

# Chaplin Historic District Commission

## Minutes

### Regular Meeting

Tuesday, November 14, 2023

*These unapproved Historic District Commission meeting minutes are forwarded to the Chaplin Town Clerk in a draft format. These minutes are unofficial until they have been read and approved by a majority vote of the Commission. Should edits be necessary, they will be made at the next regularly scheduled meeting, voted upon and noted in the meeting minutes.*

#### **A. Hearing: Application for Certificate of Appropriateness (C of A) from Fritz Mauer for solar panels constructed at 350 Phoenixville Rd.**

Chairman W. Church opened the hearing at 7:01 P.M. Regular members present were D. Cox, C. Smith, P. Peifer, Alternate members present were L. Ricklin, W. Rose, and C. Lindquist. Also present were Mr. Mauer, Adam Strumf, his representative from Venture Solar, First Selectman J. Roman and eight members of the public. Mr. Church read the legal notice published in The Willimantic Chronicle on November 6, 2023, the regulation regarding physical changes on Historic District properties and explained that the panels were already installed. Mr. Mauer said he did not know solar panels needed a C of A and the Chaplin building inspector gave him the permit. He said the panels on the south side of the detached garage are slightly visible from Rte. 198. The panels on the north side of the garage and on the Grange were less visible. Mr. Strumf handed out illustrations of the installation and explained there are two arrays on each structure that are flush mounted. Mr. Peifer noted that he had given the Building Inspector a list and map of the structures in the Historic District and specifically said there are three properties not located on Chaplin St. and he did not think it was the homeowner's fault to proceed with installation and that the installation was as unobtrusive as possible. No other discussion, Mr. Church closed the hearing at 7:12 P.M.

#### **B. Continuation of Hearing: Town of Chaplin, Moving Chaplin Museum building to the Chaplin Library site.**

Chairman Church reopened the hearing at 7:15. P.M. with a statement that the hearing began in July and continued in September. Chaplin First Selectman Juan Roman said he is still waiting for information from the State about how the actual structure would need to be moved and added that he would not like to have to dismantle it for the move. He presented illustrations of how the building would be sited next to the Library and approximately twenty feet from the cemetery. Archaeologists have examined the site for any artifacts or interference with the cemetery. His vision is to see the museum open at the same times as the library with the Librarian as curator and with exhibits protected by Plexiglas that would not require a staff on site. Eventually he would like to see a group of volunteers to run the museum. There are no plans to change the exterior of the building. He showed the plan for an expanded parking lot that did not include landscaping. Stone facing would be around the slab foundation at the new site. Mr. Church asked about fences or signs and Mr. Roman said the hitching posts would be moved with the building. Mrs. Smith asked if there was any thought to use the old post office as the museum and Mr. Roman responded no, he wanted to explore renting that out for office space. The museum would be open to the public without staff and eventually, have a 503c to create a Historical Society but, as yet, there is no time frame. Mr. Church asked if he worked with an engineering firm and would like to see a depiction of what the site would look like without the museum. Mr. Roman said the large tree and shrubbery would be removed at the original site.

