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- POLICYMAKERS

Policymakers: Questions for the Dartmouth Historic Preservation Trust about the Akin house

Questions for the Dartmouth Historic Preservation Trust

Posted Mar. 1, 2015 at 2:01 AM

Q: What is the purpose of the Dartmouth Heritage Preservation Trust?

A: To carry on the stewardship of the 1762 Elihu Akin House at 762 Dartmouth St., Dartmouth, especially the preservation and restoration of this landmark property to ensure its completion.

To preserve and safeguard the region's history and heritage through education, advocacy and partnerships for the benefit of all.

To provide leadership and/or support to preservation projects through the development and delivery of programs for the use and benefit of the community, and through the use of preservation tools and techniques, such as historic preservation restrictions.

The Akin House is emblematic of our motto, "Preserving our Heritage from the Foundation Up."

Q: What are challenges for your organization?

A: DHPT was founded in 2007, and as with any new nonprofit, the biggest challenges early on were name recognition, exposure to gain support for our mission and raising money to advance our goals. Arguably the smallest nonprofit in the area, the Akin House speaks volumes about the importance of our heritage. As we approach our eighth anniversary, we can look back on our accomplishments without resting on our laurels because there is so much more to be done.

We are ever mindful that there are many nonprofits competing for the same source of funds. It is our job to demonstrate that our organization is unique in our priorities and in what we offer communities, and that we are worthy of support and a piece of the funding pie.

Q: What are your strengths?

A: Even a small group of dedicated people pursuing a mission can make a difference in this world. We approach our activities with skills, experience and specialties matched in equal measure by our commitment and perseverance to advance historic preservation in our community. We are able to achieve a lot on a shoestring.

DHPT has a wealth of historical content, research material, and artifacts to augment our education programs, either connected to the Akin property or the surrounding area. Since we are all about sharing, our events and programs are backed by a formidable amount of credible and reliable historic material available to others.

Q: Has the DHPT had success in forging and engaging partnerships?

A: No organization can be successful without partnerships and collaborators. We are fortunate to have terrific historic preservation partners, locally and at the state level. We work closely with the Dartmouth Historical & Arts Society and co-sponsor programs and events. The Massachusetts Archaeological Society is also an important partner, along with other groups and institutions in neighboring communities. DHPT is a member of Preservation Massachusetts's preservation coalition.

We are proud of our productive relationship with Roger Williams University's Community Partnerships Center, which has yielded tremendous benefits. For example, RWU's education department has provided us with curriculum development and living history programming that will enhance the social studies learning of local schools, especially for children in Grades 3, 4 and 5. DHPT's relationship with the Dartmouth Public Schools opens up tremendous opportunities for collaboration on enrichment programs and service learning opportunities at the Akin House.

By placing an emphasis on education and programming, we represent "The Little House with a Big Story to Tell."

Q: What are the organization's goals for the Akin House?

A: It is imperative that we obtain funding from Dartmouth's Community Preservation Committee (CPC) for the final phase of historic preservation work at the Akin House. The restoration of the house MUST be completed along with our design for barrier free access to the property and the house.

We have tried our very best to make the case for more funding. Phase III is the third leg of a three-legged stool that represents the three phases of Akin House preservation and restoration work. The house won't be finished nor fully accessible without that third leg firmly in place.

Q: What are your obstacles?

A: Phase III is by no means a slam-dunk with the CPC. Our immediate challenge is to win CPC's approval by presenting a rationale for the significance of Phase III and the potential consequences for not funding the project. If approved, then we take our case to Town Meeting.

Community Preservation Act funds are "public" funds. By design, CPA applicants are required to run the gauntlet to prove the worth of their projects. We must present our case to the public as well as CPC. The Select Board has already expressed unanimous support for our project. The CPA/CPC process is comparable to the Oscars. It's in part a campaign on the substance and part popularity contest.

Q: What is in your favor?

A: First of all, the Akin House is a historically significant property rich in history. Second, DHPT's accomplishments to date: We have a measurable track record of positive performance. Third, we leverage our resources and funding sources to best advantage. We are willing to do the heavy lifting and to do whatever it takes to get the job done.

Q: What other properties are you involved with?

A: DHPT plays an advocacy role that extends to other historic preservation projects when our help is needed.

DHPT holds historic preservation restrictions on two Dartmouth properties, both beneficiaries of CPA funds: the Dartmouth Y barn on Gulf Road, originally a contributing structure to the Gulf Hill Dairy Farm; and the Russell's Mills Village 1871 Schoolhouse/Library.

Q: Is there something about DHPT that is not widely known?

A: DHPT founders were former Waterfront Historic Area League board members and Akin House committee members, a nonprofit spinoff. Once WHALE made the strategic decision to concentrate its mission and efforts in New Bedford, WHALE transferred the Akin property deed to the Town of Dartmouth. DHPT stepped up to assume the temporary stewardship of the property on behalf of the town. While the move was controversial at the time, in hindsight it was the right thing to do for both organizations.

For more information about the Akin house project and DHPT, visit dhpt.org. Contact President Diane Gilbert at d.m.gilbert@comcast.net, 508-965-7265.