

Calais Historic Preservation Commission

February 13th, 2024

Present: David Schutz, Larry Bush, Ryan Edwards, Jarrod Weiss, Tobin Anderson, Susannah Blachly (on Zoom), Marge Sweeney (on behalf of the Curtis Pond Association).

A. Agenda Revisions. We'll add the discussion of Curtis Pond as item C on the agenda.

B. Approval of January 2024 Minutes. Unanimously approved.

C. Curtis Pond Dam.

- Update from Marge Sweeney: A bond passed at the last town meeting for \$450,000 for the dam – and so the town applied for the bond and got the approval a couple of weeks ago. The Selectboard now has only a short window in which they can sign for the bond.
- \$850,000 toward the project has been raised, with about half being the bond. (Also, \$100,000 ARPA funds, private donations, etc.) That was supposed to cover the estimated costs of repair. However, when the Curtis Pond Assoc. went out to bid – the bid came back at \$1.2 million. Big shortfall, especially considering the possibility of contingencies.
- They have been talking to contractor Larry Hebart from Williamstown.
- The Selectboard felt they were uncomfortable signing for the bond when there was a gap between the \$850,000 raised and the \$1.2 million total.
- Thanks to Jamie Moorby's hard work, the Selectboard did finally sign for the bond. Once this money was secured, the Curtis Pond Association raised a further \$170,000 in pledges toward the shortfall.
- Neither the Selectboard or the Pond Assoc. wants to go back to the town for more money for this project.
- Given the signature this week, construction could start this summer. (Though the bond, once signed, is still available for three years.)
- Jordan and Jamie and others were able to work with the contractor to possibly bring the cost down from that high bid. It has now been reduced to a bit over \$900,000.
- (Though there are still some other expenses – for soft costs and engineering oversight. It will probably actually be \$1.1 million in total.)
- Still need therefore \$220,000 by mid-March if they're going to build this summer.
- There are still a few grants and requests out. (Bernie has put in an earmark in the budget, for example.)

- As part of the US Army Corps of Engineers permit, they have to go through the Vermont Historical Division of Preservation to do a historical survey, archaeological survey, etc. University of Vermont Dept. of Archaeology did a very complete report.
- This week or next week they should get the approval from the US Army Corps of Engineers.
- Are there any opportunities for funding that the Commission might help with?
- For example, the historians' report recommends:
 - The report recommends an interpretive sign.
 - They're doing some faux rock work on the pond side of the dam (with coloration of the concrete and embossed outlines, as at North Calais).
- Possible placement of the historical panel:
 - In the back of the store (near the ruins of the mill)
 - Down at the fishing access
 - Down at the town beach
 - At the dam itself
- They have picked the ruins behind the store as the location for the historical panel.
- David: We could help first of all by determining what the plaque could include. Also, we could help with the costs with a CLG grant to be proposed next December 2024.
- David: Also, have you communicated with the Preservation Trust of Vermont? (The Curtis Pond Association is looking into that presently.) What's great about them is that they give you seed money that could help act as a bridge to hire someone who could help with fundraising.
- Currently the Association is paying someone to search for grants; volunteers are writing the grants. They don't want to engage a paid grant-writer.
- Marge is happy to share her spreadsheet of grants and funds the Association has already approached.
- David will send Marge a joint email with Ben Doyle (VT Preservation Trust) and see whether he has any advice. (Mark Mihaly has also contacted him.)
- Marge provided the Commission with copies of the UVM historical report on the dam.

D. 2022 CLG Grant: Calais Town History Tour Project.

- The tour script is in a Google doc. Tobin will send out a link so that anyone on the Commission can take a look at it.
- Two points that have to be dealt with:
- First, Tobin still has to find a contact to discuss the Abenaki presence in the region. (Charlotte Bassage has suggested a contact.)
- Second, we have to find a way to digest the sections on architectural style into a visual guide – a kind of scavenger hunt – rather than describing these elements verbally.
- David wants to take a look at the design review guide for the Kents Corner district. It might be something that could be replicated.
- David makes point: villages have many of the same stylistic elements, but nonetheless there are differentiations (for ex. more Italianate details in East Calais).
- Ryan: There are already architectural scavenger hunts available from the VT chapter of the American Institute of Architects. There are ones for Middlebury, Brattleboro, Church Street in Burlington.

