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HISTORIC AGRICULTURAL STRUCTURES MATCHING GRANTS PROGRAM
(HB 395 CHAPTER 285, LAWS OF 1999 RSA 227-C: 27 – RSA 227-C: 32)
ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING
MINUTES

Eighty-Seventh Meeting –Tuesday, August 14, 2012
10:00 a.m.

19 Pillsbury St., Concord, NH
(*An accessible public facility)*

Carl Schmidt, NH State Historic Resources Council
Elizabeth Muzzey, Director, Director & SHPO, NH Division of Historical Resources
Beverly Thomas, Program Associate, NH Preservation Alliance
Jennifer Goodman, Executive Director, NH Preservation Alliance
John Porter, Professor Emeritus, UNH Cooperative Extension
Chet Riley, Friends of the N.H. Barn Committee
Ben Wilson, Bureau of Historic Sites, Dept. of Resources & Economic Development
Colin Cabot, Friends of the N.H. Barn Committee
Chris Rogers, Board of Directors, NH Preservation Alliance
Michael Bruss, Chair, Board of Directors, NH Preservation Alliance
Betsy McNamara, Principal, Full Circle Consulting
Deborah Gagne, NH Division of Historical Resources

I. Announcements and Minutes of February 1st meeting

Carl welcomed everyone and noted that, following Mae William's departure from the Department of Agriculture, Markets & Food to pursue an advanced degree, Jennifer Gornnert will serve as the Department's representative to the Barn Committee. She is the new Director of the Division of Regulatory Services. Following a motion made by Jennifer and seconded by Chet, the minutes of the February 1st meeting were approved as amended.

II. Arrangements for Education & Outreach Subcommittee's advisory site visit

Although several ideas for a site visit were discussed, none was selected and it was agreed to give further thought to the matter. The ideas included: (a) a barn near the Hooksett I-93 toll booth whose owner has contacted John and would like to retain it as part of a new commercial development; and (b) a suggestion by Chet that Smutty Nose

Brewery, the new owner of the Toll Farm in Hampton, might be receptive to advice regarding the farm's barn, on which there is a RSA 79-D easement. The brewery has received a $340,000 federal grant in connection with the project; Beth said she believes the house and barn have been determined eligible for listing on the National Register.

III. Identification of our Education Session topic for 2013 Farm & Forest EXPO

In light of the September 15 deadline for submission for the printed program of our education session at Farm & Forest EXPO on Friday, February 8, 2013, we have been looking for ideas. Committee members agreed to John's suggestion of "How to Resurrect your Dilapidated Barn", and Beverly suggested that we assemble a panel of three barn preservation professionals to make the presentation. Among names suggested were Steve Fifield, Jan Lewandowski, Steve Bedard, and Ed Pape. Beverly agreed to put the panel together before the September 15 deadline.

IV. Other Business

Beverly reported that the N.H. Preservation Alliance had partnered with the Squam Lakes Natural Science Center in a tour of local barns in the Holderness area on July 28; as part of the program, she staffed an information table at the True Farm barn where approximately 50 people visited and there was a good deal of interest in the RSA 79-D easement program. On October 13, 9:30 – 2:00 p.m., the Preservation Alliance, in partnership with the Rye Conservation Commission, will sponsor a Barn Preservation Workshop at the Goss Barn with Ian Blackman heading the program.

John said he had recently given his barn talk in Freedom, N.H., to a very preservation-dedicated audience. Carl referred to distributed copies of an article in the June 21st issue of "The Meredith News" by Dan Heyduk entitled "What's in a barn?", which in part was based on information from Thomas Hubka and Cristina Ashjian. He also referred to a recent decision by the Deerfield Selectboard to approve another RSA 79-D application and said he intended to write a letter to thank them.

NOTE: At 10:30 a.m., the meeting was expanded in order for Betsy McNamara of Full Circle Consulting to present her final report on the Feasibility Study for a Capital Campaign for New Hampshire Barn Preservation. Michael Bruss and Chris Rogers also joined the meeting at that point.

