

Boston Marathon statue will move to Hopkinton Town Common

By Michael Morton/Daily News staff
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HOPKINTON —

After voicing concerns about keeping Town Common's aesthetic and not overshadowing its war memorials, a local preservation board last night approved moving a Boston Marathon-related statue there.

"I've been trying to make myself like this," said Claire Wright, who nevertheless endorsed moving a statue of Marathon forefather George Brown holding a starter's pistol from the Police Station to the town's central gathering point.

Wright was joined by three other members of the Hopkinton Center Historic District Commission in approving the switch. Chairman Michael Girardi cast the lone "no" vote, citing a "negative aesthetic impact" and his sense that the sculpture was being forced into a space featuring local war memorials.

The board's endorsement was granted on the condition that the applicant, the Hopkinton Athletic Association, come back for approval of the statue's base.

Wright said the commission wants to ensure the base is large enough so nighttime passersby won't mistake the statue for a live, gun-wielding man, but modest enough so as not to outshine the town's signature "Doughboy" monument to local World War I soldiers.

While he voted for the move, member Frank Chase said he was still pondering three previous worries: that the statue might diminish the Doughboy, that it would hurt the common's look and that viewers might mistake the trenchcoat-clad Brown for a turn-of-the-century gangster and get the wrong impression.

But regarding the merits of the man the statue depicts, Chase said, "I don't think we have an issue here of whether George Brown is worthy of historical note."

Among other endeavors, Brown, a native son, helped move the Marathon starting line to Hopkinton as a member of the governing Boston Athletic Association and fired the starter's pistol for a number of years. That tradition has been carried on by his descendants.

Before last year's race, the Hopkinton Athletic Association commissioned local sculptor Michael Alfano to create a bronze statue of Brown. The sculpture was placed on the Town Common in the days leading up to the race and moved to the Police Station afterward.

Hoping to move the statue near the starting line, the athletic association gained the approval of other town boards, with the historic district commission the last stop. During the meeting, a number of statue supporters spoke, including Alfano and Brown's grandson, Thomas Burke.

In making the pitch, athletic association Treasurer Dave Stoldt said he was sorry if the commission had gotten the sense that his group had not previously collaborated with them when the two sides met in January 2008.

"Maybe that's a little bit of naivete on our part," he said.

While commission members told Stoldt they were satisfied with his group's actions, Wright later said she wished there had been a full discussion on ways to honor Brown and noted that the athletic association had launched a campaign to pressure her group after initial talks didn't look promising.

But once Stoldt detailed how other locations had proven infeasible and how other boards supported the plan on their own volition, Wright said she accepted his explanation.

In hesitating to approve the statue's move, Wright said the commission was charged with protecting the downtown historic district and could not approve every proposal.

"We've been very careful with precedent setting," she said. If not, she added, "The common would not look at all the way it does today."

Dispelling rumors, Stoldt said the association has no intention to expand the sculpture or include in the move a flame that was given to Hopkinton by its sister city in Marathon, Greece.

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