

Acton Historical District Commission
Meeting December 13, 2011
Minutes

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TOWN CLERK, ACTON

Meeting was called to order by Chair, Kathy Acerbo-Bachman.

Also present were Pam Lynn, Anita Rogers, Ron Rose, David Honn, Michaela Moran and David Barrat.

Minutes of November 22, 2011 were approved unanimously by consent.

Chair Kathy Acerbo-Bachman presented an update of the two HDC applications for CPC funding. The first is for supplementary funding for landscaping at the South Acton Train Station. The MBTA is budgeting \$60,000, which is deemed to be inadequate to soften the contrast between the new train station and the historic district adjacent to it. The second application is for no-interest or low-interest loans to homeowners whose houses have historic significance but who are unable to make necessary repairs to preserve them.

The landscaping project has three elements to shield adjacent neighborhoods and Jones Tavern, to shield the platform to soften its starkness and to fill in the area between the parking lot and the drop-off site on the north side of the station. The plan needs to show a more definitive, polished plan. CPC is reluctant to commit \$150,000 without seeing a more completed plan. The town will have to hire a contractor. The MBTA will put out bids for landscaping in the spring. MM Should we seek bids after Town Meeting? TM approves the CPC funding. What does the T provide if the TM does not approve the funding? KAB will call Phil Brake concerning what to suggest for landscaping. DH There is no advantage to delay. Advertising for this will be done in January. The T will want the trees etc. in the ground by April. We could do this as supplementary landscaping by way of a normal change order. KAB With a \$60,000 budget, a \$10k supplement won't make much difference in the scope of work. We need to get 3-4 bids. We can do it cheaper but need to have something to price. Fees to prepare a landscaping plan will cost \$25,000. We must have a plan for landscaping in order to obtain pricing.

Noted that Ryan Bettez and his two sons Brendon and Liam came in to observe the meeting.

The estimate for adequate landscaping is \$150,000. Many items are as yet uncertain including the T's right of way and what the town owns. The town does own the plaza. The T will buy property for a right of way. In seeking the \$150K we will not try to phase it in. Need to have our design teamwork with Phil Brake to prepare detailed drawings and prepare answers to technical questions. Will Phil attend a CPC meeting? MM will convene a meeting with RR DH and Peter Lukacic.

Application #2-Low/no-interest loans: Liaison between HDC and CPC is Walter Foster who is pro-active. Found Enterprise Bank to be interested. Held a marathon session. Talked back and forth. There are six similar projects in other towns that are partnering with

Enterprise Bank. Spoke with a representative from Town of Arlington about their programs. CPC funds cannot be used for maintenance. A new roof would qualify but painting would not. CPC would look at all proposals. What work qualifies; can painting qualify if it is a part of a larger project? Not as a stand-alone project.

We need to develop a procedure for bundling applications for approval by the Board of Selectmen. Do we approve projects? Arlington has between 8-12 applications a year. There are 175 buildings in the historic districts. There are more structures on the cultural resources list and designated on the Historic Commission list. We should start with just HDC properties. MM We should include Cultural Resources listed properties. Otherwise there is no protection for those buildings. We need to conduct a broader survey in the interest of preserving the town's character. DH We should be more inclusive. It is a good marketing tool. Suggest a formula of 2/3 of properties in the HD's and 1/3 outside the HDs. We should also discuss this with HC to get their comments. Talk to other related committees. Contact Bill Klauer for his input.

Enterprise Bank likes the zero-interest loan. There are many low interest rate loans right now. There would be minimal red tape. MM 1% loans are not out of the question. Interest might be helpful. Write by-laws to allow adjustment of interest rates. RR favors low interest. DH Do zero-interest rate for the first round. DB Wants nominal rate. TM has to pass it. The loans are usually around \$7,500. MM Thanks to KAB for the time and work that went into this presentation to CPC and the follow-up.

