

Cohasset Historical Commission Minutes of Meeting

March 13, 2023

Members Present: Merle Brown, Jill Crafts, Jacqueline Dormitzer, Julia Gleason, Mark St. Onge

The meeting was called to order at 6:50 p.m.

Minutes of the previous meeting were approved.

Webpage Update: Mark and Megan have been working on a template for our webpage based in part on other towns' webpages. We will wait until Megan can join us to discuss their ideas.

Proposal for New Local Historic District(s): Scott Ford, former chair of the Hingham Historical Commission and now a Cohasset resident, attended our meeting to discuss Hingham's local historic districts and to answer questions. The Hingham Historical Commission began to establish historic districts in the 1970s and 1980s. Scott noted that it takes about a year of planning to set up a historic district. For each district, a diverse set of volunteers, including district members, made up the study committee. They held about 20 meetings with boards such as Planning, Select Board, and Zoning, and met with property owners in the proposed district. They also held public debates. The most challenging part was persuading owners of nonhistoric properties in the district to buy into the proposal. It was important to get the endorsement of town boards before proceeding, and then to get the support of local district residents. Without the backing of the boards and residents, it would not make sense to go ahead with the project. A two-thirds vote of approval by town meeting is needed to establish a district.

Scott recommended that we begin by defining a new district in a small area with historic homes where one or more have been demolished. We should provide a map of the district for the boards and property owners whose buy-in we need, as well as information about the historic buildings in the district. Preferably, the proposed district should be near an existing one to take advantage of the support of its residents for preservation.

The Historical Commission and the Historic Districts Commission operate separately. The Select Board appoints the members of each board. Scott said that Hingham has benefited greatly from having an administrator who can answer questions from residents and can handle forms and other administrative matters. He also mentioned that the Historic Districts Commission rarely rejected any proposal but worked for consensus with the property owner. Appointing architects and other professionals such as builders to the Historic Districts Commission will help in offering expertise to residents of the new district when planning alterations or new construction. The Mass. Historical Commission and MAPC were helpful in dealing with challenging issues.

Jackie asked the Commissioners to think about possible new districts off Cohasset Common (our only existing local historic district) to discuss at our next meeting. She offered to get a map of the Common and nearby areas from the Assessors Department so we can delineate the boundaries of our proposed district as a first step.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:55.

Respectfully submitted,

Jacqueline Dormitzer, Secretary Pro Tem