



PRESERVING DARTMOUTH'S HERITAGE
from the Foundation Up

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July 15, 2021

Dartmouth Select Board
Shawn MacDonald, Chair
Dartmouth Town Hall
400 Slocum Road
Dartmouth, MA 02747

via Email

Subject: Urgent Matter of the Lease Renewal for the Akin House between DHPT and the Town

Dear Shawn,

We respectfully request to meet with the Select Board in person on the renewal of our lease for the Akin House.

The Dartmouth Heritage Preservation Trust's lease with the Town expired in May 2018. Since then, we have operated as tenants-at-will while we were trying to renegotiate a new lease with the Town which had become subject to new provisions mandated by the Select Board. As you know, other town-owned properties that are being leased by nonprofits are the old Southworth Library and the Russell's Mills Schoolhouse. Because their leases are still in effect, these groups can operate and hold events for the public.

The 1762 Akin House and property are much different from the old Southworth Library and the Russell's Mills Schoolhouse because the building has no plumbing facilities, no water source, and cannot compete in the marketplace as a rental property with an occupancy permit.

Absent an active lease with the Town, the Dartmouth Heritage Preservation Trust board had no choice but to close the building and property to visitors. The property is being managed and maintained by DHPT through our donated operations funds for lawn and landscape care, to pay for electricity, and for the wireless alarm system. The building's interior is also being cleaned and maintained and must be kept at a certain temperature to minimize dampness which adversely affects an old house. Why do this volunteer work without a lease? We believe it's our moral obligation to care for this property—to address and solve any problems that can occur. This historically significant pre-Revolutionary War building must be sustained and our Town's significant investment must be protected.

Now that all organizations and businesses have been green-lighted to re-open, the Akin property lease has become a matter of urgency. We have tried to urge town officials to take this one up as soon as possible. Still, we have made no progress in negotiations.

Our principal concern is the insistence by Town counsel that the Town require unnecessary and expensive insurance for reasons of uniformity and require that we keep the property plowed in wintertime, even though the property is not open to the public in the winter. We have been informed that these items are non-negotiable, and that we may not meet with the relevant town boards to discuss these issues. We believe that, as a long-standing partner with the Select Board working on this project, we are entitled to an audience with the board to be heard on these matters.

In every single way, DHPT has operated as the stewards of the Akin House since our first lease was executed with the Town in May 2008 and renewed in May 2013. Our lease expired in May 2018 and since then we have made good faith efforts to work with the Town to renew the lease.

What are the ramifications for DHPT and the Akin property? DHPT cannot apply for grants for programming or more restoration work. Fundraising is difficult when our main reason for being—the Akin House—is closed to the public and we are unable to offer living history programming. We've had to inform our members and supporters that without a renewed lease with the Town, we cannot take the risk of hosting visitors on site.

What are the ramifications for the Town? The Akin House has a Preservation Restriction in perpetuity. As already stated, this property has limited use except as a house museum and as a cultural heritage center and education facility. If not DHPT's stewardship of this property, then which organization would be willing to take over?

With so much invested in this property—in public funds through CPA, private donations, and memberships, and with countless volunteer hours expended since 2008—is this really where we want to end up?

Thank you for your consideration of this urgent matter.

Respectfully submitted,
Diane Gilbert, President
Dan Perry, Vice President
www.dhpt.org

Diane Gilbert
and for Dan Perry (dq)

Email Copies to the Select Board: Frank Gracie, John P. Haran, Stanley Mickelson, David Tatelbaum; Shawn MacInnes, Town Administrator