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MELROSE HISTORICAL COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES FOR MONDAY, MARCH 6th, 2023 @ 7PM

This meeting of the Melrose Historical Commission was conducted via in-person participation in the Cassidy Room of City Hall, Melrose

CALL TO ORDER

This regular meeting of the Melrose Historical Commission was called to order by Interim Chair Kate Roberts at 7:00pm. Members present in addition to Interim Chair Roberts were Vice Chair Tom Champoux, Secretary Kimberly Marolda, Joe Hunt, and Shane Egan. General members of the public present were potential MHC members Darren Brown and Alex Schmidt, former MHC member Jim Bennett, and community concern presenter Megan McDonough.

ORDERS OF BUSINESS

The first order of business was to approve the previous meeting's minutes from February 6th, 2023, which were universally approved by the Commission.

Second order of business was to open up the forum for comments from the public of which there was one from Megan McDonough, who was present to advocate against the Northeast Metropolitan Regional Vocational High School (Northeast Metro Tech or NEMT) Building Project on the Saugus-Wakefield border in Wakefield.

This project will establish a new, larger facility to allow NEMT to grow its enrollment by 26% and would continue to serve students in grades 9-12 from twelve surrounding communities: Chelsea, Malden, Melrose, North Reading. Reading, Revere, Saugus, Stoneham, Wakefield, Winchester, Winthrop, and Woburn. Construction is scheduled to commence in early 2023 with tree- / site-clearing and blasting, which will allow for the construction of the new school to begin in September 2023. Once construction of the new building is complete, the existing school will be demolished in early 2026 to allow for site improvements and landscaping, including playing fields, tennis and basketball courts, and parking. The project is scheduled to be completed in fall of 2026.

McDonough appealed to the Commission for historical preservationist attention to be paid to the land being pegged for construction and sought guidance on how to further advocate for the site. NEMT's current location borders the Breakheart Reservation, which has historical significance with supporting archaeological evidence as hunting, camping, and fishing grounds for inhabitants dating as far back as the Paleo-Indians and continuing through the Archaic and Woodland periods. She is asking for a proper archaeological survey to be conducted of the construction site, and hopes the project will consider other parts of the 60-acre site for construction that do not contradict potential historical relevance.

Vice Chair Champoux and former Commission member Bennett both questioned what level of support the Commission could provide due to jurisdiction parameters, as the Commission serves Melrose and not Wakefield, in addition to not having the power to make any decisions for the city.

Bennett mentioned that, as part of the community that contributes to the development of the land, the Commission could write a letter of advocacy, but the question remains as to whom this letter would be addressed. Additionally, per Open Meeting Law, the Commission would need to include the discussion of drafting an advocacy letter on a future meeting agenda to permit members of the public to voice their opinions for or against the letter.

McDonough was advised by the Commission to appeal to both the Wakefield Historical Commission and the Wakefield Historical Society. It was also suggested she write to Tori Kim, Assistant Secretary and Massachusetts Environmental Policy Act (MEPA) Director for the state's Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs.

DISCUSSION

I. Wayfinding Signage Project in Collaboration with Office of Planning & Community Development

a. The Office of Planning & Community Development is installing two outdoor kiosks in the city to assist with pedestrian / bicyclist navigation and has asked for the expertise of the Commission in drafting site-specific narratives of historical significance for inclusion.

    i. Two signs, one for Ell Pond and the other for the intersection of Main St. and Grove St.

    ii. There will be 1500-3000 characters of text space available with room for a QR code.

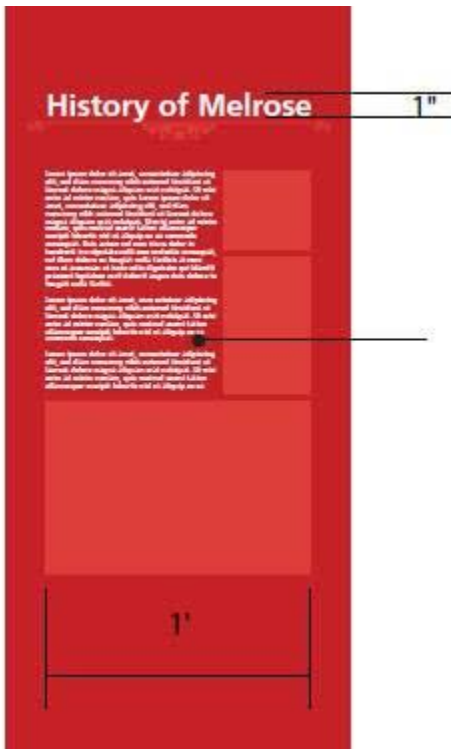
b. It has been decided at previous Commission meetings to dedicate the Ell Pond text to the indigenous population of Melrose and how the natural area served their tribe, with the Main & Grove text being dedicated to the evolution of our Business District.

