

Weston Town Committee for the Oversight of the Lachat Property

MINUTES

August 29, 2012

Present: Committee Members: Ellen McCormick, Paul Deysenroth, Nicholas Bell, Judy Saffan, Amy Kalafa, Carol Baldwin, Sheila Koehler; **Consultants:** Dennis Tracey, III, Selectman; Robert Hatch, AIA Architect

Absent: None

Presided By: Ellen McCormick,

Meeting was called to order at 7:37 p.m.

- A. The minutes for the last meeting were approved as amended.
- B. Overview of the Town covenants with the Nature Conservancy and understanding of the parameters of Leon Lachat's wishes for the property: Dennis Tracey attended the meeting to address the Committee's questions regarding the restrictions on the potential uses for the property. Mr. Tracey explained the following in response to questions:
 - There are four mirror image covenants between the Town and the Nature conservancy affecting the two parcels that make up the Lachat property. They all address the same restrictions. The original agreements are attached to the amended agreements.
 - It will be best to follow the restrictions in the covenants in deciding on a use. There are also restrictions in the deeds, but the covenants are more restrictive.
 - There is little guidance in the agreements regarding Mr. Lachat's intentions for the buildings and there is a difference of opinion among different parties as to what he intended. Some people say he cared a lot about what happened to the buildings as demonstrated by the creation of the endowment to pay for upkeep. The covenants, however, allow for pretty much anything to happen to the building as long as the overall use is in conformance.
 - Public input should be solicited on the use of the property. In previous public hearings regarding the use of the land, a consistent theme of the public comment was that the use should be consistent with Mr. Lachat's intent and with the historical use of the land as a farm.
 - There are no prohibitions on the construction of new buildings or restrictions on the type of new buildings that may be constructed as long as the lands are kept generally open space and the building is consistent with the use of the property. There is no requirement that a new building be complementary to the existing buildings. A bermed or sheltered greenhouse would be permissible.

- The prohibition on picnicking actually reads “picnicking and camping.” Mr. Tracey reads this as one informing the other. Mr. Lachat did not want people coming in with their own food, eating, and leaving. He did not read this as prohibiting a fundraiser such as a Farm to Table event.
 - The installation of new fencing that is consistent with the permitted uses of the property is permitted.
 - Fundraising events for the nonprofit group (Friends of Lachat) should be permitted under the noncommercial use clause. However, there is some uncertainty that a farmer’s market would conform to the noncommercial requirement. The structure of the market would have to be determined and submitted to the Town’s counsel for an opinion.
 - The overall intent for the use of the property is research, education, and conservation. A hydroponic demonstration would be allowed.
 - It does not appear that a dog park is consistent with the permitted uses or the intent of Mr. Lachat. A proposal for a dog park should be submitted to the Town’s counsel for an opinion. The Nature conservancy would also have to be in agreement. It was noted that the person proposing the dog park would raise money for the necessary fencing.
 - An arts or cultural center would fit the permitted used and the spirit of covenant.
 - The covenant calls for the property to be identified as the Julianna Lachat Preserve. The Committee should be conscious of that moving forward and should consider erecting a sign with that name on the property.
- C. Use of the Farmhouse: The decision from last week’s meeting that the second floor would be used as a residence for a farmer/caretaker and that the first floor would have a public use was restated.
- D. Foundation Restoration: The project is being rebid. Two bids submitted earlier were rejected, one for not addressing all of the necessary items, the other for addressing more work than was specified. The project is currently being rebid, with bids due in two or three weeks. The Town will then have to award the project to a bidder. The Committee agreed that the Town should be notified that the Committee would like the work started as soon as possible and completed before November 1, 2012. The Committee would also like it specified that no additives be added to the mortar mix for the foundation wall to compensate for cold weather and that enclosure and heating are used instead to protect the work area from the weather and ensure adequate temperatures for the mortar preparation are maintained.
- E. Action Plan for Restoration: Robert Hatch raised the issue of what the Committee is asking of him over the next few months to expend the planning grant funds before the grant deadline. He explained that his understanding is that he is working for the Committee and will prepare a set of preliminary drawings for the Committee to use in presentation to the Board of Selectmen that will show the Committee’s initial plans for the house. There is some uncertainty as to what level of drawings are required by the planning grant. Carol

will review the grant and let the Committee/Mr. Hatch know.

