



Plympton Historical  
Commission

# Meeting Summary - 05/17/16

- The meeting was called to order at 8:05 p.m. Commission members in attendance were Jon Wilhelmsen, Jane Schulze, and Jill Palenstijn.
- Outstanding minutes from previous meetings will be held until the next scheduled meeting.
- Discussion centered on upcoming Town Meeting (5/18/16) and the warrant articles that were relevant to the Commission. These included Articles 24 & 25 which, if passed, would reduce the demolition delay period from a maximum of 18 months to a maximum of 6 months and Article 23 which, if passed, would be the first step to repealing the Community Preservation Act (CPA).
- The Commission discussed the inaccurate claims being stated regarding Article 24 & 25 in a recent letter sent by an unnamed resident (recently revealed) and what had been posted on social media. JW also noted that the numbers being quoted regarding demolition delay periods and numbers of towns having a delay has not been represented accurately. JW has prepared a handout to be distributed at Town Meeting to correct the inaccuracies. JS made a motion to approve the Historical Commission flyer to be available for Town Meeting. JP seconded the motion. Vote: 3-0-0. The motion carried. JP made a motion that the Historical Commission would not recommend Articles 24 and 25 at Town Meeting. JS seconded the motion. Vote 3-0-0. The motion carried.
- The Commission discussed Article 23 and the desire of the article to begin the process to eliminate the CPA. This would not be in the best interests of the town from the perspective of the Commission. JW made a motion that the Historical Commission would not recommend Article 23 at Town Meeting. JS seconded the motion. Vote 3-0-0, The motion carried.
- JP made a motion to adjourn the meeting. JW seconded the motion. Vote: 3-0-0. The motion carried. The meeting was adjourned at 8:29.

# Save Plympton's Demolition Delay Bylaw

## Help Preserve your Community

Good evening and thank you for taking the time to join us at Plympton's 2016 Annual Town Meeting.

Tonight you are being asked to consider two articles that will cripple Plympton's demolition delay bylaw. It appears that these citizen's petitions were a reaction to a delay of demolition of a single historic home. This was the first delay of demolition placed on any home in Plympton in the almost 15 years that the demolition delay bylaw has existed. The below Q & A is designed to provide you with additional information so that you may effectively evaluate the two citizen's petition articles. The Plympton Historical Commission hopes that this informs you as to why we are asking for your NO vote on Article 24 and Article 25. Please help us preserve the community that we live in and enjoy.

Q: What is a demolition delay bylaw?

A: A demolition delay bylaw is an essential, but limited tool to provide some basic protections for historic buildings that help create the town's historic character and define its landscape.

Q: What does a demolition delay bylaw do?

A: It provides a window of opportunity to save a building from destruction, if warranted, and affords a public review process to determine if a building should be preserved. If a building should be preserved, the bylaw does not permanently prevent demolition, but rather allows for time to develop alternate solutions.

Q: What is the history of the demolition delay bylaw in Plympton?

A: Plympton passed its bylaw at the 2001 Annual Town Meeting. It revised the bylaw at the 2009 Annual Town Meeting by extending the maximum demolition period from 6 months to 18 months. The 18 month period was chosen based on the experience with historic building demolitions in other towns and on the recommendation of the Massachusetts Historical Commission.

Q: Isn't 18 months a long time to delay a demolition of a historic building?

A: No. It often takes more than 12 months to find an alternate solution to prevent a historic building's demolition. And, it is important to remember that the delay period is a maximum delay period - the Commission can waive the delay period at anytime provided it is satisfied that no solution exists.

Q: Does this bylaw permanently prevent the demolition of a historic building?

A: No. It delays the demolition so that alternative solutions can be developed. Unlike many other town bylaws and regulations, a delay of demolition is temporary.

Q: The Green Letter spends a lot of time talking about one particular demolition. Is that what this is all about?

A: We have no idea what the motivation is for the citizen's petition, but that would appear to be a possible conclusion given what was written in the Green Letter. We should not be crippling a proven town-wide bylaw because of the reaction by a select group of folks to a single decision over a 15-year period.

Q: Do you mean that there has only been one delay placed on a building in 15 years?

A: Yes. The Commission has been involved in at least 14 demolition permit requests over the last 15 years. A delay in demolition has been issued in only one instance.

Q: The Green Letter said that the Commission's numbers were misleading and implied that longer delay periods were extremely uncommon. Is this true?

A: No. To be misleading the numbers would have to be overstated. It turns out that both the Green Letter's numbers and the ones we used were understated. We don't know where the Green Letter's numbers came from, but we went back and researched the numbers we obtained from the Massachusetts Historical Commission's Municipal Database and supplemented them with our own review of the municipal bylaws of a number of towns. Of the 145 towns that have a demolition delay bylaw, 61 towns or 42% of them have a delay of greater than 6 months. 34% of 145 towns have a delay 12 months or greater.

Q: Okay - but should I be concerned that we are not in the majority?

A: Over 35 years of experience with delay of demolition bylaws has unequivocally demonstrated that the 6 month period is insufficient. A delay period of longer than 6 months is not unreasonable - Plympton is part of the 42% that have a better chance of success to preserve their community. In 2009 we were ahead of the curve and perhaps even "cutting edge" - and today Plympton is exactly where it should be. Reducing the period to 6 months would take us back 15 years.

Q: What do you mean by saying that it would take us back 15 years?

A: Shortly after we approved our demolition delay bylaw in 2001, the Massachusetts Historical Commission no longer advised that a 6 month period was sufficient to develop alternative solutions to demolition. Longer periods were strongly encouraged based on recent preservation efforts running out of time.

Q: We don't have many demolition requests in Plympton - so this isn't a big concern - right?

A: Unfortunately that is not right. While we haven't typically had many demolition permit requests, the numbers have increased recently. In the past year the Commission has held hearings on 5 demolition permits. Over the prior 14 years the Commission participated in 9 demolition permit requests - though more than half were due to emergency demolitions for fire or severe structural issues. In every case (except for the currently delayed property) the property owners and the Commission worked together to find a mutually agreeable solution that was appropriate given the facts at hand.

Q: What is the Plympton Historical Commission's role?

A: The Commission is the municipal agency responsible for ensuring that preservation concerns are considered in community planning and development decisions in accordance with MA general laws. The Commission is the Town's local preservation advocate and is responsible for administering the Demolition Delay Bylaw in accordance with its provisions.

We appreciate your support!

Jon Wilhelmsen- Chair, Jill Palenstijn & Jane Schulze

PLYMPTON HISTORICAL COMMISSION