

Braintree Historical Commission
Meeting Minutes – Virtual ZOOM
Monday, January 9, 2023 at 5:00 PM
Approved: June 5, 2023

Members Present:

Ronald F. Frazier, Acting-Chair
Santina Giannino
Kate Nedelman Herbst, Member
Rayna Rubin, Member

Staff Present:

Melissa SantucciRozzi, Director – PCD

Members Absent:

Robert S. Harris, Member

Participants:

Councilor Meredith

Remote Meeting Provisions

Due to the COVID19 Pandemic remote meetings have replaced physical meetings per the Governor's Order on March 3/12/20 as most recently amended. Said order suspended the provisions of the Open Meeting Law to promote public health and social distancing. This meeting was not conducted in an open, publicly-accessible space. Public access to the meeting and deliberations were achieved by adequate, alternative means that allowed the public to follow the proceeding in a third-party communication technology known as ZOOM that is readily accessible to the public by the internet and the telephone.

Call the Meeting to Order

At 5:00 PM, Acting-Chair Ronald Frazier called the Meeting to order via Zoom. Acting-Chair Ronald Frazier requested Director Melissa SantucciRozzi conduct a Roll Call vote for Attendance:

Acting Chair Frazier – Here;

Member Giannino – Here;

Member Harris – Absent;

Member Herbst – Present;

Member Rubin – Present;

The Director wished to let the record show four (4) members were present for a quorum at 5:00 PM.

Old Business: Elm Street Cemetery Phase III Project Update

Vice Chair Frazier asks the Director for an update, and he advises that that he has been going over and taking a lot of photographs of the work that is being done. He mentions that it is quite amazing, and what he has seen is that there was carved granite that was buried under dirt. There is stuff there that they are finding that we never knew even existed.

The Director thanks Vice Chair Frazier and advises that the Phase III project is underway and almost near completion at the Elm Street Cemetery. She states that, not being involved with the previous phases, she has to say that the work going on there is pretty amazing. Our CPC Manager, Liz Manning, and Vice Chair Frazier have been out there quite a bit. The Director has had the opportunity to be on site and to meet with the Contractor. The restoration is unbelievable, and the Director honestly didn't know that things could look so pristine.

The Director wanted to give an update. This was a project that the Historical Commission had put forward utilizing some Community Preservation funds. Most of the work is done for the wintertime. There is some minor work that can be done in the spring. We have been going out, taking photos, and having lengthy discussions with Frank Drollett of Colonial Stone, who is the contractor. They have been doing fine-detailed work on restoring the tombs. The Director would encourage people to go down to Elm Street Cemetery to look. The Director wasn't aware this type of work was an option, and it looks really nice. Vice Chair Frazier thinks, over the years when the stones separated, all they did was fill them. They have cleaned all that out and put the stones back where they belong in the above-ground tomb, which is a very interesting process. The Director has learned so much from going out there, and hopefully this barrier that is being placed, when the water does hit these tombs, is designed to roll away and not roll down into and break the mortar that was used to construct these. This was an awesome recommendation from the committee to have this done. The Director advises that Liz Manning, our CPC Manager, is here two days a week. If anyone is interested in having her go out to the site with you, she has been the one following most of the work and making sure that it is completed in accordance with the contract. The Director states she can also go out to the site with committee members.

There are no questions from committee members. Member Santina Giannino states having the pictures really helps a lot. The Director states the pictures don't do it justice, and it is going to be a showpiece when it is done – especially the Vinton tomb. The Director states what Mr. Drollett has done is amazing.

Vice Chair Frazier thinks we should go to Mass Historical Commission when it is done to have them come out and look at the work because they put out brochures or booklets with various cemeteries, and they don't usually mention this one. Once they see what has been done here, Vice Chair Frazier thinks we will start getting more publicity. The Director mentions that it is on the state register of historic places, and it is important to maintain its integrity.

Old Business: Great Oak

The Director would like to elevate Councilor Boericke, if the committee members don't mind, to join us in this discussion. At this time, Councilor Meredith Boericke joins the meeting. The Director states this is Councilor Boericke's district; she has expressed continued interest in trying to keep the communication open. The reason that the Director had included this on the agenda was to provide an update. Verizon has finally moved their wires. Both Comcast and Verizon have cleared the pole. The Director wants to give a shout out to Sean Murphy at BELD, who helped the Director with getting this done. The Director did reach out to Darryl Rappaport in November, as he had said he was waiting to get more rain to do the root invigorating treatment. The Director had mentioned to him that we have been getting some rain, and now would be a good time to do the treatment. Then, she hasn't heard back from Mr. Rappaport, but he hasn't billed us, so she is guessing he hasn't done the job. The Director also had some contact from Chris Hayward, Chairperson of the Conservation Commission, also has a deep background in trees, and is an arborist. He has expressed an interest in what we are going to do. Are we in this for the long haul, or are we going to move on to some other creative solution? Maybe that means moving on from the tree. The Director doesn't have an opinion either way. She thinks this should be a community decision. She thinks this is an opportunity to engage residents and citizens and to hold a meeting in the spring out at the tree to gather ideas. If this is never going to be what we want it to be, then there is no better time than now to figure out what we can do here.

