

Town of Amherst
Local Historic District Commission

PROJECT APPLICATION REPORT

Local Historic District:	Dickinson LHD
Property Owner:	Amherst Community Television 246 College Street Amherst, MA 01002
Project Address:	Corner of Main Street and Gray Street
Map/parcel:	14B/250 and 14B/251
Zoning:	Neighborhood Business (BN)
Nature of request:	Request the construction of a new 4,080 square foot facility measured at 32 feet in height, and consisting of a wood frame construction with a cement fiberboard exterior. The new structure is visible from Main Street, Gray Street and Triangle Street, requiring Commission approval for a Certificate of Appropriateness as indicated in Section 6.2 of the Local Historic District Bylaw.
Board members:	Jennifer Taub – Chair, Bruce Coldham, Jim Lumley, Murray Schwartz
Staff members:	Brandon Toponce, Senior Planner

BACKGROUND

The two vacant parcels are found on the corner of Main Street and Gray Street. Originally they were part of the Property of Henry F. Hills who owned the home located at 38 Gray Street. This home has been carefully protected by several owners through the years. In 2008, Hills House LLC, divided the property into three lots, two along the front of Main Street, and one behind where the historic home is located. At this time the properties were owned by Barbara Guidera, representative for the Hills House LLC. On December 19, 2013, Amherst Community Television purchased the property with the idea of constructing a new television studio on the site.

Originally, Amherst Community Television imagined the building being a prominent features on the corner facing Gray and Main Streets. They also had a design created by Great Country Timber Frames, which had the appearance of a red barn. This design was brought to the Historical Commission in 2018, where the Commission requested the building take on more of the appearance of structures within the neighborhood and less of an agricultural red barn. Additionally, they added that this style was not appropriate for the historical nature of the property.

According to the Articles of Organization, Amherst Community Television was organized as a non-

Amherst Local Historic District Commission

profit educational organization. Since the use is non-profit, the Zoning Bylaw allows approval by the Planning Board for Site Plan Approval. In January 2019, the applicant met with Town Staff in preparation to have their proposed development reviewed by the Planning Board. At this meeting, the applicant presented a new building design, which staff believed took on several elements of the neighboring buildings and looked much less agricultural.

Amherst Community Television is now prepared to receive a decision by the Local Historic District Commission.

PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

The applicant is proposing to construct a 4,080 square foot building on a 24,000 square foot building pad. The parking lot will be located on the east portion of the property and the building will be located on the west. The site will be fully improved and fully landscaped. On the south edge of the parking lot along Main Street, a retaining wall will be required. This wall will be constructed of stone and be approximately 48" in height. The applicant has chosen a natural stone as to blend in with walls that can be found in other sections of the neighborhood.

The building will contain the studio, computer rooms, offices, equipment rooms and other general rooms related to an office use such as restrooms closets and an employee break room. With the building being a total of 32 feet high, it will only have one full floor and then an unfinished attic area for storage.

The exterior will consist of a concrete foundation with the walls having a cream cement fiber board finish, with white trim. The first floor windows will have a white casing and muntis with a transom window and a large white lintel above. The gambrel roof will have black asphalt shingles and a white rain gutter at the eaves. A gable roof is located above the front entrance that will have the sign and down cast lighting. At the front door is a slightly pitched flat roof overhang being held up with four square columns. Along the south side of the gambrel roof will be four dormers with two over two windows. On top of the building will be found three cupolas, the largest will stand in the center with windows and the smaller ones will be located on the east and west and only have vents. The total height from finished grade to the top of the center copula is approximately 39 feet.

According to Great Country Timber Frames, their architects have diligently tried to introduce the historic design elements of the surrounding neighborhood. Staff believes the structure has evolved from looking as if it had an agricultural use as a barn, to having a Dutch Colonial appearance with the added features of the copulas.

CERTIFICATE, SECTION 6.1

No building or structure or part thereof within a District shall be constructed or altered in any way that affects the exterior architectural features as visible from a public way, unless the Commission shall first have issued a Certificate with respect to such construction and alteration, except that a Certificate shall be required in all cases when the construction or alteration involves a removal of an exterior architectural feature visible from a public way.

