

Montague Historical Commission Meeting 8-27-20 Meeting held via zoom

Meeting opened at 7:01..

Members present: David Brule, Chair, Suzanne LoManto, Chris Clawson, Jeff Singleton.
Ed Gregory unable to attend.

Non-members in attendance: Ariel Elan, town meeting member from precinct 1.

1. July 30 Meeting Minutes approved as amended to include the wording of the motion approved on the Turners Falls name process. David Brule agrees that motions as worded should be in the minutes, not paraphrased, “so that will be the way we do things from now on.”

2. Jeff Singleton is approved as MHC secretary by a 3-0 vote, with Singleton abstaining.

Jeff Singleton says the commission needs to record its meetings “even when we get back to normal.” Committee members do not express opposition or concerns but do not vote a motion on the issue.

4. Open Meeting Law discussion on the agenda tabled due to time constraints. Singleton urges members to read AG open meeting law guide he emailed because “the devil is in the details.” He requested that Chris send his proposal for meetings via an on line forum to the Attorney General office. Clawson agrees but asked Jeff to send him a link to the AG.

5. Turners Falls name change discussed. Brule reads motion passed by the MHC on July 30 and the motion passed by the Selectboard on August 10

MHC 7-30 motion: “The Montague Historical Commission recommends that the broader public discussion [of the village name Turners Falls] be delayed until at least next spring [2021] due to the COVID pandemic and that historical commission begin collecting information on the [1676] battle/massacre itself and the naming of Turners Falls.”

Selectboard 8-10 motion-Mike Nelson: “I make a motion that we delegate to the commission to research the battle at Turners Falls and to uncover the historical meaning to the Turners Falls name and any other historical data they can regarding the name of Turners Falls and prepare a statement of information for the board no later than June 30, 2021.” Ariel Elan then suggested adding to the motion “researching Great Falls in the indigenous languages” to which Nelson said “I’ll add that to the motion.” The vote was unanimous in the affirmative.

Chris Clawson reads a proposal about the name change process. He agrees with the proposal to slow down the process but says articles are appearing in the newspapers. He mentions a referendum that took place in Martha’s Vineyard on a similar issue and suggests a “binding referendum” in Montague.

Singleton says based on the high school mascot process he believes there is no vehicle for a binding referendum in state law according to town counsel – although there could be a non binding one. Town counsel also has ruled that the name change must go to town meeting in order to petition the legislature to grant the local right to change the name.

Singleton proposes putting the primary source research prepared by Singleton and Ed Gregory on the naming of the Falls and Village on the website. He asks if the commission to approve of that but there is no formal motion.

Suzanne LoManto says that it is too early to talk about a referendum but Chris's proposal is interesting. The committee should investigate the process on Martha's Vineyard and bring the MHC's conclusion to the Selectboard. "Even if it was terrible we would know what to avoid" she said. She also said that she was not ready to support a vote on the issue in the spring and that "this process could take years."

David Brule says he would "totally agree" with putting the research on the website but it should involve "just the facts, just the basics."

Singleton says that the next research goal should be to cull the large amount of material produced the battlefield grant to determine what is most relevant to the name change issue. He also said commission members should look at the primary source documents he and Ed presented and raise any bias issues "before they go up" on the website. David Brule said he felt these documents on the falls and village name history are "good to go."

Suzanne said that she supported putting the research that Jeff and Ed produced on the website but the committee should "take its time" on the information from the battlefield grant, perhaps waiting until the winter. She said that "once the information is out there it will generate interest and it will generate conversation and I think the conversation will get pretty rough."

Ariel Elan said that there is nothing in town policy or law that says a committee can not express an opinion. In fact, the reality is "just the opposite." mentioning other town committees such as the finance committee where members and the committee as a whole express opinions. She said the committee should not hold back on its perspective. Secondly, she said, the Selectboard never asks committees to do work just for them but for the whole town. She said the board should take an "active role" that "inspires trust."

Chris said he wanted to "postpone the decision on the website because we're defining Turners Falls as a battle in King Phillips War and its far more complicated than that."

Jeff said he would like to consider for future discussion playing an active role in the "broader process" this spring and that the committee consider not using the word "neutral." David said he had used the word at the first meeting the issue was discussed because members expressed very strong opinions. It may have been more appropriate then, he said.

LoManto said it was very important to appear neutral about "the process" so it would not appear to favor one side or another. "The process can be neutral," she said. She also said that personally "I have my opinions." "You stole my thunder, Suzanne." said Chris Clawson

Singleton said the proposals from himself and Town Planner Walter Ramsey about the MHC's "need to know" about development project, which was taken off the agenda due to time constraints needed to be on the agenda at the next meeting. Brule agreed.

Chris said he was "glad we're not deciding this this afternoon" and thanked the committee. "This is a work in progress," said Brule. Everyone thanked everyone and the meeting adjourned at 11:58.