

HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION

WORK SESSION

Caucus Hall

Town Hall

Provincetown, MA

TUESDAY, JUNE 4, 2019

Members Present: Thomas Biggert (TB), Chairman, Pilgrim Monument Rep.; Laurie Delmolino (LD) Historical Commission Rep; Hersh Schwartz (HS), Chamber of Commerce Rep.; John Dowd (JD), PGB Rep.

Excused Absence: Christopher Mathieson, PAAM Rep.; Michela Carew-Murphy, Alternate; Martin Risten (MR), Alternate.

Discussion with David Dunlap about the Mission of the HDC.

TB called the meeting to order at 2:00pm, introduced New York City and Provincetown-based journalist and historian, David Dunlap to the viewing audience; noted Mr. Dunlap's extensive book on the history of Provincetown.

Defining the Historic District Commission in relation to the Town's Composition.

Mr. Dunlap spoke of the development of the Historic District as a means to establish the distinction between contributing and non-contributing structure, referencing the West Village in Manhattan as being one of the first in that borough.

TB noted that Provincetown's design was once non-existence in that everyone basically did what they wanted in terms of renovation and additions and that it could be said each house tells a story, but that now he questions if all the regulation and cultivated aesthetic has created a kind of cookie-cutter mentality where everything looks the same.

Mr. Dunlap agreed that houses tell multiple stories and suggested that home owners would do well to consider what kind of story they want to tell when arranging for renovation; gave an example of an oddly wonderful window as pertaining to the former Mary Heaton Vorse house in noting the heavy burden the HDC faces when deliberating what might be acceptable with a small board and multiple applications submitted month after month when time-constraints enter the equation; remarked on the added level of pressure the HDC faces in considering just how far to go back regarding various properties when making approvals for upgrades and additions in the Historic District.

TB stated some considerations of the HDC such as availability of materials, functionality, keeping costs low and suggested a public forum in the future might do well to inform the public of the Board's needs. Mr. Dunlap observed that compounding the Board's mission is that often the work of the HDC is not necessarily on people's radar until they personally seek an approval for a renovation. JD added that a lot of applicants who come before the HDC are new homeowners who are uneducated to the parameters of historical imperative. HS agreed that educating homeowners can be a big help in achieving code compliance.

Chris Pula spoke from the public to expand on the assumption that many homeowners seem unfamiliar with what the limitations might be upon their properties and said that realtors can be the key to getting the right information out to their clients. HS suggested that Mr. Pula had a good point to make in that real estate agents could benefit from seminars, as well.

JD offered another angle on the realtor awareness issue in remarking that there are instances when agents or contractors are aware enough of the situation involving the potential for restrictions upon their client's properties yet may withhold this information for the sake of greater billing hours when delays and restrictions result from a Town board vote.

TB stated for Mr. Pula that the Historic District, and others who may not be aware, that the Historic District as all of Commercial Street from the Bradford Street split to the end of Town with other part of Bradford going in and out; and the areas that include Town-owned McMillan Pier through Town Hall, and the Schools as along a large swath.

Mr. Dunlap asked if through the cooperation of the Barnstable County Registry of Deeds with the Town's Assessor's Office that prior to the transfer of deed, a kind of welcome letter to a new owner could be sent alerting them to the condition of their property as contained within the Historic District. TB said he felt that was a great idea, and that the measure could come a listing of sales addresses in The Provincetown Banner. Mr. Dunlap said it would be beneficial to the preservation of the Town's historic heritage to inform these property owners that they are, in fact, heirs and stewards of this claim.

LD noted how underutilized is the portion of the twice monthly Historic District Commission Town meetings wherein the public has the opportunity to take the mic and field answers to questions as they pertain to their properties before spending tens or hundreds of thousands of dollars on design plans and renovation proposals that may run afoul of their structure's contributing status in the Historic District, as well as FEMA or other considerations. LD suggested a letter to inform homeowners of this service.

Mr. Dunlap agreed and added that another valuable talking point to include in such a letter is the incongruity that can be found around Town as pertains to various features of aspects of home and structures, and which stems directly from the evolution of the Historic District regulations.

Research Methods

Mr. Dunlap referenced his personal 12 year-old library that exists in his home and takes up one entire wall, but for the sake of public interest, said the first stop in researching any given property might be the Assessor's Office file and the Registry of Deeds, which he cited as a great tool for uncovering the layers of history on a structure; that the listing of ownership by names opens up the online advocate from which to trace a property back through time. Mr. Dunlap also mentioned the online preservation project initiated by former Town staffers and volunteers or, even something as simple as the Google search engine. Mr. Dunlap said he has utilized social media, as well, and has been pleasantly surprised at the number of responses and photographic information that has resulted from inquiry.

2020 Project

Mr. Dunlap said the 2020 Project is actually not so-called for the year, but for 2020 vision and, as such, will not be completed next year, but will be a re-build on the Town website to encompass every occupiable structure and property in Town, including vessels but not yet those which might invite trespassing; said he is going alphabetical and, currently, is up to about 150 Commercial St. website is buildingprovincetown2020.org.

TB asked Mr., Dunlap what he thought the HDC might do for the 2020 celebration. Mr. Dunlap replied spoke of mittens that had been found out at the seashore and which might give notice of what animals were at the seashore or in Town and when; said he was not aware of cites or specifics in Town that might be associated with the Wampanoag Indians, but that he had a sense that bits of knowledge might be drawn together to give us evidence that there was habitation in Town prior to 1608.

Mr. Pula spoke about his home in the East End on Commercial Street and how where the local trolley passes by daily in season but that the driver seems unaware of the history at his location. JD echoed that and added that what he hears over the past 15 years is the guide regularly pointing out property values in lieu of actual historic imperative.

Mr. Dunlap said there are three things he pledges as take-away for his attendees at the Twenty Summers seminar he heads: 1., that Hell Town is not Long Point – that they were completely separate communities; 2., that the Town did not get on Long Point, that settlers did indeed settle on the mainland and that the Long Point settlement was very brief; 3., that the Mailer house is not the only brick house in Town, and is actually only a brick frame-house.

Long Point

Mr. Dunlap noted that Long Point had been in prominence roughly between 1820s to the 1850s and was based on the local fishing trade, but that once the ensured fishing site was exhausted of supply the business was forced to relocate, compounded by the lack of fresh water systems. Mr. Dunlap said there was only one two-story original building on Long Point and that the rest were basically shacks which were then floated over to the mainland. JD referenced a two-story structure that was floated over as there exits photographs of the move. Mr. Dunlap mentioned that two batteries were built at the outset of the Civil War which are still visible at Long Point.

National Seashore

Mr. Dunlap spoke about his work in the attic at the old Fire Station which will relate to the 2020 Project and has yielded some tremendous findings such as a 1958 detailed plot map of the properties at the National Seashore, including proof of land lines, original dune shack locations and plans to develop the Seashore by private developers; gave some perspective on the activism of former locals Josephine Del Dio and Ross Moffat in determining the Town's ownership over its land at a time when the United States government was formulating the National Seashore.

In Conclusion

The Board thanked Mr. Dunlap for his time. Mr. Dunlap acknowledged the work of the HDC and gave a few more examples of the investigatory work which can lead to historical determinations of the Town's properties.

JD asked after facades in the commercial district in Town and if there might be incentives or motivation to return the look of these buildings to the Town's former style, lamenting the loss of the soul, character and integrity of the authentic structure. Mr. Dunlap replied that there are many frontages that are essentially walk-ins to display areas which should serve as an asset to retailers. LD said she looked forward to future consultations with Mr. Dunlap and his archival work.

Respectfully Submitted,
Jody O'Neil