

Town of Stonington
Mystic River Boathouse Park Implementation Committee
Regular Meeting Minutes
Stonington Police Department, Pawcatuck, CT
November 5, 2018

The Mystic River Boathouse Implementation Committee held a regular meeting on this date, November 5, 2018 at the Stonington Police Department at 7:00 p.m.

Present were Rob Simmons, Chairman, Mike O'Neill, Vice Chairman; Mike Crowley, Steve Planchon, Nick Kepple, Steve White, Steve Plachon, Jim Kelley, Alan Strunk, Nick Kepple, Tim O'Brien, Kathryn Burchenal, Sandy Tissiere, Recording Secretary as well as Jason Vincent, Director of Planning, Town of Stonington, Chad Frost, Principal, Kent + Frost, and interested citizens

Members absent: Scott Bates, Jim Kelley, Kathryn Burchenal, and Frank Todisco

1. **Call to order**

Chairman Simmons called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

2. **Pledge Allegiance**

Nick Kepple led the committee in the Pledge of Allegiance.

3. **Comments from the Public**

Chairman Simmons started the meeting reiterating there is two separate committees working on the park project; the first being the park committee whose interest is creating a park for public use and the second being a boathouse committee whose task is to fund and build a boathouse for use by the Stonington High School Crew team and community rowing programs. Chairman Simmons continued saying because there has been substantial amount of interest in the boathouse design, he requests of the committee members motion to amend the agenda to add under Old Business a discussion of boathouse design led by Michael O'Neill. This would provide an opportunity for the citizens who attended the meeting to voice their comments and concerns.

A motion was made by Tom Switz and seconded by Mike Crowley to amend the agenda to add under item #6. Old Business, a discussion of the boathouse design.

The vote was unanimous and the motion carried.

Chairman Simmons turned the floor over to public comments as follows:

John Johnstone said he was presented with the boathouse through Facebook, and did not like the design. Mr. Johnstone said he believes others voice the same opinion in wanting to see other design concepts. Mr. Johnstone said it is his impression the design is a modern box and we can do better for the aesthetics of the town and eliminate an eyesore that is on your agenda. Mr. Johnstone spoke of a meeting with Mike O'Neill to discuss the presented plan and a rough plan Mr. Johnstone had drawn up. Mr. Johnstone expressed his concern with the public restroom located street side at the front of the building for public use; asking who would maintain it. Mr. Johnstone's suggestion would be to start off with Porta-potties with a strict contract for maintenance on the park side. Mr. Johnstone's second thought was the ideas of the design is being controlled by the architect; we should be telling them what we want and have them present what we want and if it means they present three different options of choice for the outside that would be fine as long as the inside functions as needed. John Johnstone finished by saying we want something different outside and the public should have an opinion; there should be alternatives presented to the town as a vote. Mr. Johnstone thanked Mike O'Neill and other involved in the Crew program for a job well done.

Paul Sartor of Mystic; said he is a part of the Mystic River Park Commission but not speaking on their behalf, said they maintain public restrooms and could be a resource in the future on their maintenance process. Mr. Sartor said, speaking as a citizen who lives downtown, the name of the Mystic River Boathouse Park is already causing confusion as there is already a Mystic River Park located in downtown Mystic. Mr. Sartor spoke of the development of the Mystic River Park which is run by Groton and Stonington. Mr. Sartor suggested the Mystic River Boathouse Park be renamed to Stonington Boathouse Park, as it is park that belongs to the town of Stonington. Mr. Sartor spoke of the consolidation of the Stonington Public Schools middle schools and the renaming of Mystic Middle School to Stonington Middle School and how the park should follow the branding process.

4. **Approval of minutes**

A motion was made by Tom Switz and seconded by Steve White to approve the regular meeting minutes from October 1, 2018 as presented.

The vote was unanimous and the motion carried.

A motion was made by Mike Crowley and seconded to approve the special meeting minutes from October 18, 2018.

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Discussion: Mr. O'Brien asked the minutes to be amended to read he was in attendance. Chairman Simmons said the minutes would be amended to include Mr. O'Brien.
The vote was unanimous and the motion carried.

5. Correspondence

A letter was received from Charles E. Stevens, 2018-19 Chair, Mystic River Park, asking the Mystic River Boathouse Park Committee to consider another name to avoid confusion of the two parks. This letter is accepted into the record.

