

## WEST TISBURY HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION MEETING MEETING MINUTES

Date of Meeting: February 7, 2011

Attending: Sean Conley, Mark Mazer, Nancy Dole, Lan McDowell, Ann Fisher, Ben Moore

Also Attending: Tara Whiting, Stephanie Dreyer, Jill Bouck, Cathleen Vincent, Noah Block, John Alley, Peter Brannen from Vineyard Gazette and Susan ? from MV Times

Meeting convened at 5:30 PM.

This was the second informal meeting with Tara, in regard to Daniel's and Tara's application to demolish the Whiting Homestead/Old Parsonage.

All commission members have, since the Jan 24 meeting, done site visits to the property. The general consensus following those visits is that the house should be preserved.

We did receive feedback from other MA HDCs concerning eligibility for CPA funds and standards for granting a hardship application.

Feedback on CPA: the property although privately owned, would be eligible for CPA funds, if there were preservation restrictions placed on the property, and a plan for rehabilitating the structure.

Feedback on standards for hardship: Local HDC bylaws are all based on MA GLch.40c, and address the duties and powers of an HDC when considering an application for hardship. There are 5 possible tests that must be met to grant a hardship:

The 1st is related to the owner:

- \*Substantial hardship, financial or otherwise.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> thru 5<sup>th</sup> are related to the structure involved:

- \*owing to conditions especially affecting the building or structure involved.

- \* owing to conditions... not affecting the historic district generally

- \* such application may be approved without substantial detriment to the public welfare

- \* such application may be approved without substantial detriment.... from the intent and purposes of this chapter

Chapter 40c:

“...in the event of an application for a certificate of hardship, the commission shall determine whether, owing to conditions especially affecting the building or structure involved, but not affecting the historic district generally, failure to approve an application will involve a substantial hardship, financial or otherwise, to the applicant and whether such application may be approved without substantial detriment to the public welfare and without substantial derogation from the intent and purpose of this chapter....”

Other HDs feedback was that the application might not meet the first requirement, since the property could be sold, nor the 2<sup>nd</sup> requirement without a negative determination and report by a preservation contractor(s).

Tara and Daniel did receive an estimate of 1.75 million (over \$500 per sq ft) from a contractor to repair and winterize the house but no detail has been supplied to the Commission to support the estimate.

The WTHDC and WTHC felt the site visit showed the house to be intact and in good shape in many important respects. Much of the early structure was still in very good condition, the rooflines seemed straight, the floors did not appear to be sagging, and nothing stood out as being beyond repair. Some ceilings had water damage. The roof showed signs of repair but the entirety needs to be done.

Nancy felt that even if the application was shown at a hearing to meet the 1st and/ or 2<sup>nd</sup> tests, it would not meet the 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> tests, and she could not support a tear down. She thought we should offer a strong letter of support to the CPA if Tara was interested in pursuing that.

Ben and Annie agreed with Nancy.

Annie had information detailing how Tara could obtain a large tax credit from the federal government since the house is in the district and could likely be eligible for the National Register (but would need to have a commercial use) and since Tara has been running a B&B on the premises, perhaps she could apply.

Mark said although he felt the property could not be made livable, by current standards, the structure inside and out was of such great historic and educational value to the community that it should be turned into a public museum, and the applicant be allowed to build a new home on the property in a suitable site that did not detract from the Parsonage as it is sited.

Lanny said that while it was not our job to do so, he would like to help Tara find alternatives to tear down.

Sean asked if Tara would be willing to consider these various alternatives.

Nancy asked if Tara would be willing to withdraw her application.

Tara said that she and Daniel had actually been thinking that they could build a new home elsewhere on the site, and they had talked to the ZBA about getting a variance to do so. Her initial feedback from ZBA was positive. Sean asked if a letter to ZBA would be helpful. Nancy said she was opposed to writing a letter of support until it was determined how the structure, which would then be deserted, would be protected against demolition by neglect. Tara said she did not want to see the structure destroyed by neglect, and said, in line with Mark's proposal that it become a museum, that the structure could be gifted to an organization that would restore it. She was concerned that if she gifted it, the organization might not take good care of the structure. Nancy suggested the gift would come with requirements, that Tara could look at the track record of the organization, that the structure could be what preservationists refer to as "mothballed" (ie fix roof, board windows) for considerably less than 1.75 million, and a restoration could be done over a period of years.

Jill Bouck said if the building were in public/non-profit ownership, it would be eligible for a great number of tax credits, grants, and also for the National Historic Register.

Sean wondered if the Preservation Trust might be interested in accepting the structure as a gift from Tara and Daniel, and if the CPA could gift funds to the Trust for restoration.

Nancy asked Tara if she had considered taking the money she and her brother would use to build a new home, and instead investing that in gutting and making livable year round one section of the house, while doing what was immediately necessary to preserve the rest, so that she would not lose ownership of the property.

John Alley felt strongly the structure and its site were an integral and important part of the community, and he was strongly opposed to a tear down.

Cathleen Vincent spoke as a friend of Tara's who had come in support of her application to demolish.

The discussion ended with Tara saying she would speak to her brother Daniel about withdrawing the application, and pursuing other options. If they decide to proceed with the application, we will schedule a hearing as soon as her application is complete.

Other business:

The Selectmen would like a letter from us citing the historic value of the Field Gallery, in order to make it eligible for CPA funds. They have also requested a letter from the Historic Commission, who were ambivalent about the historic nature of the property and were thinking to ask for a letter of intent from both the town and the Maleys. We discussed whether the Field Gallery was particularly historic, in and of itself, or simply a part of the historic district, and if it did have historic value what was it, and how did that value compare with properties such as the Parsonage. Why was the town seeking to acquire the property? We decided to postpone further discussion, and wait with the HC for a letter of intent from the town.

Meeting adjourned.

Respectfully submitted by

Nancy Dole, Secretary