

Subject to Approval

**HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION
Regular Meeting, Monday, Feb. 27, 2017
7 p.m. at Madison Town Campus
Meeting Room B**

MEMBERS present: Chairman John Lind, Eric Berg, Thomas Boyle, Susan Cartledge, and Eileen Banisch.

ALTERNATES present: Peter Clement and Carol Snow.

OTHERS present: Director of Planning and Economic Development David Anderson.

1. **Call to Order:** Acting Chairman Thomas Boyle called the meeting to order at 7:11 p.m.
2. **Review proposed door changes for Lee Academy, 14 Meeting House Lane.**

The Madison Historical Society had extensive renovations done about 10 years ago, and the doors were installed; all four doors have since fallen into a state of disrepair, due to rainfall. Choices were to replace the doors and possibly add an overhang, but, instead, doors made of fiberglass were found, and they are identical to the wooden doors. They are indestructible, and when painted Essex green, they will be completely indistinguishable from the original wooden doors. This is an after-the-fact item before the commission. The fact that the material has changed from wood to fiberglass is the reason for requesting approval of a certificate of appropriateness. Acting Chairman Boyle stated the commission prefers to see wood; the guidelines speak specifically to appearance. The Madison Historical Society does not want to put wooden doors in again, and then return 10 years later having to spend \$6,000 to replace the doors. Acting Chairman Boyle stated the look of it is virtually indistinguishable. No action can be taken on this item, since public notice has not been given for it; this is not yet an application, Chairman Boyle stated, adding that the application must be submitted for approval.

3. **Review of 498 Boston Post Road.**

Plans were to remove three existing windows in the kitchen and replace with a bay window, and the windows are currently installed. The old windows were six over six, and the new windows are two over two. The house was built in 1835. Commissioner John Lind stated that Zoning Enforcement Officer John De Laura brought this to his attention as needing Historic District Commission approval. The windows were installed in January. A formal application for a certificate of appropriateness will have to be submitted for action next month, since this is an after-the-fact installation, and it is a big change in the appearance of the windows, according to Acting Chairman Boyle. There is a serious penalty for not abiding by the regulations; \$250 a day, until the situation is remedied, Commissioner Lind stated; he asked the applicant to investigate the feasibility of changing the window design and return to the commission with the information in an application.

4. **Review of Academy School property with Planning Consultant coordinating March 14, 2017, public workshop.**

Planning Consultant Francisco Gomes, AICP, ASLA, of Fitzgerald and Halliday, Inc., of Hartford, stated that the town approached his firm about plans for the future of the Academy School and its