A letter from Nancy d'Estang, Old Mystic, CT, expressing concern over the first boathouse design with the inclusion of inspirational design options attached. This letter is taken into consideration and accepted into the record.

6. Old Business

Discussion – Dedicated Dinghy Dock

Chairman Simmons discussed a letter from Don Procko, Harbor Master, Mystic River, asking for consideration of a dedicated dinghy dock at the park. Chairman Simmons asked Mr. Procko to stand and address the issue. Mr. Procko spoke of previous correspondence with the Mystic River Boathouse Park Implementation Committee asking for consideration of a dedicated dinghy dock for the park. Mr. Procko told the committee the proceeds from the mooring fees were used to conduct a hydrographic survey that was taken above the Mystic Seaport to determine the conditions of the river. Mr. Procko spoke of the need for a dock on that part of the river as there is a current issue with people docking their boats illegally at the cemetery, the Mystic Seaport and private property. Mr. Procko expressed the park would be an excellent opportunity to create a dinghy dock for public use. Chairman Simmons opened the floor to the committee for questions.

Mr. Steve Planchon: Mr. Procko, where would the dock be located based on the conceptual drawing. Mr. Procko answered he was not a designer.

Mr. Planchon also asked about the how a dock would be funded. Mr. David Carreau, member of the harbor commission, asked to speak. Mr. Carreau explained to the committee part of the harbor commission's rules of their management plan mandated by the state is they have to provide transient anchorage to visiting boaters. Mr. Carreau said there is a place on Holmes Street referred to Jailhouse Point (funded by grant money) that is available but anchorage is needed on this end of the river. Mr. Carreau said when he saw the conceptual drawings at the public meeting depicting a public dock, he thought this would be the perfect place to incorporate the transient anchorage dock into the dock planned for kayaks and canoes. Mr. Carreau spoke of possible available state monies to extend the dock to if necessary.

Mr. Planchon: The reason I asked where it would be located is because if we have kayaks, canoes and crew boats here, how are going to get the big boats up to here. Mr. Carreau answered these are not the big boats but the 10-foot dinghies continuing to say he realizes there would be challenges but it would be appreciated if this consideration of the use of the dinghy dock for transient boaters would be considered eliminating people coming on shore illegally.

Mike Crowley said he would like to work with the harbor commission and asked how many boats were they talking about. Mr. Carreau answered it varies but the experience with the dock on Holmes Street which is 10 x 20 foot is more than adequate.

Steve White said he sees the mooring area daily and boats anchoring there is zero to six on a daily basis at different periods of the year. Steve White said it is my sincere hope but not because of an imposition of the museum but as a community to figure out how to make the dinghy dock work.

Mr. Switz asked if there is state funding available, would it be just for the dinghy dock or a larger dock. Mr. Carreau answered the commission would work with the park committee requesting a state grant to fund what is needed.

Mr. Kepple said he felt it should be a slow process to accommodate a need that was not included in the core plan of the park. Mr. Kepple said he respects the need but it hasn't been incorporated into the plan and feels there needs to be a better understanding of, over the course of a day, what the interplay would be between non-motorized users before incorporating this additional use of the park. Once there is a sense of that, if it is possible to accommodate a dinghy dock without interference of the core service then maybe it could be a consideration.

Tim O'Brien said the reality of this area is people are going to use this dock whether we want them to or not. The other reality is that Mike O'Neill and the crew team are going to have to keep people off those docks when they need to use them. It is going to be a work in progress. The prudent thing to do is work with these gentlemen to find an amicable solution and make this work for the community.

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Chairman Simmons recognized John Johnstone to speak. John Johnstone asked how many moorings do you have out there. Mr. Procko said there aren't any moorings, it is an anchorage area. Mr. Johnstone asked how many boats are allowed there, Mr. Procko answered as many boats will fit, however, they have done the hydrographic survey and would like to enlarge the area to accommodate 50-80 boats.

Chairman Simmons suggested to the committee they move forward as this is a decision would not be made tonight. Chairman Simmons told Mr. Procko and Mr. Carreau their statements were appreciated and as we look at this project there will be phases. We understand the problem, there are people on the committee who will work with you and we will place it in the context in a sequence of events to meet our obligations.

