

WEYMOUTH HISTORICAL COMMISSION
McCulloch School/Conference Room
JUNE 2nd, 2009 Public Meeting Sea Street Historic District

PRESENT: Ted Clarke/Chairman, Jody Purdy-Quinlan, Mary Dorey, Ed Walker and Steve Puleo

ALSO PRESENT: Jody Lehrer, Community Development Coordinator
Jim Clarke, Director of Planning & Community Development
Phil Bergen, Massachusetts Historical Commission
Kate Dankett, Massachusetts Historical Commission
Candace Jenkins, Massachusetts Historical Commission
Wendy Frontiero/Consultant for the Weymouth Historical Commission

Chairman Ted Clarke called the second portion of the June 2nd, 2009 meeting of the Weymouth Historical Commission to order at 7:00 PM. Chairman Clarke noted that the purpose of this meeting was the public hearing for the nomination of the Sea Street Historic District.

Mr. Walker moved to open the public hearing for the Sea Street Historical District.

Motion was seconded.

UNANIMOUSLY VOTED

Chairman Clarke then introduced Phil Bergen of the Massachusetts Historical Commission.

Mr. Phil Bergen of the Massachusetts Historical Commission came before the Commission to begin the public hearing portion of for the Nomination of the Sea Street Historical District. He began the hearing by giving a slide presentation that included pictures of various Massachusetts sites presently included in the National Historic Register. He began by informing those present that a Historic District can involve a variety of sites including historical buildings, properties and neighborhoods in Massachusetts. He stated that Wendy Frontiero, who would be the next speaker, would be specifically addressing the National Register Nomination re. the Sea Street Historical District on behalf of the Weymouth Historical Commission. Next he would be addressing the nomination:

- what it means
- what it doesn't mean

Mr. Bergen went on to explain that in his post as a Massachusetts Historical Preservationist, his position gives him the opportunity to go around the Commonwealth and visit the 351 cities/towns - and in doing so has seen many interesting places. He noted that he has been to some municipalities in the state with unusual names, such as; Monterey and Peru, Massachusetts. He informed those present that although Mass. Historical Commission is a state agency, the National Register is a federal program administered by the National Park Services, which has been in existence for 40 years. Further there are approximately 65,000 properties included in the National Register - and growing. He said if you would like to know where they are, all you need to do is visit any library because they all have a copy of the National Historic Register - with sites listed by alphabetically by community. He then spoke about what is contained in the National Historic Register.

The National Register includes:

- single family homes
- business complexes
- cathedrals
- home for aged couples
- an entire city
- farms
- buildings from Colonial and Federal period
- public/private buildings; ie, schools, town halls, libraries

With regard to specific buildings, they include:

- Hagerty House, Cohasset (built in the 1930's, one of the original works of the International movement which began in Germany - it was moved here by Harvard and MIT)
- Peabody House (located in Danvers has become their Town Library) with funding from the Peabody family
- Goodwin Memorial African Methodist Episcopal Church (modest property, built by freed slaves and located in Amherst)
- Capitol Diner in Lynn
- The Carousel in Nantasket

Mr. Bergen explained that nominations could be made in several different ways; i. e., singularly or collectively, like the Town of Rockland or Montague. He noted that each designation has a story to tell and through them you could learn about important and significant people including Longfellow, Stockbridge, Cambridge Chesterwood (created the Lincoln Memorial) and Ezra Carpenter who started the first shoe business in Foxborough and became at that time became their leading employer.

Mr. Bergen went on to explain that in many cases they look at the architecture, noting two of the most famous: Frank Lloyd Wright and H.H. Richardson who designed Trinity Church. Further, different types of architecture have been preserved including Italianate as well as mid-19th century - such as a covered bridge, adding that there were a few of those left including the Golden Bridge in Lee and the Bessell Bridge in Charlemont. Other designations include those that made archeological statements; i. e., Plymouth Town Brook and the Richmond Furnace. Then there are others with great historical significance such as: Merrill Tavern in Lee (a relic of Shea's Rebellion), Friends Meeting House in Pembroke, a railroad station in W. Brookfield built in the 1840's. There are those that are significant on the local level - the Town Farm in Easthampton, an early form of social welfare - when it was built a person/family could live there and would perform the farming chores.

