

Notes from Woodville Information Meeting

Date: September 9, 2004

Sponsor: Study Committee of the Woodville Historic District

Place: Woodville Baptist Church, 249 Wood Street

Time: 7:00 – 9:00 pm

Study section presenters/attendees: Carol Mecagni, George Reimann, Nancy Stevenson, Michaelyn Holmes, Rose Leveille, Ann Marcy, Bill Shaw

Residents in attendance: 31 (85 property owners were sent notices).

Purpose of meeting: The meeting was scheduled to provide residents with details of the proposed Woodville Historic District, the process for community review and approval, preliminary findings from a recent survey of residents, and for the purpose of soliciting input, concerns, and questions from Woodville residents.

Presentations: Michaelyn Holmes opened the meeting with a brief overview of the State's process for creating local historic districts and what advantages such a district designation might have for Woodville residents and property owners. She also summarized preliminary findings from the recent resident survey (approximately one-third opposed). Rose Leveille, Carol Mecagni, and George Reimann, past or present residents of Woodville, provided insights about the historical character of Woodville and the need for preserving the architectural integrity of the neighborhood. The remainder of the meeting was dedicated to a question/answer period – details provided below.

Question/answer (paraphrased from notes):

1. Since Woodville area residents have been doing a great job of maintaining and preserving their properties for many years, why do we need a Town by-law?

Response/discussion: Creation of the Historic District is not intended to penalize residents, but to recognize and preserve the historic character of the neighborhood they have worked so hard to maintain. The fact that this area has been identified for historical recognition is, in itself, a tribute to Woodville residents' outstanding efforts to preserve and restore their homes over many years.

2. Shouldn't the town be focusing on other issues like landscape maintenance of street right-of-ways and neglected areas around the Whitehall reservoir and gatehouse?

Response/discussion: The focus of the proposed Historic District would be to review proposed improvements to architectural elements of buildings facing the public right-of-way. Landscape maintenance and general up-keep of home exteriors would not be within the purview of the Historic District Commission.

3. What will be the boundaries of the Woodville Historic District?

Response/discussion: The precise boundaries of the District are yet to be determined, but the consensus of the Study Section was that the natural boundaries of the historical village center seem to extend from about 200 Wood Street all the way to Fruit Street. In addition, there are some older homes on Fruit Street, Exchange Street, and Winter Street that might be included.

4. Not everyone values the historical significance of buildings. Shouldn't it be left up to property owners to decide what is right for their property?

Response/discussion: Some residents are categorically opposed to municipal land use restrictions of any kind, so it's not likely that these landowners would be in support of a Historic District proposal of any kind. It's our belief that the benefits of historical preservation in Woodville are worthwhile and that a local historic district may be the most effective method of preservation.

5. What about empty lots? Will they be included in the Historic District? How would that affect plans to build new homes on empty lots?

Response/discussion: It's possible that vacant lots may fall within the contiguous boundaries of the Historic District, if surrounded by historical structures. Any plans for building new structures on such lots would be reviewed and approved by the Historic District Commission. This provides protection to surrounding property owners that the historical streetscape of their vicinity will be preserved, even if new construction is proposed. The emphasis though is on what is visible from public ways.

6. Are there State assistance programs available to help residents maintain or restore their historical dwellings?

Response/discussion: There is federal funding administered by the State that the Historical Commission is looking into. Hopkinton does not now participate but it's possible that Marlboro (which provides the administration of the program for its neighbor Hudson might also be able to do so for Hopkinton). The loans are no interest and need only be paid back when the property is sold. It's a great program – not targeted specifically to historic maintenance but that would be a valid use.

7. How will boundaries of the Historic District affect zip code and post office designations?

Response/discussion: According to Woodville residents, only those with a post office box in the post office building are using the 01784 ("Woodville") zip code designation. Those who have their mail delivered to their homes use zip code 01748 ("Hopkinton"). Creation of a Woodville Historic District would have no impact on existing post office designations.

8. Can a historic district impose any restrictions on signage?

Response/discussion: To the best of our knowledge, signage would not be within the purview of the Historic District, as regulations concerning street signage are already covered in existing Town (and State) rules and regulations. We do need to examine this issue a bit more however.

9. What if it's too expensive to preserve an existing building? (e.g., recent demolition and reconstruction of Woodville Baptist Church).

Response/discussion: Financial hardship is one factor that the Historic District Commission may consider when making decisions on planned improvements. If preserving an existing building is cost-prohibitive, the Commission might work with a landowner to develop plans for a new building that are generally consistent with the historic character of surrounding properties within the District.

10. Will creation of a historic district improve access to funds that might be available from the Town's Community Preservation Act?

Response/discussion: Yes, for public buildings and properties within the district.

11. Woodville has a history of setting itself apart from the rest of Hopkinton (there was even an effort to secede from the Town years ago). How will creation of a historic district affect the relationship between Woodville and the rest of Hopkinton?

Response/discussion: Unlike some other parts of town, the historical character of the Woodville area has been very well preserved over the years. In some respects, establishing a Woodville Historic District might help to distinguish Woodville from other parts of town and maintain this identity for years to come.

12. What sort of time delay might be involved in getting Historic District Commission for new construction/improvements?

Response/discussion: The existing Town by-law (for the Hopkinton Town Center Historic District), requires review within 2 weeks. This requirement would probably be the same for a Woodville Historic District by-law.

13. Some residents in other towns (e.g., Sandwich) have been frustrated with their local historic districts for being too restrictive and particular about architectural details. How can this be prevented?

Response/discussion: Although some specific exclusions can be included in the Town by-law (e.g., paint color, storm windows), responsibility for establishing architectural guidelines will ultimately reside with the members of the Historic District Commission.

Therefore, it's important to have a strong representation of local residents serving on the Commission, providing reasonable and fair assessments of proposed improvements.

14. Why does the whole Town get to vote on an issue which only affects residents of Woodville?

Response/discussion: This is required by the State laws governing creation of a local historic district. Presumably, the laws were written this way because whole towns might benefit from the preservation of small, but significant historical areas of the town (either in its center or elsewhere within the town).

15. What is the timeline for Town approval of the local historic district?

Response/discussion: The study section will complete a preliminary study report in the fall, submit it first to the Massachusetts Historical Commission for review and then hold a public hearing in the early part of 2005. With the input from meetings (including this one) and review, a by-law would be drafted for a vote at the Town Meeting in May 2005.

16. What ever happened to the Woodville sign that was posted in front of the firehouse? Can it be restored or replaced?

Response/discussion: If it's still around, it might be inside the firehouse or stored somewhere else by the Town. Providing signage to commemorate historical significance is a priority goal of the Hopkinton Historical Commission. If the Woodville Historic District is approved, a sign posted at either end of the district would be a nice first step toward local recognition.

17. There was some recent trimming of hedges and weeds along Exchange Street near the Whitehall Reservoir. Was this done by the Town?

Response/discussion: (by residents): This was probably part of the State's on-going work at the Whitehall Reservoir but may have been done by the town for road safety.

18. Are there any historical pictures of Woodville homes and businesses available to the public?

Response/discussion: A community volunteer, in consultation with the Historical Commission, is currently scanning and indexing hundreds of historical pictures and newspaper clippings housed in the public library. In the future, these may be made available for viewing on an internet website.

19. If there had been a Woodville Historic District years ago, would this have prevented demolition of the old firehouse?

Response/discussion: Perhaps, if the firehouse property had been included within the Historic District boundaries.