Discussion – Initial Boathouse Design

Chairman Simmons introduced Mike O'Neill to present the proposed boathouse design. Mr. O'Neill shared the development of the of the park and how the placement of the boathouse was determined. Mr. O'Neill explained the design process of the building explaining the Rossie Mill was the baseline for the design as it is the most prominent building on the block. Mr. O'Neill said A & W mimicked the shape of the mill but didn't want traditional brick as the exterior; they wanted something more transparent. Mr. O'Neill said the static image does not reflect this transparency and is what he thinks people are opposed against. Mr. O'Neill explained this is a building built for the function of a rowing shed and the challenge is it is a box and their committee will work with softening the design of the exterior. Mr. O'Neill said it will be very difficult to build a traditional Victorian boathouse that will fit within the framework and budget. Mr. O'Neill said the boathouse committee is appreciative of the community interest and invites them for public engagement at the next meeting where this will be discussed.

Chairman Simmons opened the floor to committee.

Steve White asked Mr. O'Neill for clarification of when he uses the pronoun "we" are you referring to the Boathouse Committee as opposed to the Mystic River Boathouse Park Implementation Committee? Mr. O'Neill answered the Mystic River Park Boathouse Implementation Committee has authority over the design and development of the park. The Friends of Stonington Crew was granted the opportunity to build a building within the park that we have to privately fund, design and develop. Our efforts are to 1. Provide training space for the Stonington High School Crew Team, 2. To provide a community rowing program and 3. To provide a facility for a variety of community uses. There are no tax dollars going toward the building but it is all privately funded.

Breck Perkins stated the architect has gone to great lengths to design a very efficient plan, saying we are dealing with massing at this juncture which is the beginning aspect of schematic and conceptual design. The architect has designed a building with minimal grossing factor which range 10 to 40%, and this is a building has about 10% grossing factor, which is stellar in good design because you pay for each square foot you build and when you have a very tight building which is what this architect has designed and made the building as efficient as he has, he has reduced our basis of costs substantially.

Mr. O'Neill explained this building is designed on the basis of using a Butler Steel Building. Those buildings are efficient and meet all the requirements. The architect's challenge was to take this building and create a façade that the community would approve. The architect's concept was to design a semi-transparent structure and the public did not like it so we understand that and we will be looking for other ways to achieve our goal of staying within the footprint of the building and budget.

Mr. Perkins made the additional point that if the building was to be designed in the traditional Victorian boathouse design, it could double or triple the budget. There is a lot of fundraising still to do and a lot of competition for philanthropy.

Chairman Simmons opened the floor to the public.

John Johnstone said the building needs other ideas. Mr. Johnstone suggested finding people within the town who has an idea and can draw to create alternative outside designs for the building. Mr. Johnstone said someone needs to funnel these ideas and present them to the boathouse committee so there can be communication of what the community would like that would fit the functionality of the boathouse. Mr. Johnstone asked how this could be done. Mike O'Neill answered the boathouse committee is waiting for feedback from the public and there will be a meeting in December where all of this can be discussed. Mr. O'Neill showed and explained the challenges of designing boathouses due to the shape of their structure and emphasized the boathouse has to meet the utilitarian needs of use first. Mr. O'Neill said it is understood that something else is wanted by the community but the structure of the building is a factor on the how it looks.

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7. New Business

Discussion Route 27 Parking

Chairman Simmons acknowledged the presence of members of the Board of Police Commissioners and inquired if they are attended to discuss the Route 27 parking issues. A member of the commissioners replied they were there to observe and to hear what the committee has to say as they have not had any plans officially submitted to the commission yet but do have some concerns with the traffic on Route 27. Chairman Simmons asked the committee to discuss this item next. Mr. Simmons explained this item is about the proposed parking spaces along Route 27 in front of the park saying there is street parking on state roads in other towns that is successful. Mr. Simmons continued it is his understanding the state is encouraging this with the support of the local traffic enforcement which is the Board of Police Commissioners in the town of Stonington. Chairman Simmons turned the meeting over to Chad Frost.

