

TOWN OF STOW  
GLEASONDALE LOCAL HISTORIC DISTRICT STUDY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the February 3, 2022 Gleasondale Local Historic District Study Committee Meeting

Members present: Margaret Costello, Dorothy Spaulding, Catherine Hammill, Jen Gero

Members absent: Eve Fischer

Margaret Costello called the meeting to order at 2:00PM

*Dorothy Spaulding motioned to approve the minutes of January 20<sup>th</sup>, 2022 as written  
Catherine Hammill seconded*

**Roll Call Vote:** Dorothy Spaulding **-Yea**; Catherine Hammill **-Yea**; Margaret Costello **-Yea**;  
Jen Gero **-Yea**

The Committee held a discussion with Anne Forbes, an Acton resident who has been involved in the creation and administration of historic districts in Acton. Margaret Costello provided an overview of the outreach efforts to date with residents of Gleasondale, and explained the preservation goals for this committee.

Anne Forbes said that creation of historic districts in Acton required outreach to affected residents to understand very clearly which exterior architectural features should be exempt from Historic District Commission review. Anne Forbes said that historic districts can help stabilize property values within the district. Anne Forbes said the committee should try to pinpoint what kind of development could pose a threat to overall neighborhood character.

Catherine Hammill said the committee heard from a Gleasondale resident who is worried that house improvements already must navigate multiple layers of permitting and asked how that kind of concern was addressed when Acton created historic districts. Anne Forbes suggested that an eventual district bylaw allow for historic reviews to happen at the same time as other permitting. Catherine Hammill noted that the historic district in Hudson requires certificate of appropriateness from the Historic District Commission before Building Permits can be applied for. Dot Spaulding noted that Hudson requires a quick turnaround on those historic reviews, and so the delay from this review is limited and known to applicants at the outset.

Catherine Hammill asked how Acton has approached historic districts with a broad diversity of housing styles. Anne Forbes said the historic district commission review should consider the building itself and its own history, and that design guidelines should not make too many blanket prescriptions for specific architectural features. Anne Forbes said design guidelines can be a useful tool for commission and applicant reference, but are not necessary when the district is first created. Anne Forbes said Acton did not create design guidelines until well after the district had been established, based on lessons gleaned from experience. Anne Forbes suggested the committee focus first on the draft district bylaw, with special care given to architectural features exempt from review. Anne Forbes said the guidelines are provided for the benefit of applicants, to give them a sense of what will likely be approved and what may not be approved.

Anne Forbes suggested members of the committee subscribe to the Mass. Historical Commission's (MHC) list serv, which contains a great deal of guidance and knowledge for Historic District Commissions. Anne Forbes said the list serv also includes an archive of past discussion topics that might answer questions members of the committee have. Anne Forbes said one example was a discussion over whether religious structures are exempt from the requirements of a local historic district. Anne Forbes also recommended communication with Jennifer Doherty, coordinator between the MHC and local historic district commissions.

Anne Forbes asked if there are development proposals for the Gleasondale Mill. Catherine Hammill said there are no current redevelopment proposals, although concept planning for a redevelopment was completed several years ago. Anne Forbes said the committee should argue for the need to preserve the historic structure as an argument for creation of the district.

Dot Spaulding asked how to committee can message to people who say they will not support the district until they know what will be regulated. Anne Forbes said the bylaw should be very clear which items are exempt from review and establish language that makes clear that other regulations and state laws will be respected. Anne Forbes said that the bylaw should make clear which things can be advised on but not clearly denied by the commission.

### **Preliminary Study Report – Progress Update**

Margaret Costello said she reached out to an acquaintance about helping draft the preliminary study report previously but has learned they will not be able to assist. The committee agreed that they do not have the capacity to draft the report. Margaret Costello said she spoke with Laurie Burnett, who expressed some possible interest in assisting.

Town Planner Jesse Steadman said the preliminary report also requires a draft bylaw, which is relatively simple to draft. Jesse Steadman said much of the work and research needed for the preliminary study report has already been completed, and a consultant can assist with compiling that work into the requisite document. Jesse Steadman suggested the committee create a scope of services for the preliminary report drafting and solicit some proposals from historic preservation consultants.

The Commission discussed development scenarios and the potential applicability of the historic review. Jesse Steadman said that questions of regulating and preserving certain materials is difficult, as it might not be reasonable to require re-installation of difficult features like wooden gutters or siding. Jesse Steadman said the eventual bylaw should consider if strict recreation of certain features can be waived in favor of a design that respects the overall architecture of a given building.

Planning Staff summarized the three main tasks before this committee: Hosting a springtime forum to detail efforts to date to residents and the broader public, drafting and submitting a preliminary study report on the proposed district to the MHC, and drafting the eventual Historic District Bylaw.

Jesse Steadman suggested the committee reach out to the owner of the mill sooner rather than later about the historic district proposal. Catherine Hammill noted that there may be tax credits available to owners of historic structures. Jesse Steadman said he will need to verify the historic tax credits available for local historic districts vs national register districts.

## **Spring Public Forum**

The Committee discussed a public forum about the proposed district later in the spring. The Committee discussed seeking assistance from local journalist David Mark to speak about the significance of the neighborhood. Jen Gero offered to reach out to David Mark.

The Committee agreed to tentatively schedule the forum for April 20<sup>th</sup>, 2022.

## **Workplan Discussion**

Jesse Steadman said staff can assist with the scope of services for the preliminary study report and try to get an idea from nearby districts about anticipated costs. Jesse Steadman said the scope of services should be mostly limited to compiling previous work.

Assistant Planner Malcolm Ragan said staff can assist with drafting the historic district bylaw but would prefer to wait until the preliminary study report is drafted and there has been a public forum to hear resident feedback.

*Catherine Hammill motioned to adjourn  
Dot Spaulding seconded*

Respectfully submitted,  
Malcolm Ragan