The Director's suggestion is to do something maybe in March; we can put a notice on various agendas so that people are aware. The Director suggests there be a discussion at the Great Oak location that brainstorms ideas from residents.

Member Rubin asks if the consultant, Bartlett Tree, will be available to answer questions. Member Rubin feels that people will ask questions that she wouldn't be able to answer. Member Rubin wonders if he will attend that gathering, as we haven't heard from him directly. The Director states her plan would be to have a professional there that can answer these questions.

Member Giannino asks if it would be helpful if the consultant provided a synopsis of what is feasible and what is not feasible. Is the tree ever going to look like a real tree again? Will the branches have leaves eventually. If you know in advance what to expect, it would be easier to ask questions and make some decisions. Vice Chair Frazier states the consultant implied that it would grow leaves, and he thinks that we should wait until the spring to see if anything happens there. The Director is going to talk to Darryl Rappaport as soon as she can get him to respond. He indicated that he would be willing to have a meeting. It would not be a meeting of the Historical Commission; it would be a meeting of the community. There might be a little additional funding required, but the Director does carry a small line item in the Historic budget in case something like this does come up. The Director knows that the Historical Commission is interested, as are residents, members of Conservation Commission, and members of the Council. We can put together a format and make sure we have the appropriate professionals there so that it is a meaningful meeting with dialogue and information sharing. Member Giannino suggests that, if it is determined that the tree is not going to survive, can we plant another oak tree in the middle and make some benches out of this tree trunk. The Director states that is what she wants to get from the public. If the tree is not going to remain, what are some ideas to incorporate the lumber into something that could continue as a legacy of the Great Oak.

Vice Chair Frazier thinks in the springtime we will have a better idea of what is happening, and the Mayor could send out one of his messages stating we are going to have a meeting there.

Member Rubin states, since Councilor Boericke is here, she was going to ask the Councilor if she had anything to add or if she had heard other things that the committee is not aware of.

Councilor Meredith Boericke thinks a community meeting would be very welcome, especially in the Washington Park/Tenney Road neighborhood. One question the Councilor had was related to the root invigoration treatment. She went back to her notes, and she thinks initially that was supposed to happen in the spring of 2022, but it sounds like it didn't happen then. The Director states that is correct and explains it was due to a lack of rain. The Councilor thinks it would be helpful to understand if that is a last-ditch effort to save the tree. At least we can get an understanding of what that is supposed to do. The Councilor thinks having a neighborhood meeting would be helpful, and if Chris Hayward is available, because he is a certified arborist, that would be fantastic to have him there, as well. The Councilor states that she can help facilitate the meeting in her district to get people there and to get a format that is going to work. She is not sure if they will need to close the road or have the meeting in the library parking lot, but she expects that attendance will be good.

The Director advises that Chris Hayward has indicated that he is willing to participate, understanding that everyone has priorities. There was dialogue about this at a Conservation Commission meeting a couple of months ago, so the Director reached out to him. The Director doesn't have an opinion on this issue and thinks it should be the community's opinion, but if there isn't going to be an extended time for the Great Oak, then we should get some ideas on what to do going forward. The Director sees her role as the facilitator, listener, and someone to come up with next steps based on that input. The Councilor states likewise. She would also like to understand if the Historical Commission has purview over the fate of the Great Oak. It would be helpful to understand how the decision will be made about what to do with the Great Oak. The Director advises that it is in the Historic District, and Vice Chair Frazier states the Historical Commission would have some purview over it as a result. Member Herbst remembers that when they installed the playground next to Town Hall, the Historical Commission did not have jurisdiction because it is not a permanent structure. Member Herbst is not confident that we have the final say, and she thinks we need to look it up again. She is happy to look it up in our bylaws. Member Rubin states the Historical Commission had the authority to have it trimmed. The Director clarifies that in the general ordinance for the Town of Braintree it lists out the Town Center Historic District. It lists a variety of things, and it specifically says "Oak Tree, Frederick J. Follett Circle". The Director remembers when doing some research that the Historical Commission jurisdiction extends to more than permanent structures because landscapes and walls were

included. Member Herbst thinks it may have to do with a certain number of inches in the ground, but she will research it. The Director advises that the Historical Commission may have jurisdiction, but they don't own the tree. The town owns the tree. The purpose of the public dialogue would be to see what people are interested in, but the ultimate decision probably falls with the mayor.

Vice Chair Frazier recalls that, when they were talking about the playground, the Historical Commission was told that the mayor owns the property. The Director states that she can check with the town's legal team. The Great Oak is in the middle of a public way, and the town, in most situations, owns the fee under the street. Vice Chair Frazier thinks we have covered this extensively enough that the Director knows what the concerns are, and we can take this up at a future meeting because he doesn't think anything is going to happen during the winter. The Director will keep this matter on the agenda with updates, and she will start to gather some information.