Mr. Peifer asked how the commission could balance destroying an original foundation, moving a building that is a gateway to the District with the commission's mandate to protect the originality of the District as it is one of the most original districts in the state. Mrs. J. Philbrick complimented Mr. Roman on his good work on this plan but it is not a done deal. She spoke of several options, first, do nothing but was concerned the building would not be maintained. Second, to fund a Historical Society to fund maintenance, third, attempt to get state funding and contributions to move it to the Library site. Lastly, leave it where it is, take the \$80,000 to build a replica of the museum instead of using the money to move it. Mr. Church said a fifth option is to sell it, he has spoken to the adjacent landowners who expressed interest in using the building. William Rose said there is no guarantee that it would be maintained if in private hands. Mrs. Cox noted that the Town sold the Grange and Ross Library and there is no guarantee those would be maintained, either. Mrs. Smith thought the Town should retain ownership. Mr. Roman said a Historical Society must have several years to establish itself as a 503c and this process of whether to move the building has been ongoing for twenty years. Mrs. Philbrick added that Chaplin is one of a few towns without a Historical Society. Dr. Linqvist wondered if the building could be set back 10 or 20 feet to give it more dignity. Mrs. Church asked about the CIF grant application that had recently been denied by the State. She understood that the State recommends applicants initially submit an application for a CIF planning grant. Mr. Roman explained the grant has different phases and the State has an amount that includes all aspects of the project. Linden Weiss asked who was designing the project and thought there should have been more input from townspeople before the grant was started. Mrs. Cox said the plan was presented in a general way to get funding. Ms. Mayhew wanted to see the plan and application, Mr. Roman said it is available at Town Hall. Mrs. Ricklin referred to the document Ms. Zimmerman and Mr. Olsen submitted at the previous meeting that made her realize what a valuable historic building this is. To have a woman build and run a store and develop a business in the 1860s was rare. It made her reconsider moving the building. She added the old post office should be considered but it is going to be difficult to get volunteers. Mrs. Ricklin thought there is interest to create a Historical Society and an ad hoc committee should explore that possibility. She would like to see more interactive exhibits and the adjacent property owners should be contacted to see their level of interest. Randy Weiss agreed with Mrs. Ricklin and thought the grant process was confusing and there should be more public input into the plan. He thought the new parking lot shown in the plan was hideous; he has looked at the museum building and it is still in solid shape. Mr. Roman said this issue has been around for so long, he wanted to move forward with funding to make it happen. Mr. Rose agreed a Historical Society would be good but they would be unable to meet in the museum as it is now. He added any grant application must have a conceptual plan then it is adapted by public input and various stages of Town and State approvals. Mr. Church received letters from Sally Zimmerman and Allen Olsen about the plan. They cautioned about accepting an application without enough complete information to decide and thought any citizen would be rejected with an incomplete application. Mrs. Peifer said it may be possible to lease or sell the building to the adjacent landowner with the stipulation that it be maintained and the ability to place a lien on the property if that is not done. She noted there are several historic buildings in nearby towns that don't appear to be used but are maintained. She would rather see the money used to build a historically appropriate building that would have a connection to the Library building. Mrs. Ricklin thought the Plexiglas displays would not be ideal. Mrs. Cox noted the Library is not open on Sundays, the day the old museum was open. Mr. Rose said this has been discussed since 2002. Mr. Weiss called for more public input. Mrs. Ricklin said it would be useful to contact the adjacent landowner about using the building. Mr. Church said the commission is still lacking information and wants to see what the present site would look like from Chaplin St once the building is removed; something required of any applicant. Mr. Church continued the hearing at 8:20 P.M. Mr. Peifer said it must be held within 65 days.

### **C. Business Meeting**

1. Call to order, roll call and seating of alternates. Mr. Church called the meeting to order at 8:20 P.M. Present were regular members W. Church, P. Peifer, C. Smith, and D. Cox, alternates L. Ricklin, W. Rose and C. Lindquist. Mrs. Ricklin was seated for the absent J. Givens.

2. Approval of September 12, 2023 minutes. Ms. Ricklin made the motion to approve the minutes, Mrs. Smith seconded; the minutes were approved unanimously.

3. Audience for citizens: Laurel Mayhew asked to see the grant application, Mr. Roman said it was available at the Town Hall.

#### **4. New Business**

a. Certificate of Appropriateness for solar panels constructed at 350 Phoenixville Rd. Mr. Peifer moved to approve the application, Mrs. Ricklin seconded. Mr. Peifer said since the Building Inspector did not take into consideration that the property is in the Historic District and the panels are not that visible from the street and were probably installed as discreetly as possible, the application should be approved. Vote to approve was unanimous.

b. Resignation of Jean Givens. Mr. Church received a resignation letter from Mrs. Givens and noted that she had been a valued member of the Historic District. He also said another vacancy will be opening up and a search for new members is needed. Mrs. Smith said she could send out a letter to residents that volunteers are needed.

