

Group seeks more public access to historic tavern

By Henry Schwan
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The push to increase public access to Concord's historic Wright Tavern continues.

The American Revolution Round Tables is the group leading the charge, and it held a meeting Monday night at Minute Man National Historical Park to solicit public input.

"It went very well," Round Tables member Mel Bernstein said. "It was a lively, energized audience."

First Parish Church in Concord owns the tavern, which is registered as a National Historic Landmark and has important connections to the Battle of Lexington and Concord and the start of the American Revolution. First Parish uses the space for church functions and leases a portion to two tenants—Jericho Road, a non-profit, and Nashawtuc Architects.

Mark Prior Russell is the chairman of the First Parish Standing Committee, which is the ultimate decision-making body at the church. He said the committee is open to considering a proposal to increase public access.

"Preliminary discussions" is how Tim Jacoby, the chairman of the Trustees for Parish Donations, described talks to date. He said the church is prepared to participate in talks going forward, but any discussions must fit with the trustees' mission to properly maintain the church assets.

Bernstein said he "squashed" that idea, because the park is neutral on the issue and his group is not looking for money from the Park Service.

Bernstein believes increased access can be accomplished through a public/private partnership. He cited several examples that have worked for other historic properties, including George Washington's Headquarters Museum at the National Historical Park in Morristown, New Jersey.

Jayne Gordon attended Monday night's meeting. She is the former director of education at the State Historical Society. She said the tavern is an "important part of understanding what made [Concord] click in colonial times and beyond." She mentioned several significant moments in the tavern's history—the meeting of the new Provincial Congress of Massachusetts on Oct. 11, 1774, and the assembling of Minute Men on Oct. 19, 1775 to defend Concord against the British—adding that "it's an important part of understanding an 18th century community."

Bernstein and Jacoby said it's too early to talk specifics about where the money will come from to prepare the property for increased access.

However, Bernstein said his group desires to get church trustees to see the "benefits of involving the public in ownership and running of the tavern."

No formal talks are planned, but Jacoby said, "we're ready when they are" to continue dialogue.

Bernstein said the next step is to get more people involved in discussions in order to map out the future direction of the tavern.

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