



Holyoke Historical Commission (HHC)

Meeting Minutes

Monday September 13, 2021

Due to the declared public health emergency, the meeting was held virtually via zoom.us

Zoom Meeting ID: 829 0968 6620

Attendance: Richard Ahlstrom, Elana Aubrey, Paola Ferraro, Christopher Gauthier, Frances Welson, Marco Crescentini,

Not in Attendance: Luis Salazar

Municipal Staff: Ben Murphy (OPED)

Others in Attendance: Stephan Huntley (Valley Opportunity Council)

1. **Call to Order** – Richard Ahlstrom called the meeting to order at 5:38 p.m. and announced that the meeting was being recorded.

2. **Review of August 9, 2021 Minutes**

A motion was made by Paola Ferraro and seconded by Christopher Gauthier to accept the minutes from August 9, 2021. The motion carried unanimously.

3. **Public Participation** – No Public Participation.

4. **Installation of Fence at 181 Elm Street - Valley Opportunity Council**

Stephen Huntley from VOC explained that while the HHC did not have jurisdiction over changes to their property at 181 Elm Street, VOC volunteered to consult with the HHC because of the historic nature of the property. Mr. Huntley shared images of the property and a sample of the fence they propose installing. The new fence will be wrought iron and will replace old chain link fence, except in areas where the fence is within shrubs. Mr. Huntley explained that if they tried to replace the fence in the shrubs it would probably kill the shrubs, which they do not want to do. There was consensus from the Commission that the new fence will be an improvement to the property.

5. **Historical Commission Community Engagement-** Paola Ferraro shared the work product that the interns produced. They created three cards, one each for the Richardson Train Station, the Cubit, and Sacred Heart Church. Ms. Ferraro stated that the research was good but that she has had to go through and improve the writing. She asked other Commissioners to read through the documents and make comments. They can be utilized for various media such as producing videos. Elana Aubrey commented that she wanted to make sure that the different groups working on these types of projects are working together. Ben Murphy shared that the city is in the process of forming a Tourism Advisory Committee and that there will be a seat on the Committee for the HHC.

6. **Proceeding with Revised Preservation Ordinance (Demo Delay)-** Richard Ahlstrom shared that he spoke to Councilor Lisi, Chair of the Ordinance Committee, about putting the Preservation Ordinance on the Committee's agenda and that she indicated that it may be added to the November 9th agenda or possibly later. Mr. Ahlstrom stated that he did not ask Ms. Lisi about adding to the Committee's agenda the proposed amendment to the ordinance

to combine the two commissions. Ben Murphy shared his opinion that it would be preferable to have those two discussions happen at the same time, because they are both related to improving the efficiency of the Historical Commission. He also stated that strategically it makes sense to contact Councilors on the Ordinance Committee about the amended ordinance right before they hear it in committee and that talking points will need to be produced for combining the Commissions if the ordinances are heard together. There was consensus from the Commission to proceed with that strategy.

Frances Welson asked about the Problem Properties Group and Mr. Murphy replied that they meet on the third Thursday of the month and there is a meeting this Thursday at 1PM at City Hall Annex. Building Commissioner, Damian Cote generally runs the meetings. Mr. Ahlstrom and Christopher Gauthier will speak with the Mayor and Councilor McGivern to discuss having a representative from the HHC attend future meetings and have an ongoing presence at those meetings.

7. Discussion on Combining Historical Commission & Historic District Commission

Ben Murphy stated that he sent to the Commission two documents. One document explained the reasons for, and the process to, combining the Historical and Historic District Commissions. The second document was the Historic District Ordinance with tracked changes and notes explaining those proposed changes. Mr. Murphy indicated that Frances Welson reviewed the documents and offered comments before they were sent to the Commission. He explained that he made the changes based on four objectives which was to fix typos, add language to add the responsibilities of an Historical Commission, making sure the ordinance was in line with the sample ordinance from MHC and state law, and not changing the existing ordinance drastically.

Mr. Murphy explained that the Local Historic District Commission (LHDC) has more regulatory authority. Under state law, LHDCs are allowed to take on the responsibilities of an Historical Commission, but not the other way around, and it is for that reason that to combine Commissions, the process is to amend the current Historic District Ordinance to give the responsibilities of an Historical Commission to the LHDC. At the same time the LHDC name would become Historical Commission and the ordinance that created the current Historical Commission would need to be repealed.