### **5. Old Business**

a. Certificate of Appropriateness for moving the Chaplin Museum Building to the Chaplin Library site. Mr. Roman said the final design for landscaping cannot be done until funding is available. Mr. Church wants to make sure the view from the street is appropriate and the houses opposite the Library property are protected with landscaping. The grant requires a minimum cost and could the old museum be recreated under this funding. Mrs. Ricklin thought perhaps a modern building is better instead of trying to make this building fit in a new spot. Mrs. Cox asked if the building has to be at the Library, why not the Town Hall property. The hearing will be continued at a special meeting on Tuesday, January 9th at 7:00 P.M. at the Library/Sr. Center.

b. Other: none

6. Correspondence: Received the Preservation Connecticut News magazine.

7. Adjournment: Mr. Church adjourned the meeting at 8:40 P.M.

Respectfully submitted, Susan Peifer- Recording clerk- HDC

Addenda: First Selectman's office is digitizing the grant application to post on their page of the Town website.

11/14/2023 Letter from Sally Zimmerman

11/14/2023 Letter from Allen Olsen

November 14, 2023  
Warren Church, Chair  
Chaplin Historic District Commission  
495 Phoenixville Road  
Chaplin, CT 06235

Dear Chairman Church:

I am writing to convey my comments about tonight's Continuation of the Public Hearing on the Town of Chaplin's application for Certificate of Appropriateness on "Moving Chaplin Museum building to the Chaplin Library site." My apologies for being unable to attend. I respectfully ask that my comments be included in the minutes of this meeting and shared, either during or following the meeting, with Commission members and alternates.

The current application, as it was submitted on July 6, 2023, appears to be substantively incomplete based on the HDC Application materials and Regulations posted online. It does not, for example,

- "include elevation drawings, to-scale, showing the proposed work", or
- a "Written description of work to be done including materials to be used," or
- "Drawings and/or plans; photos; and any other information the Commission deems necessary to describe the work," or
- the "Approximate dates of commencement and completion of the work."

Most importantly, the Application and Regulations call on the HDC's Secretary and Chairman to determine if the information provided in the Application is "sufficient" and state that "The date on which they [the Secretary and Chairman] determine the information is sufficient is *considered the filing date of the application.*" [emphasis added]

Since this determination does not yet appear to have been made, and no further materials to supplement the July 6 submission appear to have been submitted, it is not clear 1) that this application was correctly filed and 2) whether the Commission can or should undertake a review of this matter at this time.

A completed application would clearly identify the ways in which the proposed relocation of the Chaplin Museum and other changes (at both 11 Chaplin Street and 128 Chaplin Street) will meet the purpose of the Historic District to "preserve and protect the unique character of Chaplin village's architecture and open space as an early 19<sup>th</sup>-century rural community".

The Commission's jurisdiction in this matter is clear since, by the terms of Connecticut General Statute, Section 7-147a. governing all historic districts in the state, the term "Altered" means "changed, modified, rebuilt, removed, demolished, restored, razed, moved or reconstructed."

By this definition, moving the Museum and reconfiguring the Senior Center parking lot will, without question, *alter* "the unique character of Chaplin village's architecture and open space" at not just one, but two town-owned properties in the District: 11 Chaplin Street and 128 Chaplin Street.

The Museum's original location at the south end of Chaplin Street will be "changed" and, for practical purposes, "demolished," while the architecture and open space at the north end of Chaplin Street, in place since at least the 1948 construction of the Elementary School, will be "changed" "modified" and "reconstructed."

Whether or not the architecture of the Chaplin Museum will be appropriately "preserved and protected" by this proposal is the central question the Commission must determine but it cannot do so without a completed application.

The Museum relocation for which the Selectmen are seeking the HDC's approval appears to be part of a possible "Town Center Vision" project on the town-owned properties at the north end of Chaplin Street. It is my understanding that the Selectmen are reapplying for Community Investment Funds (CIF) for that vision. A relocated and repurposed Museum could be a vibrant part of a transformative and potentially highly beneficial new community resource encompassing the Senior Center, Library and the Old Post Office.

