

Historic District Commission 2013 Annual Report

2013 has been a year of revitalization for the Historic District Commission. A frequent inability to achieve a quorum due to lack of members meant that at the beginning of the year, the Commission had been able to hold official meetings only twice since late 2011. In February, Ralph (Tom) Thompson agreed to an appointment to the Commission, followed by Erik Jones in March, and Neil (Eric) Potter in April, joining Paul Potter, Rebecca Harrington, and Andrew Hubbard to give the Commission a full membership. Sadly, with his death only one day after Eric Potter's appointment, the Commission lost long time member Andrew Hubbard. Despite this keenly felt loss, with five active members and a selectmen's representative, quorum became measurably easier to achieve and regular commission meetings have been able to resume.

Under Article 15 of the Effingham 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 2013, the Commission held two public hearings. The first, in April, concerned a request by Public Service of New Hampshire (PSNH) to trim and/or remove trees along Hobbs Road, a designated scenic road. Commission members reported that the trees in question were dead and/or dying, posed a real threat to transmission lines, and that removal would not affect the scenic nature of the roadway. In addition, during public comment, statements were made regarding the great inconvenience of frequent power outages such trees cause. The Commission unanimously approved the PSNH request subject to the specifications and guarantees for debris removal as described by PSNH in their letter requesting the permission to cut. The second hearing in November concerned a request in the Lord's Hill District to alter doorways and roofs of a building in order to provide safer and more convenient access into the home and out to the yard. Statements made in support of the application noted that the changes were a matter of safety for the property owner and the public, were largely cosmetic, and did not affect the overall historic nature of the structure. The Commission discussed the desire to preserve the appearance of a building versus the need for livability. The Commission unanimously approved the application subject to the payment of required application and public notice advertisement fees.

Two other main projects took up the remainder of the Commission's schedule for the year. First, the Commission has been kept informed of the ongoing work of the Planning Board to develop correct and accurate maps of the historic districts for recording at the Country Registry. Such maps will greatly aid the Commission in its work by providing clear guidance as to where historic district restrictions apply. We look forward to the opportunity to refer to the new maps when they are completed! The second project has been the installation of signs delineating the boundaries of the Town's two historic districts. These signs will be two-sided and will advise motorists driving Province Lake Road (Route 153) that they are entering or leaving the respective districts. Tim Eldridge, as Selectmen's Representative to the Commission, has been instrumental in acquiring the necessary permissions to erect the signs within the state right-of-way along Route 153. It is hoped that these signs will be able to be put in place in the spring, as soon as ground and weather conditions permit, and subject to scheduling with the local NHDOT office.

With both recent and expected sales of properties in both the Lord's Hill and Center Effingham Historic Districts, the Commission expects to be busier in coming months than it has been in the recent past. The Commission meets the second Tuesday of each month at 7pm at the Municipal Offices and we encourage all Effingham residents 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