Mr. Bergen next spoke about qualifications - noting that to be eligible a property has to retain its historical character and integrity and look pretty much as it did when it was built.

Mr. Bergen then cited some imposing buildings in the National Register such as a large number of churches and town halls. Further, he clarified, that within a Historic District they might be some non-contributing buildings, with some being altered. Although, he quickly added, some are acceptable if they are painted a color not in accordance with the times. He explained that if your home is within an approved historical district (like the Sea Street Historical District), you would be able to paint it any color you want, to the extent of even adding a Red Sox logo if you chose. Additionally the property does not have to be immaculately preserved. Also the properties do not have to serve their original function; i.e., an old railroad station - nor is your house required to be open to the public.

Mr. Bergen told those present that an NRD (National Register District) is NOT a Local Historic District. For example, Beacon Hill is a Local Historic District and that comes with very stringent regulations. Further NO review is required in a NRD unless there is state/federal funding involved. The review is administered by the MHC, which again was established by the National Park Service.

Mr. Bergen continued to give examples of the above - citing different properties under NRD and LHD. He told of the owners of the Butler Estate in Lowell located in a National Historic District, where the owners decided to tear it down and subdivide. He said that this was perfectly within their rights to do so. To those present, he said you are the property owner and you make the determination on what you do with your property - in accordance with the Weymouth bylaws. The benefits: it is an Honorary Designation - some chose to post historic signage/plaque acknowledging its historic designation or offer a brochure on their property - or even provide a walking tour. He said it could be used as a sales tool or a planning tool for the Town, similar to the Falmouth Green.

When a National Historic District is approved, it can be eligible for funding; i.e., Mass. Preservation Project Fund, Historical Society funds, adding that the Mass. Preservation Project Fund is a matching grant program. Presently there are around 17-18 rounds of grants made available for Municipalities and non-profits that can be utilized for this purpose. In their last round of funding they were able to fund about half of those who applied. Further there is an opportunity for tax credits through economic development.

Mr. Bergen reiterated that this program has been going on for 40 years - and it makes people aware of stewardship responsibilities. He pointed out that Weymouth is one of the state's oldest communities. We, the Town and state, have a past that is a living part of the present.

At this point Wendy Frontiero, consultant for the Weymouth Historical Commission came before the Commission outlining her research on Sea Street, which included a slide presentation. Her overview included its geography/boundaries, architecture and details on specific houses/buildings.

Ms. Frontiero presented over 30+ slides of Sea Street area and began her presentation by stating that her work for the Commission/Weymouth Dept. of Planning & Community Development re. the nomination of Sea Street began in 2005. While presenting each slide, she gave correlating descriptions and facts about each picture. She described the area as encompassing the core of the Village Center in North Weymouth and that included historic structures; i. e., civic, residential, commercial and industrial properties - covering 160 properties with the more prominent streets being North St., Sea Street and Bridge Streets. The majority of the structures are representative of mid 17th to mid 20th centuries. This area meets 'criterion C', a cohesive group of buildings that illustrate the continuity and diversity of North Weymouth's history. The buildings range in age from a. 1650 to 1954. Four of the most significant include wood frame shoe factories.

Ms. Frontiero went on to speak about Weymouth's first settlement, which was located in the area of Bridge/Sea Streets in the 1620's. This District's earliest building dated ca. 1650 and is found at 82-84 Sea Street.

North Weymouth gradually became prosperous after the Revolutionary War through trade and the development of the local shoe industry.

In 1812 the north edge of Bridge St. was laid out in 1812 as the Hingham/Quincy Turnpike, which helped to improve connections with surrounding towns. The shoe industry continued to grow and employed more than 80% of the households (heads) in 1820.

Railroads arrived in the 1840's - with 2 lines running through Weymouth. In 1840-1850 new streets were laid out and some of the modest houses survived from this time period.

In 1876 a total of eight (8) shoe factories were located here in No. Weymouth - with (4) of those buildings still standing today in the Sea St. area - although they have been converted for residential use. These buildings are located on Sea Street (1), Bridge Street (1), with (2) on North St.