c. Texts have been submitted for both kiosks.

i. Ell Pond text was developed with support and collaboration from Sagamore Faries Gray of the Massachusett Tribe at Ponkapoag, and the QR code will link to the tribe's website.

d. The Office has requested images relevant to the text for each kiosk (three per kiosk), which would need to be:

- Black-and-white
- 3 x 3 ½ inches, 5 ¾ x 3 ½ inches, and 7 ¼ x 12 inches
- Not requiring a caption (however, text can be incorporated into the image)



i. Former Commission member Bennett suggested historical illustrations of indigenous fisherman with fish weirs, which could be requested from:

1. Department of Conservation & Recreation (DCR) or DCR's Archeology Program
2. Massachusetts Historical Commission
3. Massachusetts Archaeological Society

Vice Chair Champoux has volunteered to initiate outreach to the above programs

ii. Commission member Egan presented historical archival photos representing both areas relevant to the kiosks for review

1. Three photos were selected for the Main & Grove kiosk, which Interim Chair Roberts will forward on to Denise Gaffney with the Office for inclusion.

II. Website Progress

a. A new website would be our ideal primary site moving forward, and any other sites would need to be removed or migrated in order to streamline materials.

b. Vice Chair Champoux reiterated that we are still in the process of migrating from a Wordpress site to a full website in conjunction with City Hall, as City Hall has stated that all content should be contained within the main city website.

c. He stressed that the city website would limit us to only one page, and that the IT department of City Hall suggested they meet in person to discuss options for more space.

i. Interim Chair Roberts and Vice Chair Champoux will meet with the IT department mid-March to discuss options for building out the Commission website within the City Hall website parameters.

III. Research Your Home Night Planning

a. This event has not been in effect since pre-pandemic.

b. Vice Chair Champoux stated that Temple Beth Shalom has agreed to host, provided the event is held on an evening in March, April, or May, and must not be a Thursday.

i. Temple has appropriate presentation technology to highlight demos on how to use available resources and conduct online searches, in addition to Wi-Fi, large presentation screens with Bluetooth / casting connectivity, outlets, ample tables and chairs, and space for each participant to spread out their research.

ii. A reservation request has been submitted for Wednesday 5/10/23 from 7pm – 9pm and we are awaiting a response from the Temple.

c. Egan reviewed the items that are permissible for borrowing from the local history section of the Public Library, in addition to items we can list as further resources after the event from both the Library and City Hall. Egan will continue to gather materials for use at the event.

    i. Former Commission member Bennett has previously mentioned that many items have been digitized since the last event, and that the homeancestry.com account is available for use via the Public Library. Fire Insurance Maps are also available online via the Library of Congress.

    ii. Vice Chair Champoux has previously mentioned that census records online are good resources, in addition to potential resources via the Registry of Deeds and MACRIS to assist with homeowner history and architectural development details.

d. Interim Chair Roberts reviewed advertising options to begin 4/10/23:

    i. Social media posts

        1. Flyers at:

            a. City Hall
            b. Public Library
            c. YMCA
            d. Milano Family Senior Center
            e. MacAuley's House of Vacuum Cleaners
            f. Melrose grocery stores
            g. Any Melrose printed or digital press
            h. City-wide e-mail blast from Mayor Brodeur
            i. Guest spot on "Let's Talk Melrose, Melrose!" podcast and social media show produced at Melrose Massachusetts Television (MMTV) studio
                i. Streams live at 8:30pm each Tuesday
                ii. Bennett was nominated by Vice Chair Champoux to promote as featured guest

e. Interim Chair Roberts volunteered to design the flyer and will draft a PowerPoint presentation to serve as introduction at the event, which can also be circulated to all attendees to use as reference.

    i. PowerPoint draft will be sent out for review to all members of the Commission, which will include further resources attendees can utilize to continue their research (in addition to details on how to use these resources).

f. Agenda for evening will begin with a brief introduction and general overview of how to best utilize any available resources, to be visualized through the aforementioned PowerPoint, with the remainder of the evening opened up for independent work. Lecture-style presentations should be avoided, and the Commission is encouraged to brainstorm ideas as to how to make the event more immersive for attendees.

g. Interim Chair Roberts revisited the idea the event should coincide with the unveiling of our Historic Home Signage Program, with the potential of offering a discount on the Program for any eligible attendees. There will also be a donation box present at these events for attendees to consider.

h. Former Chair Kate Monea previously stated that all attendees should be encouraged to sign up ahead of time online with the address intended for research, as Commission members can prepare the space accordingly in addition to pre-researching each location as a courtesy to each participant. Attendees will be requested to bring their own laptops to use for research at the event.

    i. Secretary Marolda previously suggested that attendees could sign up ahead of time by e-mailing the Commission address, and that the Commission in turn could respond with a short questionnaire including their name, contact information, and address of the property they are interested in researching, along with a disclaimer as to why such information is requested.

    ii. It was recommended at previous meetings that any attendees should fill out a Form B while at the event, provided their house is 50+ years old.

