

**CHARLESTOWN HERITAGE AND HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION  
MINUTES--DRAFT  
September 22, 2015**

Present: Joanne Hipp, Duane Wetherby, Sue Richardson, Joyce Higgins, Art Grenier..  
Absent: Sue Coleman, Wes Van Velsor.

The meeting was called to order at 7:10 p.m.

Sue Richardson, treasurer, reported that she had spoken with Jess Dennis and that the charge to the CHHDC's account to Don Highter for mowing was a mistake and would be removed from our budget line.

Before the meeting was underway, Art Grenier presented a letter to the commission from the selectboard, written by the town attorney. The letter quoted some of the RSAs relating to the commission's authority. The selectboard feels this commission did not have the authority to put benches in the town. They are displeased with the benches the commission has placed in the town, their locations, the manner of their placement (stones vs. concrete underlay), and the fact that two of the benches are on private property. They request copies of the agreements between the CHHDC and the private property owners and also the agreements with the private property owners where the National Register signs are located, stating that they should all have been reviewed by the town's attorney and signed by the selectboard. The selectboard requests a response and copies of the agreements by October 2.

A discussion followed which continued until the meeting was adjourned. Since Wes Van Velsor is on vacation, and he has the copies of the agreements, we will be unable to copy them until he returns. Duane leaves shortly for a vacation and will not return until after the date a response was requested. The commission does not meet again before the proposed October 2 date, and so has no time to research the questions and prepare a letter as a commission.

Art suggested that the commission meet with the selectboard just prior to their meeting on October 7 at 6:00 p.m. to discuss the concerns brought up in the letter. He will arrange that with the selectboard, and we will plan to be there at that time unless we hear otherwise.

When Art had attended a previous meeting, we had told him that our budget had been cut drastically, and that we didn't realize it until June, when Sue Richardson discovered it in the course of her duties as treasurer. When she asked Jess Dennis about it, Jess had no information beyond the fact that it had been cut. Art remembered the action, and informed us that specific items had been cut, which he tried to recall from memory. No one had informed the commission of that fact, and as a result, we may have spent money for things deleted from the budget. We may also have paid the bill for renting the horses for the Old Home Day parade in error. Art said that Dave Edkins had been supposed to communicate with us, but we assured Art that did not happen, leading to much confusion

on our part. Joyce Higgins stated that she was chair until April, and Dave had not communicated with her. Duane affirmed that Dave had not communicated with him, either.

Joyce Higgins, who was the only member present who was on the board since the beginning of the bench project, related the history of the project from several years ago, when the commission went before the selectboard to get permission for the benches. They spoke with the selectboard two or three times, and never told that they could not place the benches, rather they were permitted to place the bench in front of the library on a trial basis, to see if any problems occurred. The bench was there for over a year with no problems, until Art Grenier relayed a message to the commission to either concrete under the bench or to remove it immediately. Since the commission had no money in our budget to pay for concrete, and the commission has always felt that concrete was not appropriate for the esthetics of a small rural community like Charlestown, we followed the selectboard's instructions, and immediately removed the bench. We already had the other benches being constructed, and had bought bluestones to place in front of them to prevent the grass being worn away, a concern of the selectboard.

Art told us that if we would put an amount in our budget for one large stone to place under the library bench, the selectboard would purchase a stone, using the commission's budget line. Such an amount appeared in our budget request to the Finance Committee, which was preliminarily approved.

The commission was never told by the selectboard that no more benches could be placed, but obviously the selectboard didn't want the benches on town property with no concrete, so we placed the benches on private property, with agreements stating that the benches remained the property of the town. We were never told the benches could not be on private property. In fact, when the original list of ten possible bench placements was presented to the board, several of the locations listed were on private property. The commission asked the selectboard to choose the locations they would prefer, and where they would prefer to have benches placed first, but the selectboard declined to choose. The CHHDC undertook this project due to repeated requests by the townspeople for benches so that they could rest while walking Main Street. Residents continue to request that the bench be returned in front of the library, and that there be a bench placed by the bus stop.

Joyce Higgins will research the RSAs and the history of the commission's contact with the selectboard about the benches. She reiterated that even though the historic district had not been able to be voted on by the town, due to the Planning Board's intervention, the town still has both a heritage commission and a historic district commission in place. Only a vote of the town could change that status.

Respectfully submitted,  
Joyce Higgins, Acting Secretary