V. Feasibility Study Report by Betsy McNamara, Principal, Full Circle Consulting

(In addition to Betsy's oral report to the Committee, summarized below, she also provided meeting participants with copies of a detailed, 23-page written report. The report should be read in conjunction with these minutes.)

Summary.

Betsy began by stating that the outcome of the feasibility study is that we are not quite ready to launch a capital campaign for a barn grant program. It is not never, but not yet.

After talking to many people, it seems that everyone loves barns. However, it also became apparent that there are two big pieces of the case statement that need to be addressed:

-- Numbers. The need for a capital campaign for a grant program has not really been quantified. We need to do more than point out that barns are falling down. Interviewees asked how do we know this is a problem. We need to provide the number of threatened barns in New Hampshire, as well as the cost of saving barns. For example, how much money would it take to save x number of barns?

-- The co-branding is confusing. Despite the new logo for the Friends of New Hampshire Barns, interviewees were confused by and not receptive to the notion of the two organizations working together. The Friends of New Hampshire Barns was not known to them. Instead, they said that this needs to be a N.H. Preservation Alliance project and it must promote and carry it out.

Methodology.

The normal method for a feasibility study is for an outside person to meet and interview known individuals and entities. In this instance, the case for support, the accompanying "success story", and the cover letter were put together by Betsy and the Friends of New Hampshire Barns, with assistance from Preservation Alliance and NH DHR staff members. After the letters were sent, the Friends telephoned the recipients and facilitated scheduling of meetings with Betsy, in person or via phone. The names of 24 contacts, primarily individuals or couples, were developed, which eventually resulted in 14 interviews and 17 responses, as in three cases, husbands and wives had different opinions. The same questions were asked of all those who were interviewed.

Perception of the Proposed Program.

Betsy highlighted the points elaborated in her written report as to what people liked and found to be of concern.

Aside from the difficulties with the "co-branding", the case statement was well received by most people. They almost universally liked the three-part program, which was seen as intertwined and necessary for success. Overall, everyone loves barns, other states have a successful track record for similar programs, and we also have a good record from our past grant program. In New Hampshire, the money must come from the private sector, as it is clear that the government will not fund the program.

As to concerns, there were questions as to whether this effort is really a priority of the N.H. Preservation Alliance. Also, how do we know that the target amount for the capital campaign equates to the actual need; should it be more? Or less? A number of people questioned whether a $10,000 grant plus a $10,000 match would be enough to make a difference; perhaps a smaller number of grants in larger dollar amounts should be funded. Administering 100 grants would be a challenging task. Why not identify 50 barns in New Hampshire and make larger grants to save them?

In addition, it was suggested that the present economic climate is not conducive to such a capital campaign for this purpose, as donors are focused on social services and other basic human needs. There was a perception that our effort will appeal to a small or narrow bandwidth of donors.

Willingness to Contribute and Volunteer.

Eight of the 17 individuals interviewed indicated a willingness to contribute funds to the campaign, but only two expressed interest in making a major gift, perhaps spread over a five-year period. Very few were willing to make commitments and no big donors were revealed. The eight individuals indicated a willingness to contribute a total of $85,000 to $98,000, which is low for a campaign of this size, especially as the individuals contacted were to be "low hanging fruit". Normally, it would be hoped that a feasibility study would produce commitments covering 30 to 50 percent of the total goal. Betsy also noted that, by virtue of her conversations, it was understood that if the capital campaign does go forward, she could return to those with whom she spoke for further discussion of possible donations.

One suggestion was to find 2-4 major donors to form a nucleus covering 40 – 50 percent of the state-wide goal and then do region-by-region fundraising to reach the overall total, as often people seem more willing to contribute for local or regional purposes. Would it be unusual for people to be willing to give money to save barns that are not in their own community?

