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Amesbury Historical Commission
Town Hall • Friend Street
Amesbury, MA 01913

Meeting Date: October 2, 2025

Prepared by: Christopher P. Lane

Location: Amesbury Council on Aging Senior Center, 68 Elm Street, Amesbury MA

Commissioners Present: Joe Finn, Chair, Chris Akelian, Dick Joltes, Steve Klomps, Christopher Lane, Jay Williamson

Visitors: Nick Cracknell and Jennifer Welter

Meeting called to order at 7:05 PM

1. Review of past meeting minutes:

- a. Minutes for the September 4, 2025 meeting were previously submitted by Dick Joltes for review.
- b. Christopher made a motion to accept the revised meeting minutes.
- c. Chris A. seconded.
- d. The motion was passed by a vote of 5-0. (Jay missed the first vote).

2. Correspondence:

- a. Amesbury Public Library application approved by Mass Historical Commission for National Register of Historic Places.
- b. Application forwarded to National Register; awaiting federal approval.
- c. No public announcement until official confirmation received.
- d. Application packet to be available at library and online.
- e. Federal review process expected to take 45 days from submission.
- f. Joining the meeting, Jennifer Welter, nominated by mayor as alternate member of historical commission. Alternate member receives meeting packets, participates in discussions, votes only if a regular member is absent. City council vote pending this month.

3. Update from CPC meeting :

- a. The CPC meeting, on 9/17/2025, attended by Meghan, Dick, Christopher Lane and Jennifer. Jay presented on historical preservation, followed by Joe presenting an overview of the historic commission's responsibilities and goals.
- b. Joe gave a brief overview of what would/could be done with money appropriate to the historic commission, including further documentation of Amesbury's historical inventory, education and public awareness.

4. Prospect Street Preservation Restriction:

- a. Reviewed 60-page preservation restriction document for 40 Prospect Street.
- b. It was noted by Steve that the document uses new Mass Historic Commission (MHC) template, differing from previous standard, making it difficult to see what has changed. Nick noted this is the new standard document.
- c. Steve noted that the notification period for modifications has been lengthened for applicants but shortened for committee response. Nick noted that this was under review with MHC.
- d. MHC reviews only legal form (per MGL 184), not preservation merit; city council is final easement holder.
- e. Recommendation to planning board is next step; MHC approval required for perpetuity, otherwise restriction may expire in 30 years.
- f. Steve made a motion to recommend to the planning board for approval.
- g. Dick seconded.
- h. The motion was passed by a vote of 6-0.

5. Presentation Property Deeds Collaboration Harvard and Amesbury Public Library: Dick presented the progress on the software being developed to automate data entry for the Property Deeds Digital Library archive with the goal to make the process more efficient and accurate.

- a. Project aims to automate digitization of archival property deeds using OCR and NER technologies while capitalizing on services from Amazon and Google.
- b. Software being developed as open source and will not cost the city anything.
- c. Current manual process is highly labor-intensive: e.g., photographing 223 documents took 7.5 hours; uploading and metadata entry can take 25 minutes per item (excluding transcription). This automated software will expedite the process.
- d. Prototype uses Amazon OCR; achieves ~85% accuracy on mixed and handwritten documents in seconds per page.
- e. NER extracts metadata (names, dates, locations) to enhance search and retrieval in digital archives.
- f. Software to be released as open source; no development cost; operational cost is ~\$0.02–\$0.03 per page processed.

6. Definition of demolition

- a. The commission debated on the revised demolition definition and options: to approve, amend, or leave unchanged.
- b. Concern was raised over the "character-defining" clause introducing ambiguity and requiring expertise. The commission agreed to strike this clause from the document.
- c. It was suggested to focus on explicit features (chimneys, cupolas, porches) for clarity and enforceability.
- d. Lowered demolition review threshold from 100% to 25% of wall area, including windows, for structures over 75 years old.
- e. Discussion on addressing windows in ordinance and providing educational materials for the public.
- f. Commissioners to review definition and by-laws for discussion at next meeting.

7. Adjournment.

- a. Dick made a motion to adjourn.
- b. Steve seconded.

All in favor, the motion passes 6-0.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:25 PM.