- David: There's a little guide called *What Style Is It?*
- Tobin will look into the visual guides and come up with something that we can use to sideline the architectural descriptions in the tour itself.
- Alternatively, Susannah could do a photographic guide with Ryan.
- Once we've sorted out the question of a guide, we can squeeze some of those discussions out of the spoken text and just refer more quickly and efficiently to architectural styles in each hamlet.

E. Nomination of Calais for a Preservation Trust of Vermont 2024 Preservation Award.

- Somehow, we have been nominated for this award.
- Ryan has an update: He had a talk with Jenna Lapachinski a few weeks ago. Ryan had put forward the General Store and the Memorial Hall for nomination; he suggested at that point that the Town Hall could be included too, since it never has been nominated for a preservation award. Then the possibility was raised that there could be a consolidated award, a package deal encompassing all of Calais. (They may have mistakenly thought that it was for Old West rather than Town Hall, as Old West was later discussed with David.)
- Scott Newman (historic preservation consultant) discussed with Meg Campbell about the East Calais General Store as a possible nominee, "a no-brainer."
- If the town of Calais wants to be nominated, one or two people should fill out the nominating form.
- Ryan is going to nominate individual projects within the town.
- Ryan will forward the nominating form to us. Someone should nominate both Town Hall and the town as a whole.
- Larry will forward the email we've already gotten from Karen Freeman regarding this matter.
- Also, there's an upcoming preservation conference with the Trust, June 5th, down in Bellows Falls.
- David says that Ryan should do a session at the conference. Ryan is considering it.
- Jerrod will spearhead the two nominations, with David assisting.

F. Adamant Music School / Adamant Center.

- Today there was a gathering of the people who've been meeting to discuss Adamant. Ben Doyle sent a long email based on our walk-through a few weeks ago. That was discussed today.
- Ben has been discussing the possibility of creating a community chest. It could be used to hold the title to property. Would the co-op want to have its property in the trust, for example? Might the music school be interested in their real estate being owned by the trust and rent the space from the trust?
- The feeling is that it's time to start to arrange a community-wide get-together to discuss this with Ben Doyle and Karen Freeman (VT Housing and Conservation – works for Gus Seelig).
- Also, feeling that there are great opportunities to bring the school more into the village so there's more communication and cross-over (concerts, dinners, etc.).

- Great news: The music school has an on-site person who'll be moving into one of the houses to oversee the property.

G. Old West Church.

- There is currently a three-person board of trustees.
- Nobody actually owns the church. (It's actually the Old West Association itself that technically owns it.)
- Susannah: It's a lot of responsibility for a very few people. Would it make sense to have it owned by the town or the Division for Historic Preservation?
- What are the pros and cons of it being owned by an entity?
- David: They tried to give Old West to the State of Vermont a while ago, when the Kent Museum was transferred. (It would have also included the saw-mill and the church.) The Division, however, would be the first to tell you that their deferred maintenance on the Kent is already a problem. (They need to replace the roof; they need to stabilize the barn.) They turned down the offer at the time.
- Susannah: The Old West board is looking for some kind of umbrella organization to help them out – not with fund-raising etc. but who might share liability and responsibility.
- David: The Kent is run by Historic Kents Corner, Inc. It was formed in part as an umbrella organization like Susannah is asking about, which was originally going to include the sawmill and Old West as well as the museum. It primarily now deals with the art at the Kent.
- Maybe it's time to talk about how these landmarks support one another. Could we build some kind of event in the spring to talk about the future of all three of them?
- The state might be willing to be a little more involved with the other two, if they acknowledged that the Kent needs the other two as well to be a successful visitor location.
- David would be very interested in helping with this, creating a meeting between the trustees of the three sites. One joint board meeting (before a community meeting).
- Susannah returns April 5th – this could perhaps happen sometime in May.
- Maybe then plan a larger gathering after the three boards meet together.

Adjourned: 8:45 pm.