

Stockbridge Historical Commission
Minutes of Zoom Meeting of March 24, 2021

A meeting of the Stockbridge Historical Commission (SHC) was held via Zoom on March 24, 2021, beginning at 10:00 AM. Notice of the meeting was duly posted by the Town Clerk at least two business days before the meeting. Present for the SHC were Chair Linda Jackson, Clerk Peter Williams and Maria Carr, constituting all members of the SHC. Also present were Selectboard member Patrick White, Town Administrator Michael Canales, Town Facilities Manager Chris Marsden, Planning Board member Kate Fletcher, and citizens of the Town Carole Owens (a local historian) and Bruce Blair (a player of the Chime Tower chimes). The published meeting Agenda stated that the purpose of the meeting was for the SHC to review Chime Tower restoration planning.

At the invitation of the Chair, Mr. Canales updated the meeting on the status of the restoration project. He stated that the Town has had EDM Engineers do engineering work for structural analyses of the roof, the superstructure and the masonry of the tower, and the Verdin Company has rendered a report and recommendation regarding the chimes. Both EDM and Verdin have supplied cost estimates. Mr. Canales has taken those estimates and created a proposed warrant item for the Town Meeting to approve. Mr. Canales added that historic preservation issues need to be considered and addressed, including about the number of bells and the overall the overall attention to historic preservation. Mr. White noted that he sees as areas for discussion the superstructure, roof, bells, and chime stand.

The parties briefly addressed anticipated timing, noting that the proposed warrant item would first go before the Town Finance Committee and later the Town Meeting. Mr. Canales expressed the view that once the Finance Committee has approved the proposal, work could start on getting a bid package organized. Ms. Jackson inquired about the anticipated time of the Town Meeting; Mr. White replied that is not yet set, but likely will be some time in June.

Ms. Jackson inquired whether EDM has a historic restoration specialist on staff, and Mr. Marsden responded that Carlo Schneller, the EDM engineer who has been leading the project, is well versed in principles of historic restoration. Mr. Marsden added that he believes that EDM could provide the SHC with more information regarding its historic restoration experiences and expertise.

Mr. White stated that the Town cannot put out bid documents until the SHC has weighed in. Ms. Jackson stated that The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties will be "the bible" governing the restoration.

Mr. White inquired whether the project budget should include a historic restoration specialist. Ms. Jackson replied that the specialist could be someone at EDM. She noted that the project will need an overall project manager, as there are three different pieces of work. The Town needs to have someone in place who can be sure that historic goals are met. Mr. Canales stated that there will be proper oversight of the project. He said that his proposed warrant item includes a 15% add-on by EDM for overhead items such as oversight, and that Mr. Canales added an additional 15% to be sure that there are enough overhead funds, including for proper oversight.

Mr. Blair added that Verdin Company has great experience in historic bell restorations. Ms. Jackson noted that the bell restoration work is distinct from the work on the wooden superstructure. Mr. Canales added that roof replacement is also included in the proposed restoration. Mr. Blair added that there is an issue regarding whether to replace or restore the historic chime stand. Ms. Jackson summarized that there are three broad parts to the project: the masonry, the superstructure and the bells. She agrees that Verdin is a reputable sole source for the bells. Ms. Fletcher added that she is delighted that the Town is moving ahead with this project, and she added that she has a background in music and is aware that Verdin is a highly qualified source for the bells and related parts.

Mr. Canales provided his overview of the three parts identified by Ms. Jackson. He agreed that we are looking at Verdin to handle the bells and related parts. The stone masonry is in pretty good shape. As noted by EDM's report, there is some basic work to be done, but nothing extensive. According to EDM, the wooden superstructure and roof require significant work, and this restoration work needs to be done properly from a historic preservation standpoint.

Mr. Williams asked about the reports from EDM, identifying what the SHC had been given to this point. After discussion, the parties determined that there is an additional EDM report, focusing on the superstructure, encompassing 64 pages, that the SHC has not seen. Mr. Canales will forward copies thereof to the SHC.

The parties next discussed the question raised in the Verdin documents regarding the number of bells. According to the Verdin, the Tower currently has 11 bells, one of which was added in the 1970s. Verdin's February 1, 2020 Proposal offers two alternatives: (1) restore the current 11 bells and related parts or (2) an option to add three additional bells (at an estimated additional cost of \$56,868); if the additional bells were added the current chime stand would be replaced. Ms. Jackson stated that in her view the restoration project should focus on restoring the current bells and equipment and not adding anything new.

