

East Lyme Historic Properties Commission Minutes

East Lyme Town Hall Conference Room #1

July 6, 2021 Meetings

FILED

Aug 9 20 21 AT 7:30 AM/PM
Benn Bullock
EAST LYME TOWN CLERK

Members Present: Steve Marks-Hamilton, Mark Christensen, Benn Bullock, Dick Waterman, Dan Cunningham (ex-officio)

Members Absent: Ron McCauley, Maggie Prokop, Barb Low, Burt Hobby

Steve Marks-Hamilton called the meeting to order at 7:08 PM and opened with the Pledge of Allegiance. Alternate member Dick Waterman was seated.

Public Delegations: None

Approval of April 6th Minutes: Mark Christensen made motion to accept the minutes, Dick Waterman 2nd the motion. April Minutes accepted unanimously.

Correspondence:

- 1) Letter from Mark Christensen dated April 6th giving his resignation as the HPC due to business reasons. Filed by the Town Clerk May 28, 2021.
- 2) Letter from Barbara Johnson-Low that she will step down as Chair of the HPC due to family responsibilities. Filed by the Town Clerk May 28, 2021.
- 3) Letter from the BOS appointed Benn Bullock to serve as a Member on the Historic Properties Commission with a term to expire on January 8, 2024. Filed by the Town Clerk on June 3, 2021.

Old Business:

- 1) Election of HPC Chairman – Steve Marks-Hamilton nominated Benn Bullock to become the new commission chair. Steve explained that Benn is now eligible since being appointed a Commission Member by the BOS on June 2nd. The motion was seconded by Dick Waterman. The motion was unanimously approved.
- 2) Benn Bullock reports Grant for Samuel Smith House roof replacement has not been brought before the SHPO, it is scheduled for their July 7th meeting.

- 3) Publicity – sources available; Post Road Review (free), Electronic Sign at Town Hall (free), Town Website (free), Main Street Niantic (?). Get information and offerings out to the public.

New Business:

A) FY 21-22 Budget – approved \$10,268

- 1) \$2,268 – HPC Service Contracts & Operating Expense
- 2) \$1,000 – Samuel Smith Farmstead website development and maintenance
- 3) \$7,000 – Samuel Smith Farmstead building maintenance and renovations

B) Mail - catalogues distributed to appropriate members: Flower / bulb catalogue and Shellfish magazine.

C) Need to attach the POCD report appropriate pages that relate to the HPC recommendations to the minutes. Motion made by Mark Christensen and seconded by Dick Waterman; motion passed unanimously.

Reports:

Brookside Farm Museum: No Report

East Lyme Cemetery Assoc.: No Report

Library/Museum Management: No Report

Samuel Smith Farmstead: Benn Bullock reported on July 17th Farm Day event to include live animals, pony rides, live music, displays and interactive events by the Ag Group and Pollinator Pathways for children. Two antique bed warmers were stolen from the house, to review and update group tour guidelines.

Lee House: Steve Marks-Hamilton reported Archeological dig scheduled for August 21st from 9 AM – 1 PM rain or shine.

Adjourn:

Mark Christensen made a motion to adjourn the meeting, second by Dick Waterman, motion passed unanimously. Meeting closed at 8:25 PM.

Respectfully submitted,
Steve Marks-Hamilton (bb)
ELHPC Clerk

Regular Members: Benn Bullock, Chair; Steve Marks Hamilton, Clerk; Mark Christensen; Rob McCauley; Maggie Prokop; Dan Cunningham, (ex-officio)

Alternate Members: Burt Hobby; Barb Johnson-Low; Dick Waterman

Chapter 4 - Historic Resources

4.1 Historical Community Groups

In the absence of historical events, the historical resources of a town are the essence of its very existence: the neighborhoods, the places of commerce, the centers of education, religion and government, etc. The preservation of such resources, or, at the very least, development that acknowledges and respects these resources, are vital to a sense of community and continuity and contribute to the overall quality of life in any town.

The town of East Lyme has over 200 buildings built before 1900, although not all of them are still recognizable as such. Many of these buildings are concentrated in particular areas such as the Smith Street/Smith Avenue neighborhood or Crescent Beach, giving these areas an historic value as well. In addition, many of the earlier institutional buildings are still in existence, although the conditions and use have changed over the years. Even some of the early commercial buildings have survived. Where they have not, the signs of their existence, such as dams, millponds and foundations are still to be found.

According to the Community Questionnaire, launched to inform this document, 65.1% (330 of 507) of questionnaire participants felt that we had the right amount of historic places while 23.7% (120 of 507) of questionnaire participants felt that we should have more. The remainder felt that we had too many (12) or had no opinion (45).

