

TOWN OF ASHLAND  
HISTORICAL COMMISSION

MEETING DATE: September 14, 2021

MEETING NOTES:

Members in attendance: Tom DeAlmeida  
(Voting Members only) Elizabeth Childress  
Joanna Sorensen  
Kelly Flannery  
Jennifer Paratore

Meeting called to order at 7:02pm

Meeting held IN PERSON at Ashland Town Hall in Meeting Room B/C

Chairman DeAlmeida called the meeting to order and the group unanimously voted to accept the minutes from August's meeting.

Next item on the agenda was the gravesite of the Revolutionary War soldier at the construction site for the new school on Concord St. DeAlmeida said that he and Cliff Wilson from the Ashland Historical Society met with a professor about how to get a grave number for the site. DeAlmeida said that the grave has to be recorded but once that is done, it can help with setback and buffer zone requirements around the site. There was discussion about using ground penetrating radar to see if there are additional bones in unmarked graves around the site as well but that did not materialize. DeAlmeida opened the discussion up public. Steve Morgan, abutter to the project, said he was told that the site was not on the town's inventory of historical assets and there was no avoidance/preservation plan for the site. He feels that nobody at Town of Ashland has made an effort to protect the site. Morgan asserts that the cemetery is obviously there and he believes it qualifies for the National Register. Cliff Wilson said that when the town inventory was done, there was only so much money allocated to the project and the gravesite didn't make it on the list. Mr. Morgan said that the State maintains it's own list of historic properties and claims the site is on their list. Morgan said that the grave is from 1793 and should be on National Register. Wilson confirmed the headstone was placed there in 1907. Morgan said that the site is historically documented in multiple books and is well established. Wilson addressed Brandi Kinsman of the Ashland Select Board who was in attendance. Wilson claims he sent an email to the Select Board claiming that someone has mislabeled the gravesite as the Frances Poole Memorial rather than a cemetery, which it is. Wilson thinks calling it a Memorial site was intentional misdirection by someone in the town to avoid requirements in the zoning and building process. He clarified that the Daughters of the American Revolution asked to put up a plaque to honor Frances Poole at the site after she died about ten years ago but that the site is still a burial site. Wilson said that he checked with the Attorney General and said that the town cannot cut down the oak tree at the gravesite because it is protected by law and that it is a criminal offense, punishable by the AG office. Morgan said

that is illegal to disturb the root system. He told the Planning Board that he believes the setback should be a minimum of 33 feet around the tree. He said that Planning Board decided they can't save the tree and he believes they can. Morgan claims he requested a zoning document for setback requirements and was told by the Town that there is none but Morgan believes there is. K. Flannery asked if the current setbacks around the tree are already grandfathered in because she thinks the tree is close to the school already. Morgan said that the fence line is too small and he personally believes a more appropriate set back needs to be done for the new project. Kinsman said that the town was always planning to preserve the grave and the gravesite from the beginning. She said that calls to preserve the tree as well are more recent. Carl Hakansson (Ashland Conservation Commission) said that he did a site walk on the first week of August with the Planning Board and the Design Committee. The Conservation Commission always assumed the cemetery, including the tree, was being preserved but was told at that site walk the tree would be cut down. Hakansson discussed his efforts over the past few years to fix and maintain the gravesite. He said that it had fallen into disrepair and was not being properly maintained by the DPW. Wilson said he is shocked that nobody has made an effort to preserve the cemetery. Morgan said he attended all Planning Board meetings about this project as an abutter to the project. He claims he made the Planning Board aware of several things that needed to be preserved around the gravesite and claims he was ignored. Morgan said that when he personally walked the site, he wonders if gravestones had already been dug up because he claims he found small fragments of flat rock, which he insists are not naturally occurring. <J.Paratore has to leave meeting due to family emergency>

Hakansson said he thinks this is an easy issue to fix but the Town has to admit that there is a cemetery. The whole thing has been blown out of proportion. He said people just want things to be done correctly and that nobody wants to halt the construction of the new building and acknowledges that storm water issues are a major concern. Kinsman said that the Planning Board process has no input from the Historical Commission. The HC was not in operation when the Planning Board first met about Mindess building project. Morgan said the Town never told MSBA that the gravesite was there even though the Town knew about it. He believes the Town didn't do an adequate job with planning this project. He said it's a historic site and needs to be preserved. L. Childress recused herself from the meeting. Historical Commission business concluded via loss of quorum for the evening at approximately 8pm.

**Next regular meeting OCTOBER 12, 2021 AT 7PM IN PERSON**

Additional meeting scheduled for SEPTEMBER 30, 2021 at 7pm via Zoom to continue this meeting with all members present