

RYE HERITAGE COMMISSION
Thursday, September 7, 2023, 5:30 p.m.
Rye Town Hall

Commission Present: *Chair Alex Herlihy, Vice-Chair Gail Hughes, David Choate, and Alternate Elizabeth Sanborn*

Members Not Present: *Bev Giblin, Peter White, Frank Lagana, Mae Bradshaw, and Bill Epperson*

I. Call to Order

Chair Herlihy called the meeting to order at 5:36 p.m. and seated Alternate Elizabeth Sanborn.

II. Approval of Minutes – August 3rd

Motion Alex Herlihy to approve the minutes of August 3, 2023 as written. Seconded by David Choate. All in favor.

III. Business

• Treasurer's Report

Chair Herlihy reviewed the Treasurer's report, which was submitted by Treasurer Peter White prior to the meeting. It was noted that the only change from the August report is \$230 that was collected on Rye Day, which has since been deposited.

Motion by Alex Herlihy to pay invoice #11483 for \$195.00 to Timberline Signs for three house plaques. Seconded by Elizabeth Sanborn. All in favor.

• Decision on Gazebo

Chair Herlihy noted that there is one carpenter from Rye who will be providing an estimate for parts and labor for the gazebo, within the next two weeks. The gentleman has looked at the gazebo several times and is interested in the project. There is also a second Rye carpenter who has looked at the gazebo and will be submitting an estimate.

It was agreed at a previous meeting that the Commission would take a final vote on what to do with the gazebo at the October meeting.

Chair Herlihy also noted that if the estimates come in close to what's available for the project, the Commission has additional funds in the budget that can be used for anything. This could be added onto what is already designated for the gazebo.

Alternate Sanborn commented that at least two members are not really in favor of this project. She hopes that the numbers come in before moving forward with a vote on whether to proceed and use any of the Commission's additional money.

Chair Herlihy agreed that the Commission has raised enough money for the project. If the numbers are just too far off, it doesn't have to move forward.

- **Pulpit Rock update**

Chair Herlihy reported that he has spoken with Patricia Weathersby, Friends of Pulpit Rock Tower. She received a letter that Fish and Game has been looking at the Tower and reconsidering whether they really want to sell it. Fish and Game has seen the great job that the Friends have done, but also know that the group cannot go on forever. Fish and Game is also aware of the Heritage Commission. There may be a scenario where the Heritage Commission may be asked, with the help of Friends, to find a new group of volunteers to continue to do the work that the Friends have done. The Heritage Commission would be the managers of the Tower, but not the owner. Chair Herlihy commented that it would be a big change if Patricia Weathersby could say that she's been in discussion with the Heritage Commission and they are willing to work with Friends to create a new subcommittee volunteer group of the Rye Heritage Commission, who would be responsible for managing through that subcommittee. He pointed out this would have to come before the Commission for a vote.

- **Demo Review update**

Member Choate reported that 630 Washington Road, which was the former Rye Ridge Greenery property, has been sold. According to the tax cards, the house was built in 1908. The goal of the property owner is to tear down the structure and build a new house on the back portion of the property, which is 1.7-acres. Member Choate noted that the application that was approved by the Zoning Board was for variances for two homes, temporarily, on one lot and for building height, which means the home is already designed. He commented that it's frustrating that they cannot hear of these applications earlier, so they can meet with the property owners to try to convince them to incorporate the existing home into the new plans. He believes there's a certain percentage of the population that may think twice before tearing down the structure, if they knew about the property and its history. He continued that the problem is that people know they can go to the ZBA to get whatever relief is needed for their project. If relief started to be denied, the property owners may start to think twice and try to make the project work within the zoning ordinances.

Member Choate noted that the other application for demolition is 65 Big Rock Road, which is currently a two family and was built in the 1940's.

- **Rye Advocates update**

Chair Herlihy noted that Rye Advocates is an ad hoc group that does its own publicity and meetings. The Advocates also had a presence at Rye Day, along with the Heritage Commission. He thinks that whenever the Heritage Commission comes up as an agenda item for the Advocates, perhaps the members need to be more vocal. The whole purpose of the Rye Heritage Commission is preservation of the built environment. Rye Advocates is also about preservation, which can be done for houses and all kinds of things. There have been many people who have come into town and bought one of the three hundred plus homes to fix up and preserve. There are many people who have preserved the eight hundred plus homes. He asked what else can be done to promote the preservation of these homes.

Member Choate noted there's a publication called the 'Registry Review' that comes out every week which tracks real estate sales. The sales are usually no more than a week or two old before they hit the 'Registry Review.' He pointed out that he could be more diligent in looking at the Rye sales, and pulling the tax cards to try to sensitize the new owners to the property.

Alternate Sanborn suggested highlighting some successful homes. For instance, Janet Davis has a home that is 250 years old and its spectacular inside. The Heritage Commission could do a story on the home with photographs for Stroll Magazine. This kind of preservation is what makes Rye, Rye. Alternate Sanborn pointed out the Commission has a great vehicle through Stroll Magazine. It would be great to have an article on some success stories. Janet Davis's home is a success story. It's documented at the Historical Society, and there are before and after photos. Janet continues to make great improvements to enhance the house.

Referring to the work of Rye Advocates, Member Choate noted they're focusing on putting together some more workshops on deed research. He commented the more that Rye Advocates can publicize what they are doing and get people invested, the more disciples there will be in the community.

Chair Herlihy commented that it's time to think about how to frame all the great work that has been done on older homes in Rye to fix them up and preserve them. The Drake Farm could be used as an example and there are many others. He commented they should reframe the purpose of the Heritage Commission and its subgroup, Rye Advocates, working together for preservation. This would also make a good feature article in the Portsmouth Herald.

Member Choate pointed out that the Town Newsletter comes out quarterly. He thinks more people read the newsletter than Stroll Magazine.

Chair Herlihy suggested they focus on the Select Board's Newsletter for December with an article from the Heritage Commission and the Advocates.

Member Choate agreed to work on an article.

- **2024 Budget**

Member Choate spoke about inviting Becky Mitchell, who is on the Heritage Commission in Stratham, to a meeting to talk about what they have done on their Commission. He noted that Stratham Heritage Commission has an annual appropriation of \$50,000 that goes to a fund that's for preservation related projects. He thinks it would be good to get an amount in the budget for this concept.

The Commission agreed to invite members of the Stratham Heritage Commission to a meeting.

- **Discussion of Town Hall upgrade; auditorium; etc.**

Tabled to a future meeting

- **Future signage projects for a new subcommittee**

Tabled to a future meeting

IV. Other Business

Chair Herlihy noted that a new master digitized graveyard list needs to be done, as the current list is incomplete. This should be placed on the Heritage Commission's website page. This can be addressed at a future meeting.

Adjournment

Motion by David Choate to adjourn at 6:19 p.m. Seconded by Gail Hughes. All in favor.

Respectfully Submitted,
Dyana F. Ledger