While an Open Space Plan can contribute to the protection of East Lyme's historic and cultural resources, ultimately the responsibility of preserving historical resources should rest with groups intended for that purpose.

In East Lyme, a number of groups serve that purpose:

1. **The East Lyme Historical Society:** The East Lyme Historical Society is a private entity made of volunteers. The East Lyme Historical Society owns and manages the Thomas Lee House and the Little Boston School House, both on West Main Street in Niantic.
2. **Brookside Farm Museum:** The Brookside Farm Museum (Society Road, Niantic) is owned by the Town of East Lyme and managed through the Brookside Farm Museum Commission, with support from private donations and volunteer hours from the Friends of Brookside Farm Museum.
3. **Samuel Smith Farmstead:** The Friends of Samuel Smith House and Property, Inc. is a non-profit organization whose mission is to restore, maintain and preserve the house and property as a living museum of 17th and 18th century Connecticut farm life. The Farmstead is jointly owned by the Town of East Lyme and Niantic Sportsmen's Club. The Farmstead is overseen by Friends of Samuel Smith House and Property, Inc through a board and membership.
4. **Historic Properties Commission:** East Lyme's Historic Properties Commission is responsible for administering the provisions of the Connecticut General Statutes (Title 7, Chapter 97) relative to the three historic museums. Additionally, there are 19 cemeteries in the town of East Lyme, although the town does not own any of those cemeteries.

A number of other private membership groups also maintain historic information about East Lyme including organizations like Niantic's beach associations, Kari-Hill Post VFW, American Legion, fire departments and residents who may reside in historic homes.

4.2 Documents & Artifacts

As such, East Lyme's historical documents and artifacts are stored in a number of locations throughout the town including:

- The home of the Town Historian (who is also on the board of the East Lyme Historical Society) has historical documents at her home.

- The East Lyme Public Library contains documents and files pertaining to local and town history.
- All three historical houses have records about their house and land.
- Historic Resource Database is available at the Town Clerk's office and the library.
- Many organizations such as the firehouse, beach associations, VFW and the American Legion keep information on their own history.

To best create a complete picture of East Lyme's history and historic assets, the recommendations below encourage further partnership between various interest groups and greater educational programs for East Lyme's residents and the general public.

4.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Develop a sign program to list the initial building date of a home and the builder of the home. The signs which list the date and builder of the home would be available to the homeowner at their request to post on their property. The Historical Properties Commission is currently studying this project and is completing a historic resource database with this information. East Lyme also has an inventory of historically significant homes located in the Records Room of the Town Hall.
2. The historic resource database existing at the Town Clerk's office should be deployed and periodically updated as the database could be used by the commissions in the process of making their decisions. Land use commissions should be more aware of the availability of this database in making decisions.
3. Historical interest should be promoted through photograph displays, markers, tours, oral histories, etc. Much of this work is already being done by the historical houses, but the creation of a central display area would do much to encourage public interest. There may be grants available for projects of this kind as they involve historical tourism/local interest & education.
4. Actively seek grant funding: The Historic Property Commission has completed the work necessary to ensure that East Lyme is a Certified Local Government and published a list of possible grantors on the Town website, thereby enabling each of its historic properties to directly apply for grant funding through the State. Publicizing the historic resources database will assist in obtaining grant funding.
5. In the event of properties being threatened by destruction, it might be in the best interest of the town to become actively involved in the acquisition of such properties for conservation and preservation purposes. The Samuel Smith Farmstead is an example of a property that has been preserved since the last POCD. It is recommended that the Historic Properties Commission launch a fund for the purchase of historic sites that can be supplemented with grants as available.
6. Consider an increased partnership between the Historic Properties Commission, the town's three historic properties and the East Lyme Public Library. Currently, the Town lacks one common regularly accessible and environmentally controlled location and digital process by which to record, maintain and display all of East Lyme's historical artifacts, documents and ephemera for the benefit of all. This material is now held separately and often in only an analog format, in a number of locations including the three historic properties, a room at the library and at various private locations. Through partnership, all stakeholders in historic resources could develop a common location and digital process by which to record, maintain and display all of East Lyme's historical artifacts, documents and ephemera that is accessible to all. The East Lyme Public Library/East Lyme Community Center/Brookside Farm and surrounding properties should be considered as an appropriate location for a future Town of East Lyme Museum. The location is not only centrally located but is already staffed by professionals who are properly equipped to not only digitally catalog but also to effectively manage the care and display of our towns historic resource. To implement, an inventory of all of the assets should be undertaken and potential grants for digitizing should be researched.