One of the leading figures in shoe industry was Elias Smith Beals born in 1814 (died 1897). His business was located on Torrey's Corner. Mr. Beals actually invented a machine for sewing soles to uppers. His elaborate, well-preserved house still remains at 40 Sea St - with factory next door (#48) still standing.

Back in the 1880's-1890's if you were in the Sea Street area you would see streetcars. Introduction of streetcars brought suburban/summer resort development to the Town. Then in the early 20th century the shoe business declined but was replaced by larger employers including one of the biggest - the Boston Edison/Edgar Station. In the next era the automobile industry evolved during a time period when the architecture was primarily Colonial Revival - and you will find an example of the Colonial Revival style in the service station located at the corner of Bridge/North Streets.

Further you will find that the majority of the buildings in the Sea Street area are residential although also represented are institutional, commercial and domestically-scaled industrial properties. Specifically you will find churches, schools, a fire station, post office, library and some stores.

Ms. Frontiero described the buildings on Sea Street as mostly 1½-story cottages with gable roofs and vernacular styling. She added that you would find examples of Georgian & Federal style houses, Greek Revival throughout the Sea Street area - as well as an array of Victorian buildings and one elaborate 2-1/2 story mansion at 40 Sea St. Also represented were Colonial Revival and Bungalow styles. She then showed slides of each style located within the Sea Street district.

With regard to commercial buildings - examples could be found primarily along Sea St. and included the old street railway waiting station at 10 Sea Street and a mid-20th century service station at the corner of Bridge/North streets.

Open Space was the next topic. Beals Park, created in 1880's, provides the focal point of Sea Street.

In summing up her presentation she said that the Sea Street District contains a variety of building types and styles from all periods of the village's 300-year history. It was her hope that listing this area in the National Register would create a greater awareness of the significance of the Sea Street area - and would encourage the preservation and restoration of its historic structures.

At this point Phil Bergen/MHC spoke again explaining that this process could go on for a number of years.

It was further noted that the MHC was looking at the Abigail Adams birthplace, the large cemetery and the church located there.

Members were told that completed forms were available re. Sea Street Historic District for any interested residents present this evening. Mr. Bergen wanted to compliment the Weymouth staff and the Weymouth Historical Commission who he felt had done a wonderful job acting as the Town/residents representatives - adding they really cared about furthering the Town's history.

It was also noted that this information presented this evening could also be used by school groups.

Lastly, Mr. Bergen stated, on June 11th they would be holding a public meeting, as part of the state's requirement - and they would be addressing the Sea Street Historic District as well as (8) other presentations that included the communities of Canton and Princeton. Then at the conclusion a vote would be taken with the results sent to the National Park Service in Washington. If approved it would then become part of the National Historic Register - and could be seen in next year's edition of the State Register.

Ms. Frontiero asked if there would be signage and Mr. Bergen replied that it was not a requirement, adding that would be up to the community.

The hearing was opened to the public.

Ms. Frontiero was told by resident Charles McCallough that Weymouth was once referred to as Old Spain and asked if she ever heard of that in her research - but she had not.

Mr. Bergen wanted to point out that they still had time to make any changes/additions to their nomination form, stressing they should try to keep their report as accurate as possible.

Mr. Bernie Gillen suggested they go on Google to view the prior information.

Mr. Gillen asked 'who would be presenting this proposal' and Mr. Bergen responded "The Massachusetts Historical Commission and Wendy Frontiero". He further explained that the Commissioners who would be voting on the nomination come from a variety of different fields and are given the opportunity to ask questions. He quickly added that the Mass. Historical Commission would serve as an advocate.

Jim Clarke told those present that he would have someone there representing the Weymouth Historical Commission in support of the nomination.

Mr. Bergen wanted to explain that his agency become involved when they are approached by a Town or a Historical Commission to do so. Once this happens they do research and make site inspections, adding they are receiving these types of requests weekly.

Ms. Purdy-Quinlan moved to close the public hearing.

Motion was seconded.

UNANIMOUSLY VOTED

Adjournment

Ms. Purdy-Quinlan moved to adjourn at 8:00 PM.

Mr. Walker seconded.

UNANIMOUSLY VOTED

Ted Clarke, Chair

Date

Respectfully submitted,

Susan DeChristoforo

Recording Secretary