IV. Historic Home Signage Program

a. Commission member Hunt provided an update that he is still waiting on cost quotes from vendors for the plaques, and that some vendors have come back with ranges of $250.00 - $450.00 per plaque. He then suggested that in order to make the Program more affordable to residents, we could perhaps utilize vocational carpentry programs for the creation of these plaques.

b. Egan asked if the program qualifications should be restricted to homes that are 100+ years old or 50+ years old. General consensus from Commission was to be a rolling 50+ years old parameter.

    i. Bennett asked if dates were to be listed on the plaques, and if so, where would these dates be confirmed if the house does not already have a verified Form B? He cautioned that the Commission should be very careful about not listing misinformation.

ii. If the house does not already have a Form B, an independent House Historian would need to vet the house for date accuracy to create a Form B (which is often more expensive than the cost of the plaque).

c. Bennett suggested that it is worth asking local government officials if there are any plans that this program can be tied into (such as whether or not the city has a vested interested in content and look of signage), and that the City Attorney would need to vet the Program for any legal conflicts.

d. Vice Chair Champoux asked who would handle the actual purchase of these plaques

i. Would the Commission place the order and receive the money from the participant, and if so, would that affect pricing as if it were a fundraising event?

ii. Bennett declared that doing so would be a logistical nightmare and advised that the Commission should act merely as a liaison connecting the participant to the vendor.

e. Interim Chair Roberts asked Hunt to reach out the Wakefield Historical Commission and the Wakefield Historical Society to understand the parameters of how their plaque program is administered.

f. There should be a continued focus moving forward on establishing participation cost and plaque aesthetic (look of sign, details listed, placement of sign on the house), in addition to designing an application and verification process to ensure that all details are correct and appropriate for the signage once approved. A guideline for applicants detailing the program will also need to be created.

V. Historical Commission 50th Anniversary

a. Anniversary date of Sunday 10/29/2023, with Mayor Brodeur supporting a public celebration

b. Vice Chair Champoux and Egan met with a representative from the Melrose Chamber of Commerce, who suggested that we join the Chamber as a non-profit (annual fee of $95.00), which would permit the Commission to formally have a discounted presence at various events sponsored throughout the year, such as the Melrose Farmer's Market and the Victorian Fair.

i. The Chamber rep also offered ideas for celebratory events, such as a historic car parade through downtown and offered to review their photo archive for inclusion.

ii. Egan noted that we need to respond to the Chamber about how the Commission can work with them for this photo initiative for shop windows. Egan agreed to follow-up with the rep on what next steps would look like to set up this initiative.

c. Previously recommended ways to include the public in any celebrations:

i. Any business with a window facing the street could be gifted an enlarged photo of their location c. 1973 for window display, potentially partnering with Miter Biter Frame Company and Hunt's Photo & Video to assist with photographic reproductions and framing for these window displays.

1. Vice Chair will reach out to Hunt's Photo for pricing of photo printing

ii. Egan also mentioned area parameters for this initiative; should this be limited to downtown Main Street businesses, or should we also include other business hubs such as Wyoming, Emerson, or the Highlands?

1. Consensus was to open it up to any interested local business

iii. It has previously been recommended that any former Commission members be officially invited to attend any events in celebration of the Commission

1. Former Chair Monea noted that City Hall has confirmed that they are able to provide a roster of all previous Commission members

iv. Previous meeting notes mention the notion of making the celebration a month-long event to coincide with other city events, and to invite other local historians to attend and make presentations

v. Was suggested presenting an honorary award to those in Melrose who have made independent contributions to preserving local history, with Mayor Brodeur presenting the award. It was recommended to name the award after Mary Stetson Clark, as she was the one who originally pushed the concept of the Commission forward.

vi. To promote, it had previously been mentioned that a banner could be added to the Commission website and our social media outlets to celebrate our history, with other suggestions that we could use these mediums to collect and display photos of what life was like in Melrose ca. 1973.

vii. It had also previously been mentioned that we utilize participation in the autumn Victorian Fair to promote any events that are organized, and that it can also be advertised alongside any Research Your Home Nights that may occur

around that time.

VI. High School Internship Program

a. Egan had previously drafted a proposal to connect with the Melrose High School to establish a photography internship, which could be utilized by the Commission to update our archives with interior / exterior photos of historically significant buildings. The High School principal has included the program on the list of approved intern projects.

b. Egan mentioned that there is definite interest from students, but the school is the one that actually places the students in the open positions. He is waiting to hear if anyone will be officially placed from the school into our available internship.

