

Waltham Historical Commission

Zoom Meeting Minutes

January 8, 2024

1. Chair called the meeting to order at 7 PM
2. Secretary called the roll:
 - Commissioner Isaacson, present*
 - Commissioner Daly, present*
 - Commissioner Dufromont, present*
 - Commissioner Egirous, absent*
 - Commissioner Russo, present*
 - Commissioner Migdal, present*
 - Commissioner Wilson, present*
3. Reading and acceptance of the December 2023 meeting minutes:
 - Motion to accept the minutes as written moved by Commissioner Dufromont.
 - Second: Commissioner Daly
 - In favor: ALL** Absent: Commissioner Egirous
4. Announcements
 - Correspondence: The Commission received a PNF for a Section 106 review for cell phone antennas on the roof of the WCAC building, which is on Main Street opposite Ellison Park and Linden Street. The building is not historic, so Commissioner Isaacson felt that there was no need to discuss it further. The Commission does not have to respond to PNFs.
5. Public Hearings: None
6. Development Prospectus Hearings: None
7. Stonehurst Report: None
8. Wellington House: Monthly Report & Update:
 - A subcommittee was formed in December, consisting of Commissioners Dufromont, Egirous and Isaacson, to investigate a plan to present to the city on the Wellington House. Commissioner Isaacson took Commissioner Egirous and Rachel Malley, who is the new Historical Commission office assistant, on a tour of the house because they had not seen it. Commissioner Isaacson felt that Commissioner Egirous got a better idea of the issues there, such as maintenance and parking, etc. Commissioner Isaacson felt that the subcommittee should start looking ahead and forming a plan. Commissioner Dufromont reviewed the report on Wellington House from 2016 that mentioned annual maintenance, and wanted to know if the Historical Commission had been receiving maintenance reports. She said that the house was supposed to be cleaned annually, maintained by the Building Maintenance Department, and grounds maintained by DPW, and wanted to know if the Commission is notified when that work is accomplished. Commissioner Isaacson said that he has never received an official report, but that he didn't see any major problems when he was there.

However, he noticed that the house was not very clean, and there were cobwebs inside. Commissioner Dufromont asked if the gutters had been cleaned yet. Commissioner Isaacson said the gutters had not been cleaned, and felt that it was worth contacting the building maintenance department about it again. Commissioner Dufromont asked if Commissioner Isaacson had ever received reports about maintenance done at Wellington House in the past. He said that Pam Lyons, the former office assistant, used to give him updates when she was working for both the Commission and the building department, but now that she is not the office assistant anymore, he agrees that they need a more formal mechanism of communication. Commissioner Isaacson said that the Wellington House subcommittee should research similar houses run by other municipalities to help formulate a plan for the house. He discussed problems that he was aware of at a similar house in Woburn that had a fire caused by a live-in caretaker. Commissioner Dufromont asked if the stone wall restoration had been completed. Commissioner Isaacson said the project was never started, and may have been part of an older plan from several years ago. Commissioner Daly said it was too expensive to hire a stone wall restoration expert. She said that a lot of vegetation had invaded the stone walls but was cleared away by volunteers from the Waltham Land Trust. She said they were also working in the field, but now the status of that project is in question. Commissioner Isaacson said that the volunteers did a good job of clearing the vegetation from the walls, but it was not ideal to have volunteers attempt restoration of the walls. He said he had a contact at Historic New England who was knowledgeable about stone wall restoration, but then she left Historic New England. Commissioner Daly said that the Historic New England contact estimated that restoration of the walls could cost five figures, so funding would be needed. Commissioners agreed that there were more pressing issues at the house, but Commissioner Dufromont noted that if the stone walls were restored, the property could be registered as a National Historic Landscape, and wanted to know if that was a goal. Commissioner Isaacson said that the stone walls are on grounds not controlled by the Historical Commission. He said the Parks and Recreation Board would have to be involved. Commissioner Daly suggested that they invite the new ward councilor, Bill Hanley, to tour the house. Commissioner Dufromont suggested they invite all the city councilors to tour the house. The Commissioners discussed that there were a lot of new councilors just inaugurated who might be interested in seeing the Wellington House. Commissioner Daly said that some of them, like Councilor LaFauci, might have expertise to lend to the project.