Mr. Murphy went on to explain that both Commissions have similar make up, including seven regular members and alternate members. He explained that the LHDC has some seats that are appointed in a specific way that requires asking for nominations from the local AIA (architect), local realtors, and local historical society (or Historic New England if no historical society exists). Mr. Murphy indicated that he believes that because the existing Historic District Ordinance would just be amended, current members of the LHDC would continue with their current terms. It is unclear how current Historical Commission members would move over to the new Commission. There was consensus that the details on how current Historical Commission members would move over to the “new” Historical Commission be worked out before the City Council reviewed the proposed changes. Mr. Murphy indicated that he would speak to the City’s Law Department on how Commissioners would move to the new Commission. Mr. Murphy indicated that the new Commission would have enough seats for all the current members of both Commissions, but three of the members would need to be alternate members.

Marco Crescentini indicated that the LHDC was meeting on Thursday to discuss combining the two Commissions. He indicated that he supports combining the Commissions because he feels that it would create a stronger Commission.

There was consensus from Commissioners that the Commission take some more time to review the documents and discuss and vote at the October meeting because the City Council will not be reviewing it until November at the earliest.

- 8. Sacred Heart/ Our Lady of Guadalupe Church and Buildings; Discussion on Establishing a Local Historic District-** Paola Ferrario shared that she met with Ben Murphy and Olivia Mausel from the Historic District Commission to discuss moving forward on the process to establish a local historic district. She also indicated that she has asked a friend of hers who is an architect to help write up the architectural description for the recreation hall and that she has been taking pictures. The group determined that considering the attempt to combine the two Commissions, the process to move forward should wait until after the Commissions are combined, but that in the meantime everything could be prepped and ready to go when the time is right. Ben Murphy explained that he had drafted a preliminary report for the Sacred Heart Historic District that just needed a few more items for it to be completed. The drafting of the report means that the process could move forward quickly once the LHDC decided to move forward.

Mr. Ferrario stated that she has pictures of the stain glass windows and interiors of the church. Mr. Murphy explained that while having those pictures is helpful, especially if the building were being nominated for National Register of historic places, they are not entirely necessary for the preliminary report. He added that it is important to keep in mind that features of the building that may be religious in nature, like stain glass windows, may not be features that the Historic District Commission can control because of the limit's government has over religion.

- 9. Mt. Tom B-17 Memorial - Nomination to the National Register of Historic Places-** Ben Murphy explained to Commissioners that he had been contacted and asked about designating the Mt. Tom B-17 as an historic site. Mr. Murphy subsequently asked MHC about the eligibility of such a site for the National Register. The response from MHC indicated that it was unlikely to be eligible for the NR. Mr. Murphy asked if Commissions would like to recommend it be nominated for the NR. The consensus from the Commission was to discuss and decide on nominating the site to the NR when there is a formal ask of the Commission to do so.

Paola Ferrario shared that she traveled to the site and took pictures which she shared. She explained that people collect little pieces of metal and put them on top of the stones that are part of the monument. Some of the metal could be pieces of the plane. She suggested that while the site may not be able to receive an historic designation there may be other, creative ways for the site to become a community site like utilizing artists.

- 10. Other Business-** Richard Ahlstrom mentioned that roof repair work has begun on 1840 Northampton Street.

Ben Murphy shared that he has been working with Olivia Mausel on the process to add the Richardson Train Station to the National Register. He stated that he received a response letter from MHC stating that they needed additional information before they can review the property for NR eligibility. Mr. Murphy explained that the information they required related to the current work being done to the building and that either they would need to wait until the work is complete before they can review it, or that plans would need to be submitted. At this point the current owner of the property, David White, would need to provide that information.

- 11. Next Meeting-** October 12, 2021

- 12. Adjourn**

At 6:56 p.m., there being no further business to come before the Commission, a motion was made by Frances Welton and seconded by Christer Gauthier to adjourn the meeting. The motion carried.

Sincerely,

Holyoke Historical Commission