

Historic District Commission 2015 Annual Report

2015 has been a year of continued progress on various projects for the Historic District Commission. We began the year with six active members and the selectmen's representative, so a quorum has been easily achieved and regular monthly commission meetings have been conducted each month with the exception of February (due to weather!). In March, changes to Article 15 of the Town of Effingham's Zoning Ordinance reduced the number of seats on the Commission from seven to five. As a result, the two members whose terms expired at Town Meeting, Rebecca Harrington and Jade McRae, cycled off of the Commission. We thank both of them for their involvement, especially Mrs. Harrington, who has served for several years, including as Assistant Chairman. Otherwise, the Commission maintained a full, active membership, though the two alternate positions continue to remain vacant.

Under Article 15 of the Town of Effingham's Zoning Ordinance, the Commission is charged with ensuring the purposes of the Historic Districts. In addition, the Commission administers designated scenic roads within the town. Tasks range from recommendations to other town boards regarding projects that would aid in these purposes to public hearings related to applications for work on properties in the districts.

During the course of 2015, the Commission dealt with a varied docket of business, including the ongoing project to have Historic District boundary signs erected on Province Lake Road (Route 153) (getting through the state required process of installation continues to be difficult to schedule – we'll try once again in the spring!); responding to several inquiries by property owners regarding Historic District Regulations; approving four applications by property owners to undertake work on their properties; continuing to work with the town's webmaster to update and revise the Commission's section of the town; and discussing repair and restoration work to be undertaken at the Historic Effingham Town Hall, including what grants might be obtained for that work, in order to reduce the expense to the town and its taxpayers.

Two other projects took up the remainder of the Commission's schedule for the year. First, the Commission reviewed, revised, and/or approved a Commission workflow and checklist for applications, an Applicant checklist for applications, an Application for Certificate of Approval, and templates for a Certificate of Approval and Notice of Disapproval. In addition, as part of ongoing work with the Board of Selectmen and Zoning Enforcement Officer to create a process that is easily understood by the public, a brochure explaining how to apply for a Certificate of Approval from the Commission was created and can be obtained at the Selectmen's Office, from the Zoning Enforcement Officer, or on the Town's website. The final element of the Commission's work on policies, procedures, and documents was the adoption of a set of Rules of Procedure for the Commission, which will help to ensure that the Commission operates at its best! The second project has been a complete review of the metes and bounds descriptions of the Town's two historic districts. The Commission proposed to the Planning Board new, revised language for both descriptions. The proposed changes, which the Planning Board initially approved, pending the outcome of the required public hearing, would correct errors in the descriptions with regard to the intended district boundaries, as well as make the documents easier to understand for the public. If the proposed changes receive final Planning Board approval, they will appear on the Town's official ballot in March of 2016 for approval by the voters.

With recent sales of properties in both the Lord's Hill and Center Effingham Historic Districts, as well as rumors of more sales to come, the Commission continues to expect to be busy in 2016. The Commission meets the second Monday of each month at 7 p.m. at the Municipal Offices and we encourage all Effingham residents and/or taxpayers to attend a meeting to learn more about the Commission and its work. If you are interested in serving on the Commission, either as a full member or as an alternate, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Respectfully submitted,

Paul Potter
Chair

Erik Jones
Secretary