

**Suffield Historic District Commission Meeting Minutes
Regular Meeting: February 5, 2024; 7:30 P.M.
Town Hall Upper Level Meeting Room**

J. Schwemmer called The Historic District Commission meeting to order at 7:30 p.m. on Monday, February 5, 2024.

Attendees: Commissioner

John Schwemmer
Bill Moryto
Beth Tracey
Scott MacClintic
Klaire Bielonko (Alternate)
Crystal Quandt (Alternate)
Aysha Moore-Manwaring (Alternate)

Absent: Commissioner

Doug Mayne

Designation of Voting Members

J. Schwemmer noted that the designated voting members this evening would be B. Moryto, K. Bielonko, J. Schwemmer, S. MacClintic and B. Tracey.

Approval of Minutes

B. Moryto motioned and B. Tracey seconded to accept the meeting minutes from the January 8, 2024 Regular Meeting as presented. Vote: 5-0 in favor. Motion accepted unanimously.

K. Bielonko motioned and B. Moryto seconded to accept the meeting minutes from the January 10, 2024 Special meeting with one change as follows:

- 1) The motion made for the N. Main Veterans Park Proposed Memorial incorrectly states 4' 5" total height and should be corrected to read: " 4' 6" total height and the base with the unbroken edge"**

Vote: 5-0 in favor. Motion passed unanimously.

Public Comment

Sara Zak, Suffield Historical Society – Ms. Zak asked for clarification on the reasoning behind B. Moryto's decision to recuse himself from voting on the Veterans Memorial Expansion monument. She wanted to know what the policy of the commission was with regard to recusing oneself if an issue is pertinent to them. Mr. Moryto explained that he is a member of the Veterans Memorial Expansion Committee, and as a member, he is considered to be a part of the application submission to the town which renders him ineligible to vote. Ms. Zak explained that the reason for her question was because one of the applications being considered by the commission this evening was submitted by the Suffield Historical Society and one of the commission's voting members this evening, Klaire Bielonko, is a board member of the Suffield Historical Society. Ms. Bielonko explained that while she is a board member, she is not a trustee, and has never attended any meetings regarding the stables. Mr. Moryto noted he was also a paying member of the Suffield Historical Society, however, he has not been involved with the stables in any way.

Mr. Schwemmer asked Ms. Zak if she was comfortable with the answer provided and did not feel that there was a conflict of interest. She stated she was fine with the explanation and did not see any conflict.

Applications for a Certificate of Appropriateness

a. 82 N. Main Street, Proposed Exterior Repairs

Ben Hildebrand, a representative of Sage Engineering & Contracting introduced himself and explained that he was attending this evening in hopes of gaining a better understanding of the concerns the Historic District Commission has with the proposed exterior repairs on 82 N. Main Street, also known as the Bissell House. He acknowledged that another representative had attended an earlier meeting to discuss this project. Mr. Hildebrand explained that the plan is to repair

the clapboard siding in full, using a hardie board product. All trim would remain wood, including window trim, door trim and the dentil molding while the corner coining is in tough shape, and will require replacement. The corner coining will be replaced with wood, a change from the original application submitted which had identified the coining being replaced with a PVC product. The group discussed their thoughts on the hardie board product and the historical significance of the building. They also revisited the meeting minutes of the November 2023 Historic District Commission meeting which included the original discussion of keeping the main building intact with the wood coining and to address wood clapboard repairs instead of replacement where possible and only replacing with in-kind materials. Mr. Hildebrand emphasized that this is not a "repair" job; it is a replacement. He feels that replacing certain areas of the wood siding and choosing to leave others in place does not make a lot of sense. His company is proposing replacement of the entire body of the building. The group asked if he had looked into replacement with wood; he said he had not. The group was divided on the how exactly to move forward. They emphasized the historic significance of the building and reiterated that their goal is to preserve as much of the original building in its original state; wood clapboard should be either repaired if possible or replaced in kind. Ms. Tracey emphasized that there really is no "wiggle room" on the main building. Mr. Moryto thinks it would be okay and explained his rationale, using examples from other projects that had been approved by the commission over the years. Ms. Bielonko wanted clarification regarding the corner coins, asking if they will be removed and replaced in kind. Mr. Hildebrand confirmed the coins would be replaced with wood. Discussion ensued as to how best to move forward with the application. He also offered to meet with anyone interested in coming to the site and looking at the current state of the clapboard and coins. The group offered suggestions to discussed how the application should be worded in order to fit the desires of the Historic District Commission.