There was some concern that the use of new materials in the foundation restoration project reflected an approach to the rehabilitation of the house that did not prioritize the conservation of historic fabric and the installation of new materials that are compatible with the historic fabric. After some discussion on what the Committee's philosophy for the treatment of the house should be, Ellen made a motion to ask that Mr. Hatch do new preliminary drawings to allow handicapped access through most or all of the first floor while retaining as much of the existing historic fabric as possible, knowing that some compromise might be necessary. The motion passed.

The question of whether it had been decided that the back door would be the point of entrance for the public (and the handicapped accessible entrance) was raised. Mr. Hatch briefly reviewed the other possibility of introducing a door on the side of the house that faces the driveway, putting the rest room in that new entrance space and turning the added staircase to discharge into that space as well. He indicated that the landscape architect's input would be needed on the feasibility of constructing the access ramp on the side of the house. Mr. Hatch will provide revised drawings by the next meeting, on Tuesday September 4, 2012 and will attend the meeting to explain the plans. Ellen will determine if the plans can be given to the Town on Wednesday for inclusion in the next Board of Selectmen meeting on Thursday, September 6, 2012. The landscape plans will not be included in these drawings as the landscape architect has not started working on the project yet and probably will not be asked to until a few more decisions have been made.

Mr. Hatch asked what the treatment philosophy for the second floor should be. It was agreed that there would be a little more leeway in changes to the second floor given that it has already undergone more alterations than the first floor, but that the kitchen and bathroom should remain in the corner where they are currently located.

It was agreed that Mr. Hatch will investigate hydro-air as a potential replacement heating and cooling system for the house. It was mentioned that there is a gas supply in the street, so the house could be converted to gas as its fuel source.

- F. Strategic Planning: Ellen will be sending around information on the preparation of short and long term strategic plans and will be attempting a first draft as a starting point for discussion. Once the Committee has agreed on a draft document, it will be submitted for Town and public comment.
- G. Fundraising: The Friends of Lachat has raised \$100,000 and received a \$20,000 planning grant from the Connecticut Trust for Historic Preservation. The Town has committed \$50,000 from the endowment intended for the maintenance of the property. Carol would like to do a Farm to Table fundraiser on the property in October. A possible price range might be \$100-125 per person.

The state has capital grants available. Robert Hatch feels that due to the administrative burden and the prevailing wage requirement, that it would only make sense to go after the grant if we were applying for funds to do all of the house rehabilitation work at once.

- H. Farming: It was suggested we should get further into the discussion on farming as we start to work on the short and long term strategic plans.
- I. Heating house for this winter: The pros and cons of heating the house this winter were discussed. If there is no heat, there will be no snow melt on the roof that could cause leaks. The paint will continue to peel in the finished rooms. Plaster should be subject to a constant temperature. If the plaster is wet from roof leaks and subject to freezing, there will be additional damage and deterioration. It was suggested that just the basement be heated, which would have the added benefit of burning off the oil in the tank. There is some uncertainty, however, as to whether the heating system is currently out of commission because of the deteriorated condition of the pipes and radiators (due to the heat having been turned off with water in the system and the water then freezing and bursting elements of the system) or because the furnace itself broke down. No final decision was reached.
- J. Roof repairs: The Town will be attempting to locate and repair the leak in the roof, from the underside if possible due to concerns that the conditions of the roof are prohibitive for having people working on it. If the leak cannot be found, the Town will provide and install a tarp.
- K. Repairs to broken windows: It was suggested that Plexiglas be installed over sash with broken panes to provide protection until the windows are addressed as part of the overall rehabilitation.

Meeting was adjourned at 9:30pm.

THE NEXT MEETING WILL BE HELD ON Tuesday, September 4 AT 7:30 PM.

(Minutes submitted by Sheila Koehler.)