Public Hearing briefing on window signs. MM is presenter. First briefing deals with the town's window sign by-law. In the Historic Districts and Village Business Districts the by-laws are different. Should we make all the sign-by-laws align? This would make the sign enforcement officer's work easier so that he is not overwhelmed. KAB Look at the places where alignment could be had, clearly not in all places. People need to be told that there are differences between the bylaws for the town in general, the HDs and the village center business districts. Consideration to be given to lettering in windows. Information such as hours of operation and credit cards accepted need to be displayed somewhere. KAB Businesses are allowed 1 sign. Do projecting blade sign and window lettering constitute two signs? What about vinyl letters? DH Signs project on sidewalk shines down on sidewalk have as an exclusion. RR The differences between districts should be taken into account. Concord Center is different from West Acton. There is more historic ornamentation in Acton Center than in West Acton. West Acton is more contemporary, an amalgam of architectural styles. Need to have a broader understanding of signs as culture elements. Something not inappropriate in West Acton might be in Acton Center. Non-electric signs are intended to be seen from exterior with specific features. Establish dimensional constraints in each historic district, as they are different in character. There is no business zoning in Acton Center.

The zoning by-law is very complicated. It overlaps from HDs to village business districts.

KAB One sign or two signs per business. Where there are temporary notices such as hours of operation they should be displayed. PL There are conflicts with business owners who

don't understand why the by-laws are written as they are. Most West Acton business are in violation of the current Historic District sign by-law. We need to decide what is appropriate, encourage the pedestrian aspect and consider allowing two signs.

RR Understands Projecting vs. wall signs. Major vs. minor restrictions on secondary signs. How are signs on second floor to be treated? Should corner stores be allowed two signs? KAB each building is different. Consider allowing a corner store to have two signs. AR in Village districts should be limited to only one sign. KAB Even if a corner store?

9:02 Public hearing notice was read by KAB. No citizen participation. MM Gave an overview: Window signs in general; what are window signs. What are appropriate window signs and what are not? KAB Signs that are temporary notices are not covered; there is no guide for these. MM Suggests most businesses attract attention to sales by use of temporary signs. Allowance should be made for some small percentage for notices such as "welcome." Need to detail what is allowed for duration. Businesses on Massachusetts Avenue have no space for sandwich signs. They cannot comply because of a lack of frontage. It would be helpful to have a guideline for such temporary signs. Use of flags in lieu of sandwich signs might be a possible solution. RR Temporary permanent signs are sometimes necessary as in Acton Pharmacy's "Accept all CVS" in the front window. Businesses can apply for temporary signs for a total of 45 days per year with a display limit of no more than one week. DH Temporary "Sale" signs needed to accommodate retail circumstances. RR Retail businesses need "Sale" signs. AR Temporary signs are acceptable. How do we police the 45-day allowance? KAB Temporary signs could be limited to the term of the special event. Temporary signs could be limited in space as well as time for certain events. Different vendors have differing special events. AR Temporary signs should be readily put away.

MM Most expect to see informational signs such as hours of operation and credit cards accepted; just limit the size of the lettering. RR Readability would suggest maximum of 17' by 17" size for informational signs.

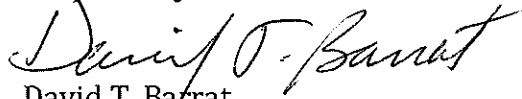
Window signs in General: Board signs in windows. MM These types of signs are not used, not attractive, not effective. Most signs windows are large enough. All agree that board signs should not be allowed. Lighted signs and neon signs are not appropriate. They haven't been allowed in the HDs for many years. RR Internal illuminated signs are ghastly. Neon signs with the name of the business are appropriate. DH There is not enough demand for neon or lighted signs. Not appropriate. PL The existing ones are very jarring.

Lettering in business windows: There are various types; Etched, painted, stenciled or vinyl. Some painted letters look etched. Not opposed to vinyl lettering such as is being used at Mia Bella in West Acton. The lettering is within the 25% allowed space in the window for signs. Use of vinyl is understandable. Businesses just need to come in for design review and the lettering must be applied to the interior surface. One objection is that vinyl letters look like Color Forms. Opaquing is unattractive. DH Prefers to see decals. Use of Plexiglas would limit opaqueness. PL The object is to avoid cluttering. KAB Use of window lettering can vary widely from cheap and tacky to very good. The design review process is critical.

We will give EDC another alert that there is an ongoing public hearing which will be continued so that we can write changes into the bylaw and vote on it. Voted unanimously to continue the public hearing to the next meeting, which is January 10, 2012 at 8PM. The meeting for December 20, 2011 will be cancelled.

Meeting closed at 9:42PM

Respectfully submitted

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "David T. Barrat". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the printed name and title.

David T. Barrat,
Secretary