Betsy said we should keep in mind that it appears that a capital campaign of the nature we are considering would have to be what is termed a "major" or "primary donor campaign" in that it would need to be based on a small number of major donations. With that would come our need to be flexible, as very often large donors want to have input as to how their money is spent. In that regard, one of the individuals interviewed, who was indentified by the Friends of New Hampshire Barns, expressed a willingness to partner with us by making a $50,000 gift, provided that it would be used only to expand the barn assessment grant program and that none of it would be used to pay for administration. Then, after a three-year period, the donor said, we would have a much better idea of what is needed in the state of New Hampshire to save its barns. This prompted Committee members to comment that this could be an excellent way to quantify the need for barn preservation funds by examining the extent of applications for barn assessment grants. Perhaps the order of "the menu" in the case statement should be reversed. Another interviewee suggested that a survey be conducted across the state in order to determine the number of barns we have, the number that are failing, and the amount needed to repair them. It also was suggested that an independent study of barn repair needs in four different parts of New Hampshire be done and then extrapolate to arrive a more reliable total need figure. Should high-priority, highly visible barns be given priority? Select the 50 barns most worth saving in the state? Give higher priority to municipally owned barns rather than to privately held barns?

Additional Comments.

An interviewee suggested that perhaps public sector funds could become available if a privately funded grant program were up and running and demonstrating success. The "circuit rider" concept described in our case statement was well received. Some of those interviewed indicated that if they gave to a barn grant program then they would not give as they usually do to the Preservation Alliance. Betsy said that a successful campaign could also hinge on whether or not the Preservation Alliance would release "holds" placed on approaches to certain potential donors. She also commented that our fundraising for barn preservation would need to be very individualized and very creative,

with a good number of site visits and personal attention. She also noted that the "entrepreneurial donors" with whom she spoke tended to be skeptical.

Regarding the case statement, we need to be clear that this would be a 10-year pay-down program and not an effort to create an endowment; there was no support for an endowment. She did make clear, in response to questions, that the grant program was to begin prior to reaching the total $1.8 million goal, and that clear priority would be given in awarding grants to stabilization projects such as for repair of foundations and roofs. Also, we need to be able to make clear the anticipated administrative costs for the campaign and the grant program, and the source of funds to pay them.

Committee Discussion.

Chet said that town-wide barn surveys are an effective way of creating and encouraging preservation interest in communities. Beth said that some 8-10 towns in the state have done town-wide barn surveys. Jennifer said that stepping up the barn assessment grant program could result in more surveys. It was suggested that town historical societies, perhaps via the state association, could be encouraged to do more. Carl said we should become better informed about why the Vermont program to survey all barns in the state, supported by a federal Save America's Treasures grant, has experienced difficulty in its execution. Beth asked whether anyone interviewed by Betsy had asked why should the focus be on barns and not other historic buildings. Also, we want to be sure to include all agricultural outbuildings in addition to barns. One individual noted that barns are important because without them, the story of the farm cannot be told. Jennifer asked if Betsy or the Friends were surprised by people who did not want to be interviewed. Carl said he was disappointed that a number of letter recipients did not respond to efforts to contact them to set up appointments for Betsy. On the other hand, Betsy said that at least six of those interviewed would be worth following up re possible future support. Overall, everyone loves barns, but who is willing to make them a priority for donations?

Next Steps.

It was agreed that a brief letter of appreciation, presumably signed by Michael and Carl, should be sent to all the individuals and foundations interviewed by Betsy.

Going forward, the following issues and options are among those that will need to be addressed by the Preservation Alliance and the Barn Committee:

-- How to better quantify the need for barn preservation
-- Regional fundraising
-- Fundraising from a handful of willing donors
-- NH Preservation Alliance support and at what levels
-- Consider initiating discussion with the individual willing to donate $50,000 for assessment grants. Would this person be willing to consider the numbers from the assessment grants already done, at least as a starting place?