

Town of Lunenburg

Architectural Preservation District Commission

Richard McGrath, Chair
Cullen Dwyer, Vice Chair
Tony Nicastro, member



Meeting Minutes

Tuesday July 13th, 2021

Joint Meeting with Select Board, Town Hall

Call to Order: At 7:00PM with McGrath, Dwyer and Nicastro in attendance. Town manager Lemieux and all members of the Select Board were also present: Alonzo, Jeffries, Franco, Dwyer and Marino.

Discussion of the disposition of the Old Primary School Building:

Alonzo began by explaining that the Select board was about to draft a Request for Proposal for a landscape architect to design a town park on the Old Primary School property, as per resolution at Town Meeting. He said that the wishes of the town expressed at official meetings made it clear that the people wished to keep the land as town property, and that a park was the most popular way to use the land. Alonzo personally opined that with the new town hall project approaching, the people would not be willing to fund the full renovation of the Old Primary School, and that if outside funds were available for such a project, the Select Board would need to know about that now.

Jeffries said that the building had served its purpose, and only had sentimental value to certain people who had attended school there. It should be demolished and the town supports that view.

Franco agreed that the building had no real historical value.

McGrath reviewed his credentials as an operative mason, and also reviewed the extensive history of school building re-use in Lunenburg and neighboring towns. He then reviewed the history of Demolition by Neglect and the APDC's efforts to persuade the Select Board to maintain the building. He advocated maintenance and reuse.

Alonzo defended the Select Board's neglect, saying the funds were not readily available, and that he did not see much will from the town to spend funds on its preservation. He reviewed the history of attempts by Mr. Jewel to convert the building to elderly housing before the economic downturn dried up the HUD funding.

Jeffries approached state delegation and inquired about available funds for rehabilitation of the building. He found that most of the state funds were for conversion of buildings to housing for towns with larger populations. Other funds may be available from smaller institutions for smaller amounts.

McGrath defended the historical value of the Old Primary, saying that ordinary people were just as important to the town's history as the notables.

Cullen Dwyer argued that the building had irreplaceable historical architectural value beyond its purely functional value. He confessed that support for its reuse had little voice in the public forum.

General discussion followed supporting compromise, cooperation, and the desire to find a path forward that is agreeable to all parties. The possibility of converting it to an open-air pavilion was discussed, and Alonzo invited the APDC to be a part of the RFP process. However, Jeffries dissented saying that he would only agree with the cheapest option, and selectman Dwyer concurred. McGrath cautioned that the APDC would be constrained by the language of the bylaw, and Alonzo encouraged the APDC to review that bylaw before contributing to the park design process.

Adjourned: The joint workshop adjourned at 8:15PM