

Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 40 Section 8D states a city or town may establish a local historical commission for the preservation, protection and development of the historical or archeological assets of such city or town.

The current Sturbridge Historical Commission has been in existence since November 2015. The major issue at the time was a request for demolition of the Worcester South Agricultural Hall to make way for the construction of a CVS drug store. The Sturbridge Bylaws at the time gave the Historical Commission the option for a six (6) month demolition delay. The Historical Commission determined the Exhibition Hall owned by T.M.C. New England LLC to be “significant” on February 11, 2016. A Public Hearing was held on March 10, 2016 when it was determined to place a six (6) month demolition delay on the building which expired on September 10, 2016. Despite efforts by the Historical Commission, the Sturbridge Historical Society and members of the public the 138 year-old Exhibition Hall was demolished in the fall of 2016. A professionally written structural and historical evaluation of the Exhibition Hall, funded with a reserve fund transfer approved by the Finance Committee, was composed for the historical record.

The Historical Commission brought forth an item on the warrant for the Annual Town Meeting to change the demolition delay bylaw from six (6) months to twelve (12) months. It passed unanimously. This will allow the Historical Commission more time to negotiate or compromise for a favorable solution to any threatened historical building or site in the future.

A twelve (12) month demolition delay on a storage barn located on the Town Common at 283 Main St. and on the National Register of Historic Places was voted by the Historical Commission on November 22, 2016. The Publick House owns the barn and plans to build a reception/ registration center and a twenty-eight (28) room hotel on the site.

The Historical Commission contracted with Pioneer Valley Planning Commission using Community Preservation Commission funds approved at the Annual Town Meeting to conduct a survey of 95-100 historical assets in Sturbridge. Surveys are the baseline for recognition and preservation efforts in any community. The last survey was done in the 1970s by dedicated and competent volunteers. Surveys now are typically done by professionals as recommended by the Massachusetts Historical Commission (MHC). All inventory forms of surveys in Massachusetts are found on the MAGRIS database on the MHC webpage.

The Sturbridge Historical Commission strives to identify the historical assets in Sturbridge, to highlight the history related to those assets, and to advocate for their preservation. We will be working on future projects to bring our mission to the attention of residents which we hope will generate more interest in Sturbridge history and open up new history related initiatives. We are a five-member board currently in need of one more "history advocate" member and any number of "history advocate" associate, non-voting members. Please contact a current member or the Town Administrator if you are interested in joining our efforts.

Respectfully Submitted,

Barbara A. Search, Chair

Richard Volpe, V. Chair

Cathy Zavistoski, Clerk

Bailey Applegate