Consideration of this proposal has been postponed twice (July 25 and September 12, 2023 waiting for a recommendation from the SHPO (State Historic Preservation Office) that (as stated in the July 6 letter) "as long as the building [Museum] stays within the historic district it would not lose its Historic Classification." That opinion primarily matters in the context of a possible CIF grant as it would allow work on the Museum to be eligible for the CIF's Federal funding source. The Commission has a duty to act in a timely manner on applications brought to them but it cannot and should not act if it lacks the required documentation for its deliberations.

I therefore respectfully encourage the Commission not to continue this hearing further, or to take any action on the substance of this application, but rather to either ask the applicant to voluntarily withdraw the July 6, 2023 submission or to move to deny the current application without prejudice on the basis of its incompleteness until such time as a completed application that meets the Commission's requirements have been submitted.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sally Zimmerman

46 Chaplin Street, Chaplin, CT 06235

6 Beaufort Road, Apt. 2, Boston, MA 02130

Letter to Historic District Commission

November 14, 2023

My understanding is that the Meeting of the Historic District Commission tonight is a continuation of a meeting on the proposal by First Selectman Juan Roman III in his July 6, 2023 letter to the Warren Church, Chairman entitled "Relocation of the Town owned building, Museum, located at 11 Chaplin Street."

The "Written description of work to be done" field in the accompanying application "To move current structure ... from 11 Chaplin St to the location adjacent to the Chaplin Public Library at 132 Chaplin Street." The letter itself explains, in part, that "The proposed new location for the Museum would be the Town owned grounds that are currently the home of our Library / Senior Center complex, within Chaplin's Historic District... This would be a great location for this small piece of history to be moved to. This location would allow our citizens and visitors to enjoy the building and learn about Chaplin's history....The town of Chaplin was advised that as long as the building stays within the Historic District it would not lose its Historic Classification."

Recently we brought a proposal to the Commission to add a deck on the back of the Lincoln-Goodell Store at 46 Chaplin Street, in the Historic District. Imagine if we had offered an application that simply said, in the "written description of work to be done," "to alter the building at 46 Chaplin Street by adding a deck on the back of it."

You would have told us that it was premature to discuss a Certificate of Appropriateness, because we had not furnished you with the information needed to verify the impact of the proposed change on the appearance of the Historic District, and would have asked us to withdraw the application and come back when we had all the information you needed.

Then suppose we came back with: "the proposed location for our deck is on the back of the house on property that we own within the Chaplin Historic District. This would be a great location for the deck to be. This location would allow our citizens to enjoy the great nineteenth century rural landscape in our back yard and learn about the history of our building. My wife advises me that the deck itself won't affect the Historic Classification of our building, since our building will still be located in the Historic District."

Would you not have found these hypothetical submissions insufficient to grant us permission? I think you would have told us that our application was premature, and asked us to withdraw it and come back when we had the level of documentation that would allow you to make a determination.

In fact, at the time of our application, we furnished the Commission with detailed plans that laid out the structural changes and showed the effect on the appearance for the building, so that you could determine whether it would "help preserve the unique character of the Chaplin Village's architecture and open space as an early nineteenth century rural community". The plans were drawn up by an architect and a structural engineer, and left no surprises.

November 14, 2019

The impact of our change on the Historic District was orders of magnitude less than moving the Chaplin Museum and the structural changes to the Library / Senior Center envisioned by Mr. Roman. Surely the process you followed with us is an appropriate one to apply to the First Selectman's proposal.

The First Selectman has worked very hard to pull together a variety of projects for this Town and getting the funds to bring them to fruition. These efforts deserve our support.

I think that you should give him the time he needs and help him develop the documentation that will allow you to determine the appropriateness of these changes. But until that time, the proposal should be withdrawn.

Thank you.

Allen Olsen  
46 Chaplin Street