Chad Frost discussed the recommendation for parallel parking along Route 27 as a traffic calming measure; it is a part of the State of Connecticut's DOT's Complete Streets design guide. Mr. Frost said this works as a traffic calming feature because as drivers approach, they see the parallel parking and will naturally slow down. Mr. Frost said he has met with the Board of Police Commissioners and will continue to meet with them. Chad Frost said all ideas will be presented to the committee first. Mr. Frost said there could be other things that could be done as visual cues for drivers such as crosswalks and landscaping.

Chairman Simmons asked the committee for questions.

Mike Crowley asked whether Mr. Frost be working with the Board of Police Commissioners to develop a plan. Mr. Frost said right now his firm are working through different ideas and options to present to the Chief of Police and the Board of Police Commissioners which will then be presented to the committee. Mr. Crowley asked what would be done if they don't approve of what is presented. Mr. Frost said they will work with the Police Commissioners until there is full concurrence.

A motion was made by Breck Perkins and seconded by Tom Switz to communicate by letter to work with the police commissioners to address the parallel parking on Route 27.

Discussion: Steve Planchon asked would the understanding be the letter would be followed by communication that Chad Frost would be the emissary for communication with the Board of Police Commissioners. Chairman Simmons said yes. Steve White asked if this involved all parking or just the Route 27 parking. Chairman Simmons answered it would be the Route 27 parking.

The vote was unanimous and the motion carried.

Discussion - Request for Renaming of the Park to the Stonington Boathouse Park

Chairman Simmons said the current committee name is the Mystic River Boathouse Park Implementation Committee and the name on record is the Mystic River Boathouse Park and he will need to check with the town attorney to determine if the name is on the deed. Chairman Simmons asked the committee to entertain the name change as had been previously discussed.

Mike Crowley said he thought Paul Sartor had a good idea to rename the park the Stonington Boathouse Park because the point is the park belongs to the whole town but it would have to be presented to the general public for opinion.

Tim O'Brien added in discussion with his neighbors about the consolidation of the middle schools and the new name being Stonington Middle School, the consideration would be for the park to be named Stonington as well.

Mike O'Neill said, for the most part, they are calling it the Stonington Community Rowing Center at the Mystic River Park.

Chuck Stevens, Mystic River Park Commission, said if you call it the Stonington Community Rowing Center at the Mystic River Park, there will be a world of confusion as the Mystic River Park is located downtown. Mr. Stevens said the park commission is very enthusiastic about a new park on the river and think this park should have a name that creates it own unique identity; they are not suggesting any other name but having Mystic River Park as the first name of both parks would cause confusion.

Rob Simmons said he is of the mind to keep it simple and was impressed with how the town of Stonington got together and decided when to combine the middle schools to name the school the Stonington Middle School. The idea of identifying this park as the Stonington Boathouse Park is fairly simple and does not encroach on the name of the Mystic River Park located downtown. Mr. Simmons said his next steps before the next meeting would be to determine if there is legal documentation that carries this name to be amended in some form.

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Discussion - Park Time Line and Anticipated Cost

Chairman Simmons turned over the meeting to Chad Frost to discuss the park time line and anticipated cost.

Chad Frost said these two items are very intertwined. Mr. Frost spoke of the amount of remediation to be done and the cost saying this will depend on available state funding. Once this is determined the cost can be determined. Chad Frost discussed the timeline saying the master plan could be adopted once the cost is determined. Mr. Frost said the next piece would be the determining funding sources from various entities. Once the funding is determined, phasing could be developed which will depend on funding. After that, the permitting and construction documents will be started which will be about a six-month time line. This results in a 10-month timeline for when the project will go out to bid for construction meaning to break ground around September of 2019. Mr. Simmons asked Mr. Vincent how the previous information given fitted into the Planning and Zoning process. Mr. Vincent answered the planning and zoning process would be included in the six-month timeline discussed by Mr. Frost. Mr. Simmons asked about the affordability of the whole package presented. Mr. Frost explained the process of funding through the state regarding remediation of the property and the importance of searching out funds to build the park right as it would be worthwhile.

Chairman Simmons discussed the house on the property as it is on the National Register of Historic Places. Mr. Simmons asked what to do with the house, should it be sold and moved. Mr. Frost said options of what to do with the house has to be explored but needs to have an architectural historian review it to determine if it is possible to move it.

Chairman Simmons opened the floor to committee discussion.