Administrative Business - Commission Vacancies (2 Members)

Vice Chair Frazier notes, with Councilor Boericke still here, that the Commission has a candidate, Carl Johnson, that everybody knows, and the mayor has asked. Attorney Johnson has said yes that he would do it. It is stuck somewhere between the mayor's office and the town council. The Director advises that Attorney Johnson was putting his resume together with a cover letter. He was a member of the Commission before. That is forthcoming. The Director mentions that she found the name of the architect that was interested in coming onboard, and she was going to reach out to him. Then, we had Mr. McCarthy, but the Director is not sure what happened with that. Vice Chair Frazier states, if we can get Attorney Johnson, that takes care of one of the positions, but it is critical for the future to have an architect on the Commission. Member Herbst thinks we should pursue all of them. The last Member Herbst heard was that Brendan McCarthy was very interested and had met with the mayor. Member Herbst thinks it is important to have a wide demographic on the Commission, especially age-wise. The Director feels it is important to keep all Boards at full membership.

Administrative Business 2023 Meeting Schedule

The Director advises that the Commission has always met in person at 7:00 PM on Monday, but then Covid came, but we still met at 7:00 PM. She advises that Zoom is going to end, unless they extend it again, at the end of March 2023. The Director asks the members what time is good, and how do we want to move forward? She advises that 5:00 PM is early for in person, but she is flexible around her other board meetings. If 7:00 PM works, she notes that the town only has one Zoom License, and Commission on Disabilities meets at 6:30 PM, and they will never be done by 7:00 PM. If people are okay with meeting in person, we can do the 7:00 PM on Monday; if members would like the Director to look at other slots, she can do that, as well.

Member Rubin is good with earlier, but she thought for some members earlier was too difficult in person. Member Herbst never could make 5:00 PM in person. Vice Chair Frazier suggests meeting via Zoom for as long as they can do it. The Director confirms that, if we are on Zoom, 5:00 PM works, and, if we are in person, 6:30 PM works. She confirms that the Commission would like to continue with Zoom as long as we are under the guidance of the state. Vice Chair Frazier thinks, if we have some presentations, we really should be in person. Member Rubin asks if we want to stay on Monday. Vice Chair Frazier is good with the first Monday of the month. The Director advises that for September the first Monday is Labor Day. Vice Chair Frazier confirms that all members agree.

Administrative Business

Approval of Meeting Minutes for June 27, 2022

Vice Chair Frazier explains our June 27, 2022 meeting minutes need approval. He has reviewed them and has a minor correction.

Member Herbst **MOVES TO ACCEPT** the June 27, 2022 minutes, as amended; seconded by Member Rubin. All in favor By Roll Call Vote: Acting-Chair Frazier – Yes; Member Giannino – Yes; Member Herbst – Yes; Member Rubin – Yes.

Administrative Business

Demolition Delay – 173 Allen Street (No Delay Required)

Demolition Delay – 61 Central Avenue (No Delay Required)

Vice Chair Frazier advises that two properties came up recently for Demolition Delay. One was at 173 Allen Street, and Vice Chair Frazier and Director SantucciRozzi went out to that site. Mrs. Frazier came along as a photographer. The site was old, but it had been so changed that there was nothing there worth saving.

The second property that came up was 61 Central Avenue. That is the one that Heidi Sullivan was living in. Vice Chair Frazier and Director SantucciRozzi went out to that site. Mrs. Frazier came along as a photographer. Vice Chair Frazier advises that it was disastrous there, and he doesn't know how Thayer Academy got along with the property in that condition. Vice Chair Frazier discusses the state of disrepair that the property was in. The Director advised that she had reported the state of the property back to the mayor, and he had Building Inspector, Russ Forsberg, go out to the site. Mr. Forsberg cited them for the blight ordinance because of the condition of the property. The Director discusses the state of the property and mentions that she has never seen anything like that. Vice Chair Frazier states it was one of the earlier properties, and he wouldn't be surprised if it was a property when Sylvanus Thayer lived on it. Member Giannino asks who owned the property, and it is clarified that Thayer Academy owned the property. Vice Chair Frazier thinks we should take a look behind a couple of the other properties they own because he heard from one of the non-Thayer owners that some of the properties are pretty trashy back there. Vice Chair Frazier doesn't think we need to take any action. The Director wanted to update the committee because there is a process where the Vice Chair and the Director go out to these sites. The Director will have the Building Inspector look at those other properties.

Administrative Business

Mandatory Ethics Training and Education

Director SantucciRozzi advises that there is an acknowledgement form that needs to be completed by members. It says we provided the information, and you received it. The Director advises that staff will be back in touch when the online portal is working, and members can go on.

Vice Chair Frazier confirms that no one has any further questions or comments. Director SantucciRozzi provides an update related to the Master Plan, and she encourages people to participate.

Adjournment

Member Herbst **Motion** to adjourn the meeting; seconded by Member Giannino. All in favor by Vote: Acting-Chair Frazier – Yes; Member Giannino – Yes; Member Herbst – Yes; Member Rubin – Yes.

Meeting adjourned at 8:05 PM

Respectfully submitted,
Louise Quinlan, Planning and Community Development