9. Liaison & Subcommittee Reports

Fernald: The fence around the Cardinal Cottage was damaged in a recent wind storm. Commissioner Isaacson notified Robert Waters, and it was fixed immediately. Commissioner Daly said there were trespassers lighting off fireworks on the property around New Years Eve and the police were called. She received a call from a reporter who was concerned because they heard on the police radio that there were wires down and doors broken, but that might have just been a status report on the property.

CPC: Commissioner Wilson had nothing to report from CPC. Their next meeting is February 13th.

Historic Inventory: No report

Education & Outreach: Rachel Malley, who recently started as the Historical Commission office assistant, said that she has received questions and comments on the history of Waltham Government Center, 119 School Street. She said there is no signage in the building about its history. There was also a question from a member of the building department about the lamp posts by the front door that no longer have lights on them. He said that if we could provide photos of what they

looked like, they would be interested in replacing them with something historically accurate or similar. Rachel felt that it would be nice to create a sign with a history of the building to display in the foyer. Commissioner Daly agreed. Commissioner Isaacson discussed the history of the site, starting with Thomas Plympton selling the land to the City of Waltham, still a town at the time, in the 1840s or 1850s. Commissioner Isaacson said that the site has an interesting history, and it would be nice to explain it on a plaque, but was concerned that the Commission doesn't have money in the budget for that, and CPA funds cannot be used for signage. Rachel mentioned that there is currently a display case in the foyer with pictures and information about former Waltham mayor Arthur Clark, for whom the current building is named, and wondered if additions could be made to that display case. Rachel also explained that there is a plaque in the foyer for Bradford Winslow Drake, former principal of the school that used to be there, but nothing about the history of the site or the building itself. She added that signage would also benefit the community, not just the employees in the building, because there are public meetings in the auditorium. Commissioner Isaacson agreed that it would be a good idea, and said that Rachel should ask the building department if they have money in their budget for something like that. Rachel asked if the Commission had any feedback on replacements for the lights on the lamp posts outside of Government Center. Commissioner Isaacson asked Rachel to share the photos that she obtained of the building when the lights were still there. Commissioner Daly suggested that if a plaque was not possible, a history of the site could be printed and framed to display. Commissioners discussed what was in MACRIS about the building, and there is not an extensive history or a good photo of the building there. Commissioner Russo asked where the photo of the building marked "1920" came from. Rachel explained that some of the photos in Dropbox came from Wayne McCarthy at the Waltham Historical Society, and others she found online. Commissioner Daly asked for clarification on where the lights were on the building. Commissioner Russo commented that she noticed how cracked the front stairs of the building were when she looked at the current photos that were in Dropbox. Rachel said that another employee said that they patch the stairs frequently. The picture of the front entrance to the building from 1920 was shown. Commissioner Isaacson said the photo appears to show clear globe lights. Commissioner Isaacson said to show the photos to the building department so they can get an idea of what the lights looked like. Commissioner Isaacson said that the electrical connection inside the columns might be a problem. They ran into the same issue with the lights on a bridge on Seyon St. Rachel discussed that there are solar options. Everyone discussed the options for lighting. Commissioner Migdal said that the proper name of the light is a "pedestal lantern in a globe shape", and that it might have to come in two separate parts, the setting and the globe bulb. Rachel invited the Commission to email any further feedback. Commissioners agreed that Rachel could do some more research on the options for lights. Everyone discussed that outdoor solar lights do not give much light. Commissioner Isaacson also said that Rachel could investigate the options for paying for a plaque or sign about the history of the building and consult with the city's administration on the project.

10. Old Business

Commissioner Daly has postponed writing a letter to the MWRA about the Lawrence Meadow area until the city and MWRA come to an agreement on the placement of the shaft.

11. New Business

None

12. Adjournment

Commissioner Daly moved to adjourn.

Commissioner Dufromont seconded the motion.

In favor: ALL Absent: Commissioner Egrous

Meeting adjourned at 7:43 PM.

Commissioners wished everyone a Happy New Year!