Mike Crowley asked, to clarify, we have to go through all these steps and procedures and if everything goes right, in September 2019 we can break ground. Chad Frost answered yes. Mr. Crowley continued with his second question about money, how much money is on hand without getting any money from the state. Mr. Crowley asked for the next meeting for a report on the amount of available funds right now. Mr. Frost discussed the complexity of the funding and how it is necessary to find out how much it will be before actually progressing to the next step.

Nick Kepple said he thinks it is noteworthy to pause and recollect in 1999, we celebrated our 350th anniversary of the community and now we're almost 370 and we are on the verge of having our first town park on the Mystic River. This is a historic initiative and it is worth doing right and if it takes a little longer to deal responsibly with both the implications of a contaminated site and vigorously and creatively explore funding for remediation and implementation of the park, it is worth the wait. It is a complicated project which takes awhile to craft something that will last 100 to 300 years. I think if we are collectively patient, I think we will get the best value for the taxpayers and have a park that we can be proud of for the next 100 years.

Tom Switz asked Mr. Frost to update the schedule for the next year and to break down some of the permitting processes.

Alan Strunk stated if the project was permitted by April, it wouldn't be able to start until September or November anyways.

8. Comments from the Public

Janis Mink, Pawcatuck, said she came because of the Rossie Mill and the registered historic district. Janice Mink said she had spoke to Mike a long time ago and he said there wouldn't be a problem with the building and it won't be a problem if you don't take federal funds for anything on the site; however, if there is federal funding there would be a problem because the building is on the Historic National Register. Janice said she agrees emotionally with what Nancy d'Estang was referring to about how people know this is a historic district and with those peaks on the Rossie Mill and the Victorian architecture in the area, they would like that echoed on boathouse building. Ms. Mink said she personally thinks the old building should be saved used on the site.

Cal Buxton, Pawcatuck, said he would like to make three points. The first being the work that Mike and the committee has done so far is outstanding given all the constraints they have had to go through. The second point is something that was eluded to but not stated is that you've got private funding for the design and the private funding for the construction but then it gets turned over to the town and it becomes the town's maintenance issue as Mr. Johnstone eluded to with the bathroom issue. We need to look at what is nice-nice such as shingles that everyone would like to see but are maintenance pigs and I'm not sure the town wants that. We would all much rather inherit something that lasts a long time built with materials that are designed for 100 years instead of something that needs to be maintained. The last item is whenever people are introduced to new types of architecture, there is always public reaction

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as they do not want to see something different than what they are used to seeing. Although, not everyone will be happy, over time these buildings become an attraction to see the changing architecture as a community grows as time goes by.

Tom Stanford, Stonington, said the reason I came to this meeting was to learn about the park plan and the anticipated costs. But since we don't have a timeline and the anticipated costs are questionable, I don't know if it is a \$500,000 park plan or a million-dollar park plan, maybe someone could answer that for me. In any event, we did have a very good discussion about the boathouse. Mr. Stanford shared his experience of the boathouse by saying the first time I saw the plan was back in August and it was not what I expected as my expectation was something like the rope factory at the Mystic Seaport. Then I thought we can't duplicate the rope factory, we can concentrate on the museum or the Rossie Mill. With the architect's discussion, I really got to like the plan and I think the public might really get to like the plan in the fullness of time. At that meeting, I did ask the question about the radical design, I was thinking how Steve White would feel about this radical design and as he is present now, I can ask him; what do you think about the plan. Mr. Simmons said Mr. White could address the question in comments from the committee.

Paul Sartor thanked the committee for the consideration of the park name change saying he trusts the committee will make the right decision. Paul Sartor said he thinks the basic design is really nice. Paul Sartor said he always thought if you have 8 to 10 good people in a room and they have a common goal it usually comes out well. Whatever design your committee decides, I will not micro manage it but will support the decision the committee decides upon as it will be a good one.

Mr. Vincent said as you talk about parks, I want to add something to the mix to think about. As you talk about parks and parking, there are 8 parking places per car in this country which works out to be 1296 square feet of our country is dedicated to parking spaces per car. There is 435 square feet of space per person dedicated for parks. Because we keep talking about the importance of parking and should keep in mind, we are designing this place for people and on street parking is one of the ways we can design this place for people.