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property, with ideas centered on future use and change of use; the town is very interested in hearing what residents and key stakeholders think about the future use of the school or change of the use. His company is helping to facilitate the process; there is a survey online. Mr. Anderson stated there is a link to the survey on the town website and on the town Facebook page; thus far, there have been over 700 responses, and the survey is ongoing. Mr. Gomes said the company is trying to collect as much information as possible and get as much input as possible. This survey helps to promote the March 14, 2017 workshop, as well, according to Mr. Gomes. The survey also helps to generate more ideas for the property. The school is located in a historic district, and it is a historic piece of property. Thus far, more than 200 to 300 people have expressed an interest in attending the March workshop, where planners hope to obtain feedback on ideas and desires, according to Mr. Gomes. The school was gifted from Daniel Hand; the original school building was destroyed, and the current building replaced it. The school has been closed for several years. It will cost potentially several million dollars to renovate the school building for any future use, according to Mr. Gomes. The school, itself, sits on five acres, with some limited parking and ball fields. Zoning modifications would be needed for any intensive use of the property, Mr. Gomes stated. The property has been appraised by the town assessor at \$5 million, for the land and the buildings; it would generate a little short of \$100,000 a year in property taxes, if it was no longer owned by the town, according to Mr. Gomes. If it were privately held, it would be an asset to the town property taxes, according to Mr. Gomes. Any redevelopment on the site would require use of the ball fields, he stated. Those who live within a 10-minute walk of the school, about 110 people, and 40 property or business owners participated in the survey; everyone else was a resident, Mr. Gomes stated. Most of the responses were from those who have lived in the town for a number of years, know the site, and know the community, he stated. This is considered a fairly good distribution of respondents; one-third have either attended or have had a family member attend the school; a little more than one-third visit the site daily, others visit it once a week; people use the site frequently for recreation and for the ball fields, according to Mr. Gomes. A concern is the lack of activity in the area, with the school closed, as well concerns for maintenance issues; there is a lack of sufficient parking; food trucks came up as an issue; and 42 percent stated that they had no concerns with the site. Regarding the significance of the school building itself, most of the responses were that the building was significant or very significant to the character or identity to the town of Madison; respondents also believe the building is significant to the town's history; less than 15 percent of the responses state that the building is not that historically significant. In response to the question as to how the school building should be reused or repurposed, 21 percent stated it should be reused as a school, but a number of people believe not so, because school populations have been declining; 35 percent believe it should be reused for another town use; 26 percent stated it should be redeveloped for housing; 30 percent thought it should be redeveloped for retail and services; 18 percent stated it should be redeveloped for offices; 47 percent thought it should be redeveloped with a mixture of uses; and three percent thought it should not be reused or repurposed. The survey also asked people about the grounds, whether reuse or redevelopment should take place, if it required removal of the ball fields: 22 percent would be in favor, even if it meant the ball fields would be removed; 10 percent would be in favor, if ball fields could be provided near the center of town; 30 percent said they would be in favor of reuse or redevelopment, if the playground could remain, as well as a small amount of open space; and 30 percent would not be in favor of redevelopment or reuse if it required removal of ball fields. Others stated that the town spent \$9 million on ball fields so why does the town need to preserve these ball fields, after there has already been a big investment on other ball fields? The survey asked whether townspeople would be in favor of redevelopment: 43 percent said, no, that the building needs to be preserved; 38 percent said yes, but it depends on the type of development; 10 to 11 percent said, yes, regardless of redevelopment or preservation of the structure; and 8 percent gave a variety of comments. A final question was, *What should the town*

do? and .62 percent said nothing should be done to the building; 52 percent thought the town should make the necessary investments for the building's preservation or reuse; 50 percent said the town should just lease the building, only contingent on the type of use; 44 percent were in favor of the sale of the building, depending on the type of reuse; and only eight percent were in favor of selling the structure, regardless of the use. Respondents do seem open to the reuse of the property, according to Mr. Gomes. Mr. Gomes asked those present to voice their ideas and concerns about the future use of the property, and he stated his firm would take notes on comments and use them as part of the planning process for Academy School. Historic District Commissioners spoke about the design and architectural significance of the Academy School building; past interests of others, in wanting to revitalize the building; and the historical significance of the building, as it rests in the historic district. Chairman John Lind stated that he doesn't believe the Academy School is a very good example of a period structure, architecturally speaking, it is in poor condition and needs a lot of work; if it was replaced with a new building, the town could potentially have a nicer building that is more architecturally meritorious than the existing building is. Chairman Lind also noted the amount of effort it would take to renovate the building, in its current state, using a lot of resources, just to bring it up to code. Discussion also centered on ideas for redevelopment that would preserve what is preservable of the school building and perhaps reuse it for a community function, with the grounds used for mixed use or residential use. It was estimated would cost about \$8 million just to bring the structure up to shape.

5. **Review and approve minutes:** Feb. 22, 2016 ~ March 28, 2016 ~ May, 23, 2016 ~ Aug. 22, 2016 ~ Sept. 26, 2016 ~ Oct. 24, 2016

No action was taken on the minutes.

6. **Invoices** ~ None.

7. **Correspondence/New Business** ~ None.

8. **Adjournment** ~ The meeting adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,
Marlene H. Kennedy, clerk