

TOWN OF ASHLAND
HISTORICAL COMMISSION

MEETING DATE: September 30, 2021

MEETING NOTES:

Members in attendance:
(Voting Members only)

Tom DeAlmeida
Elizabeth Childress
Joanna Sorensen
Kelly Flannery
James Neilsen
Karen Coleman
Jennifer Paratore

Meeting called to order at 7:01pm

Meeting held via ZOOM *** following the guidelines set forth by Gov. Baker back in May 2020 dealing with the Covid-19 Pandemic.

Chairman DeAlmeida called the meeting to order and addressed the Commission and the residents in attendance. He said that there will be no vote happening this evening and that there will be no comments from the public. He wanted to give the members of the Commission an opportunity to discuss the Concord St project, the preservation of the Revolutionary War gravesite and any misconceptions people have about our intentions as a group. DeAlmeida thanked everyone for e-mailing and contacting the Commission with their various view points on the subject but points out that we won't stand for bullying and aggressive accusations against the Commission. He says that everyone has a right to offer their opinion on things going on around town and before our Commission. DeAlmeida named Ashland resident Steve Morgan specifically as one of those individuals who is entitled to offer their opinion, whether the majority agrees with it or not. DeAlmeida feels that the tree at the gravesite has nothing to do with the Historical Commission. He said that the Commission is not the tree police and he has no issue with the project as a whole and he is not trying to delay the building of the new school. DeAlmeida's concern was with the preservation of the gravesite. He is going to be contacting the Mass Historical Commission about their recommendation for our Commission to register the site with the state. If there is any indication that the registration would delay the building, the Commission would hold off. J. Neilsen spoke next, saying that he missed the meeting on the 14th because he was on vacation but that he would have expressed that it is never his intention to delay the project. He reminded the group that the Historical Commission wasn't functioning during the initial design project and that the site should be registered as a historic asset. He stressed that the grave isn't going anywhere so if the registration would cause any delays, we would wait. K. Flannery spoke and the Commission is not trying to delay that project. Her husband attended that school as a kid and she realizes that it needs to be re-built. She says that we have a duty to the community to preserve the history of Ashland and we are just ensuring that we are doing our part. J. Sorensen said that the school must go forward. This

contention about the tree and renewed scrutiny of the gravesite preservation was dropped in our laps at the last minute. The Commission wants to record the grave to protect it moving forward. J. Paratore spoke next. She said that she was disappointed that the tree wasn't able to be saved and that she wishes it had been considered during the initial design process but that delaying the project at this point to try and save the tree was not in the best interest of the community. She also spoke in favor of registering the gravesite with the state and was surprised that it hadn't already been done. She said she is adamantly against the delay of the project.

DeAlmeida took a break from the Commission input and asked Roberta Soloman, Ashland resident, for any input. Roberta is in favor of preserving the tree and the gravesite. She thanked the Commission for listening to the public's concerns about the project but doesn't feel that the site is being adequately preserved. She also mentioned she was disappointed about the preservation of Devil's Den. L. Childress spoke next. She said she spent the morning reviewing all the documents about the project. She said that claims that preservation wasn't considered from the very beginning just weren't true. She said that everyone involved in the building and design of the school had the community's best interest at heart about the gravesite and the tree, but especially the gravesite. The original drawings for the project have the site clearly marked on where it is and where it will be in relation to the new building. K. Coleman said she had nothing to add but speaks in support of everything that has already been said. Childress asked DeAlmeida why Roberta Soloman was able to give community input and not anyone else. DeAlmeida had no explanation for why he selected Soloman to speak and said she just snuck in there. Soloman said that she didn't sneak in, she was specifically invited to speak and that was confirmed by Paratore. Childress and Coleman suggested that one additional member of the community with an opposing viewpoint be able to speak. Paratore asked members to raise their hands via Zoom and Coleman said that Claudia Bennett was the first to raise her hand.

Claudia Bennett, principal of the Mindess School, said that the gravesite has been considered from Day 1 but she was not sure when the tree became a part of the discussion. She apologizes if there is any sense of divisiveness over the issue but that they have every intention of preserving the site. She mentioned that 88% of the community voted in favor of building the new school. DeAlmeida interjected to say that he believes that is a misconception because it was 88% of the 14% of residents who voted so it's not actually 88% of the community. Claudia countered DeAlmeida by saying it was 88% of the people who cared enough. Paratore said that we were getting off track from the discussion. With no other matters to discuss, Neilsen motioned to conclude the meeting. Seconded by Paratore. Concluded at 7:31PM

Next meeting OCTOBER 12, 2021 AT 7PM IN PERSON