John Johnstone said what you are presenting, the timeline is a critical thing you have discussed along with the funding and that affects when Mike's boathouse is going to be built. You might have to have a temporary stop gap in between if they are going to use that area. I'm thinking why there isn't timeline that includes the park, the dockage and the boathouse and then associating that with the funding. Of course, you have the building, the boathouse may not come into existence for two or three years so you may want to develop a temporary structure so the crew team can get in there before the building is started. There should have a multiple goal approach to this, goal #1 begin the fill and docks, goal #2 being the parking and goal #3 the boathouse.

Chuck Stevens said the public could picnic in the Mystic River Park while waiting for this park to be done.

Herb Holstedt, Mystic Heights, wanted to mention a couple of things, one being the limited number of dinghy docks available on the river. When the dock was opened down there, we had two docks probably 5 x 8 feet and we told them you could use another dock, the plan showed we could put a 30-foot dock. They agreed to another dock and one was bought for about \$12,000.00 so there is another dock in the town of Stonington. The other thing they were talking about was the mooring field behind the restaurants. There are two moorings out there now that are privately owned. The other thing there won't be a lot of traffic in the river out in the park area but it could get busy in the summer.

9. Comments from the Committee

Steve White said to answer Mr. Stanford's question he really likes the building. The first time I saw the Thompson Exhibition building, I was kind of surprised but I listened to the architect and because the architect told us how the building responded to the functions required I ended up liking the design. When I first saw the design for the boathouse I was surprised but after listening to the architect, Mike and the committee, I asked myself "Does this meet the crew team's and community's needs and the answer is yes, and I was strongly convinced. No one comes to me and asks me about how the building functions but complains about how the building looks, no one considers it meets the museum's needs. The critical question here is does the building meet the crew team and the community needs for the foreseeable future and is it a responsible expenditure of other people's money. As far as I'm concerned, it answers these questions and I'm confident that radical looking building at the Mystic Seaport meets the needs of the seaport, so in both cases, I like the buildings.

Mike O'Neill said he would like to add to that saying they were very fortunate to have 26 architects from all over New England propose to build the boathouse and it was a very difficult task to glean that done to six and then to choose one. I think the decision was made

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based on what Steve just said, who could come up with a building that would best meet our requirements first. Plenty of the architects presented buildings with beautiful architecture which would be great for a house but we were building a boathouse, a building that would facilitate our needs and had to be done at an affordable cost. The group we picked has proven to be one of the best at that in the country who put together a building for one of the most successful programs on the Charles River and they did it on a very meager budget in a limited amount of time. The facility does not lend itself to a Victorian home but more to a contemporary structure and with this first volley we wanted to capitalize on that and present something very similar to what is presented there. This may not work in downtown Mystic and we may have to come up with something more fitting for its surroundings. To answer Janis's question regarding keeping the existing buildings on the site, if we go past 50% of the value of the buildings to bring them up to code, it would not be worth keeping them. The investment of money to bring those buildings up to code would not be worth the investment as they do not serve the needs or meet the criteria of the site. The best use of investment would to build a building that will meet the needs of the rowing programs and the community. Mr. O'Neill said the committee will continue to work with the public to come up with design that works.

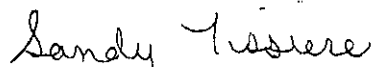
Breck Perkins added A & W have recently been engaged to modify the harbor boathouse in Cambridge on the Charles River. It is a classic Victorian boathouse and they using a modernistic design to augment that building to meet their ever-expanding needs. Also, the Cambridge Community Rowing program has quadrupled in its use and once this park is built, we will be able to use this river as never seen before, it will be unbelievable once this thing is built.

Chairman Simmons spoke of his father being an architect who built hospitals explaining a hospital's interior is built for function so it is more important than what the exterior looks like. Chairman Simmons shared his current home was also built by his father and when it was originally built it was a replication of his grandfather's house which was a four-story shingle and stone house in Watch Hill. Chairman Simmons continued saying it was torn down and replaced with a modern house which doesn't look like much from the outside but it looks awesome inside. Chairman Simmons said his point was a building may not look like much from the outside but the importance is the function of the inside and the challenge ahead is to allow form to follow function.

10. Adjourn

There was no further the business to discuss so the meeting adjourned at 8:57 p.m.

Respectfully submitted



Sandy Tissiere
Recording Secretary