b. 232 S. Main Street, Proposed New Outbuilding and Existing Stable Demolition

Sara Zak introduced herself and noted that Art Sikes and Barry Sisk were also with her this evening. She explained that the application before the commission this evening was different from the last because the group is looking toward the future and proposing a new building in the same area of the existing stables. She referenced a package that provided details and pictures of the proposed building and stated she was here to answer any questions. They would ideally like to start the project by the end of this year. The group had seen this proposed building design approximately a year ago during an informal discussion. They discussed the length of time that has passed since a project to build something new in this area which was over twenty years ago. The outside of the building is essentially the same as when it was presented in 2019, however, at that time the group was not able to move forward with a formal application. Ms. Zak says that has changed and the group has gained more of a consensus on their board and they feel that a new building is the appropriate direction. The intent is to keep the new building looking as close to the current stable as possible. Details of what would be required on the application were discussed. Mr. Sisk explained the details of the building, explained what has happened with the plan over the last twenty years and addressed the commissions questions accordingly. Construction details are not yet available as they are still in the conceptual phase. Clarification would be needed in order for the commission to move forward with a decision for the building. This application is in its very early stages to be in front of the Historic District Commission. Earlier applications did not include a new building. Timeline between tear down and building would be helpful for the group. Twenty years ago this project was approved and things were all set to go, however, the trustees of the Historical Society voted not to move forward.

Ms. Zak reminded the group that they are a non-profit organization and all the things they are being asked to do cost large sums of money. The group is looking for a little bit of support in moving forward as a non-profit organization and one of those progressive steps is to show the community that they are moving forward and that they do plan to construct a new building, which will help support the project. It was suggested that when the stable comes down, an archeological survey may need to be done prior to the new construction. If anything is found, that may extend the time between demolition and construction. Concerns regarding the concept and the actual building were expressed. Demolition is easy, however, construction could be stalled and then nothing shows up in its place. Many different view points were considered.

The group discussed the advantages of keeping the stable in its current condition and whether or not progress is better than doing nothing and allowing it to crumble. The historical significance to the community was considered. A possible consideration would be to grant support but have them consider a phased build project; demolition, archeological study and then possible construction. K. Bielonko wants the group to consider prudent and feasible alternatives to demolition as well and consider the recommendations at the state level. She feels there are options.

B. Tracey noted that the application requires action to either deny, approve as written or approve it with amendments. Options were discussed. It was noted that the HDC approved demolition and construction of a barnlike museum on the property on April 4, 2005. K. Bielonko continued to push for prudent and feasible alternatives prior to any demolition. She wants them to be explored first and once considered, demolition could occur if deemed necessary. S. MacClintic said he would feel better with some sort of confirmation from the building department or some qualified individual to make a decision that the building is deemed unsafe.

K. Bielonko motioned and Scott MacClintic seconded to deny the application due to insufficient detail and information on the proposed structure.

Extensive discussion ensued regarding the wording of the motion. Each member expressed their concerns regarding what the motion truly implies and how it could be interpreted. The group was not in agreement on how to move forward and continued to discuss options that the Historical Society could take in order to get the commission to fully approve their application.

Vote: 2 in favor. (Bielonko and MacClintic) and 3 against (Schwemmer, Tracey and Moryto.) Motion failed.

B. Tracey motioned and B. Moryto motioned to approve the application for the demolition only and to require that the group return within 3 months with a plan on how they are going to accomplish the demolition.

Extensive discussion ensued whether it would be wise to approve the demolition only and whether to address the subject of construction of the new museum structure. The group reviewed discussion and commentary from the commission at earlier Historic District Commission meetings. Suggestions were made with regard to details that will be required of the Historical Society were also reviewed again.

Vote: 3 in favor (Schwemmer, Tracey and Moryto) and 2 against (Bielonko and MacClintic.) Motion passed.

Ms. Bielonko expressed shock over the decision and strongly encouraged those who voted in favor to reconsider. The members discussed their rationale for their vote. She argued that this was not how a Historic District should act.

New Business

Missing Historic District signage

K. Bielonko confirmed that the Historic District sign was missing on North Main Street.

Board Procedures

Understanding that the decision this evening was not an easy vote, the group discussed their concerns about the process, the type of applications received and the purpose of the commission. Lengthy discussion ensued with each member continuing to express their personal thoughts on the matter at hand, as well as how to treat applicants equally regardless of whether they are for profit or non-profit and whether these actions will set a bad precedent.

K. Bielonko asked the group to consider a motion to reconsider or a motion to rescind, explaining that they "still have options." She questioned each member that voted in favor of demolition and they all remained firm with their original vote.

South Main Street House Construction Update

J. Schwemmer provided an update on the status of the South Main Street house construction and the action that the town has taken.

K. Bielonko motioned to rescind the vote made this evening with regard to 232 S. Main Street. There was no second. Motion failed.

B. Moryto motioned and B. Tracey seconded to adjourn at 9:27 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kristen O. Lambert
Recording Secretary