VII. Melrose Historic District Commission Liaison Update

a. There is a separate Historic District Commission that specifically oversees Melrose's Historic District, which includes a sizable portion of the Main St. area. Interim Chair Roberts has volunteered to be the liaison between the two Commissions as there may be content overlap.

b. The Melrose Historic District Commission reviews all proposed architectural changes in the Downtown Historic District to:

   i. Preserve and protect the distinctive and significant characteristics of buildings and places
   ii. Maintain and improve the settings of those buildings and places
   iii. Encourage new designs compatible with existing buildings in the district

   They review proposed changes to buildings, as well as signs, fences, walls, light fixtures, or similar devices that are visible to the public. Building projects that must be reviewed include construction, reconstruction, demolition, and removal of architectural features. The Commission may review the kind, color, and texture of exterior building materials and the type / style of windows, doors, lights, signs, awnings, and other fixtures. The City's Building Commissioner will not provide a building or demolition permit for any construction project or sign located in the Historic District unless the Commission has reviewed the project and issued a Certificate of Appropriateness.

c. The Downtown Melrose Historic District was established in 1979 and has general boundaries following rear property lines bordering Main Street from the intersection of West and East Foster Streets to the south side of West and East Emerson Streets.

d. Interim Chair Roberts will attend the upcoming April 11th meeting and will report back on how the two Commissions can work together in the future.

VIII. Plans for Scott MacAuley's Collection

a. Legacy planning should commence for local historian Scott MacAuley's personal collection, which could be done in conjunction with City Hall, with the Commission acting as the broker of the plan.
b. Vice Chair Champoux suggested connecting with a professional archivist on how we can appropriately catalog and care for his collection to help facilitate a plan for what to do with the items once they are no longer in MacAuley's care.

IX. Term Expirations and Vacated Seat

a. There are Commission members with terms that are nearing completion or have been completed, including the Chair seat, which was recently vacated by former Commission member Monea. The remaining terms nearing completion affect Commission members George Bibilos and Joe Hunt.

b. Bibilos and Hunt have expressed interest in renewing their terms for another three-year commitment, but Monea chose not to renew her term and has stepped down as Chair. Commission member (and current Interim Chair) Roberts volunteered to fill the seat temporarily.

c. Monea's term completion has opened a vacant seat on the Commission (three-year term) for Mayor Brodeur to fill. The City continues to seek recommendations from within the Committee as the search progresses.

d. Interim Chair Roberts and Vice Chair Champoux have been reviewing applicants the Mayor has sent for consideration.

    i. Vice Chair Champoux stated that it is the Commission's responsibility to make a suggestion as to whom we would like to promote, but the Mayor makes the final decision on who to put in front of the voting party of City Council.

    ii. Interim Chair Roberts proposed a final date for applications of April 1st, which Champoux will propose to the Mayor.

    iii. Interim Chair Roberts proposed an Executive Session mid-April to discuss candidates and finalize recommendations to the Mayor.

e. Interim Chair Roberts volunteered to assume the full role of Chair and made a motion to approve. Vice Chair Champoux seconded the motion, securing Roberts as the Commission's new official Chair.

X. Other Business

a. Hunt expressed gratitude to everyone for their feedback and input on the texts he had created for the Grove St. kiosk.

b. Social Media Projects

   i. Former Commission member Bennett currently submits content to the Commission social media accounts and has invited current members to contribute should anyone be interested. Chair Roberts and Vice Chair Champoux are the only current Commission members with log-in credentials to the sites, and posts must go through them to ensure quality and consistency. There is no set social media schedule for postings or any other campaigns currently in place; all posts are currently ad hoc.

   ii. Previous brainstorming sessions for content have taken place, which included:

      1. More short-form concepts to keep with the current trends of social media use
      2. Holiday-specific posts
      3. Blurbs about local events and how they tie into the City's history
      4. Leveraging Commission projects as they become more formalized, such as:
         a. Internship Program
         b. Research Your Home Events
         c. Anniversary Events
         d. Future architectural surveys
         e. Promotion of our website once live
         f. Photographic walking tours of historic neighborhoods

   iii. Bennett passed the torch of posting responsibility to Vice Chair Champoux, who volunteered to receive his post-ready information and post them.

NEXT MEETING

Chair Roberts reminded the Commission of the next scheduled meeting date of Monday, April 3rd, 2023, at 7pm. This meeting will be held in-person at City Hall pending room reservation; a message will be

sent to all Commission members including the location, the agenda for the upcoming April 3rd meeting, and the minutes from the March 6th meeting for review.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned by Chair Roberts at 8:40pm.