Mr. Williams inquired of Mr. Blair whether the restoration of the current chimes and chime stand would be a major improvement for the players of the chimes. Mr. Blair replied that the levers that play the bells are old and in need of restoration and that the musicality of the bells is important. He added that if we expand the number of bells, more octaves would be available. He said that one bell added in 1973 is not compatible: an 11th bell, and it is hardly ever used. He concluded that he defers to the SHC regarding whether adding new bells and a new stand should be done. [Post-meeting note: contemporary press accounts indicate that the 11th bell was added in 1975.]

Ms. Jackson stated that the SHC's baseline should be 1878 and not 1973. Ms. Fletcher stated that she favors adding the new bells. Mr. Williams expressed the opposite view. Mr. Blair acknowledged that the chimes will be very playable if restored "as is" -- just like before. Ms. Jackson agreed that Verdin can make the historic bells play well.

Mr. White inquired whether we should remove the 1973 bell, to go back to the original. He added that we should focus on the best decision, not what it costs. Mr. White also asked whether we could add notes to the current chime stand without replacing it. Mr. Blair replied that replacement of the chime stand would be required if more bells are added. He added that the main problem with the current stand now is that it barely plays at all. Mr. White asked if the stand could be repaired and Mr.

Blair replied affirmatively. Mr. White suggested that we ask Verdin about whether to remove the 1970s bell.

Ms. Jackson inquired who has been servicing the bells and chime stand. Mr. Marsden replied “no one” except a knowledgeable person at the Highway Department. Mr. Blair added that in the 1970s a company from Troy was involved.

Mr. White suggested that if this is a rare musical instrument with national notoriety, as has been suggested today, this argues for preserving the chimes in their current setup. Mr. Blair responded that the mission of the bells was to play good music and that more chimes would be true to that mission.

The question was asked why the number of original bells; no one knew.

Mr. Williams inquired whether there are a lot of songs that can be played with the current number of bells. Mr. Blair replied that the number of songs is limited, and it's a bit awkward to play some songs. He added that it's been a frustration for some of the Tanglewood students who come down to play the chimes. Mr. Blair added that the current array of bells plays enough songs, just not a lot of songs.

Mr. Blair added that one more historic resource is Claire Williams. She played the chimes as a child and her mother played as well. She put a display case inside the tower with old photos.

Mr. Canales stated that the current proposal that he has prepared for the Finance Committee includes enough funds for the three additional bells should it be decided to add them.

Ms. Owens stated that in England historically the number and size of bells had to do with issues of stature. In the case of the Chime Tower, Mr. Field called it the Children's Chimes. Field's intention for the Children's chime was to amuse the children. Ms. Owens stated that she respects Ms. Fletcher and Mr. Blair, but it was not the intent of the Children's Chimes to have a sophisticated range of playability.

Mr. Williams inquired if repair of the Tower clocks is planned as part of the current project. Mr. Canales replied in the affirmative; he said that Verdin submitted some brief documentation regarding the clocks and that he would supply that to the SHC.

Mr. Canales stated that he believes that the question regarding whether to install additional bells could take place after the project is fully funded.

Mr. Williams stated that he is very appreciative of all the Town officials and Town citizens who have participated in moving this project forward. Mr. Blair expressed a similar sentiment; he added that the restoration will be great whatever decision is made regarding the number of bells.

Mr. Marsden stated that he has a video of Claire Williams playing the bells that he will email to the attendees.

Mr. White expressed his appreciation for the tone and productivity of the meeting.

Ms. Carr inquired whether the current chime stand could be saved if it is replaced, an inquiry that was

answered affirmatively. Ms. Carr also expressed her appreciation for the fact that the proposed restoration includes proper restoration of the geographic marker at the base of the tower.

Mr. Williams stated that he thought that next steps may include the SHC's review of the additional documentation from EDM regarding the Tower superstructure and then a possible follow-up with EDM regarding making sure that the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for historic restorations will be well followed during the restoration.

The meeting was adjourned at 10:55 AM.

Dated: Stockbridge, Massachusetts
April 14, 2022

Peter C. Williams
Peter C. Williams
Clerk