the members of the ESBC will be open to the suggestions that some of what has previously been assumed to be correct is actually in error, and that a significant piece of Stow heritage can still be saved without detriment to the current school building proposal.

Not even the blacksmith shop needs to be removed because it's not in the way of anything, and it could be preserved for most of the same reasons as the stone building. But the blacksmith shop has one advantage over the stone building – it can easily be moved.

Most people have become accustomed to seeing the stone building where it is and probably don't give it a second thought. But everyone involved should drive by and try to imagine what the site will look like with the attractive architecture of the current gymnasium tied to the contemporary look of the proposed addition, with no stone building in between. That will be the new character of Stow center.

1" = 100' ±

12/06/09  
B. S. [Signature]

SKETCH PLAN OF  
CENTER SCHOOL  
PARKING AND DRIVE  
OPTION DEPICTING  
TWO-WAY TRAFFIC  
AT WESTERLY SIDE,  
WITH 51 10-FOOT WIDE,  
OR 55 9-FOOT WIDE,  
PARKING SPACES, WITH  
ROOM FOR MORE, AND  
WITH A PLAYGROUND  
COMPARABLE IN WIDTH  
TO CURRENT ARCHITECTURAL  
PLANS.