CRITERIA FOR DETERMINATION, SECTION 8.0

The Commissions role is to address the visual appearance of the structure and not the use or other site plan detailing such as site layout, parking, landscaping or engineering. These items will be reviewed and discussed with the Planning Board. The Local Historic District Commission is to be guided by the purpose of the Bylaw to preserve and protect exterior architectural features of the Amherst Local Historic District Commission

buildings and structures in the District.

Historic and Architectural Value of the Site/Structure, Section 8.1

The Commission must consider the historical and architectural value and significance of the site, building or structure; the general design, proportions, detailing, mass, arrangement, texture, and material of the exterior architecture features involved; and the relation of such exterior architectural features to similar features of buildings and structures in the surrounding area

- **Staff Review:** As stated previously this property was once owned by Henry F. Hills, as part of his front lawn. Mr. Hills was a very prominent person in Amherst, along with his father they were one of the largest producers of straw hats. However, this portion of his lot does not have any historical significance other than being the front portion of the Hills property. Since the property has been divided into two commercial lots, the historic integrity of the vast lawn has been diminished.

The building as described above is for commercial use, yet does not have a typical office commercial style that would be out of place for the District. The applicant has designed a small building that is not out of scale with the rest of the homes and other structures in the neighborhood. Many of the homes are well over the height of 32 feet. The texture and colors are in harmony with other homes that have similar colors and clapboard siding. The gambrel roof may not be one prominently found within the Dickinson Local Historic District, yet this style is found in many areas throughout Amherst. The gambrel roof is a common roof shape of Dutch Colonial Architecture, which was popular in the early 1900s. Several homes within the North Prospect-Lincoln-Sunset Local Historic District are built in this style. With several homes in the Dickinson Local Historic District being constructed in the early part of the twentieth century, it would have been possible for a home to be constructed in the neighborhood with a Dutch Colonial Style, featuring a gambrel roof.

The proposed building also has several details that can be found on others structures throughout the neighborhood such as the dormer windows (14 Gray Street, 401 Main Street), square pillars and copulas (35 Triangle Street, 38 Gray Street). Staff believes the architect has blended several designs found throughout the area and created a structure that will not diminish from the historical integrity of the Dickinson District.

New Construction or additions, Section 8.2

The Commission must consider the appropriateness of the scale, shape and proportions of the building or structure both in relation to the land area upon which the building or structure is situated and in relation to buildings and structures in the vicinity. The Commission may in appropriate cases impose dimensional and setback requirements in addition to those required by applicable statute or bylaw.

- **Staff Review:** The size of the new building is comparable to other structures found within the area. The commercial buildings to the south are approximately 4,000 square feet, the Hill House is also close to 3,500 square feet and other homes in the immediate area range from 2,000 to 3,000 square feet. With the height and position of the new building, it does not appear to overshadow any other structures and the setback to adjacent residential dwellings is appropriate.

A concern that has been expressed is that of the location of the building. Originally, the new Amherst Local Historic District Commission

building was to be located on the corner of Main Street and Gray Street. Yet, after the Engineer Bucky Sparkle inspected the site and conducted tests on the soil, it was clear that the building was unable to be located where the property owner desired it to be. For this purpose, the structure was redesigned for the west portion of the property.

CONDITIONS AND FINDINGS

Conditions

1. This project shall be reviewed and approved by the Planning Board prior to any construction taking place.
2. The exterior of the studio building will be constructed according to the approved plans dated October 18, 2018 and prepared by Great Country Timber Frames.
3. Any substantial alterations to the exterior of the building made by the Planning Board shall return to the Local Historic District Commission for approval at a public meeting.

Findings

1. The proposed structure meets the review criteria found in Section 8.1 and 8.2 of the Amherst Local Historic District Bylaw
2. The proposed building has been designed as to blend in with the overall appearance of the Dickinson Local Historic District.
3. Since the architectural design features and scale of the structure will be in harmony with the existing properties, no negative impact to the Dickinson Local Historic District will be occurring.