

Atkinson/Plaistow

Town will meet with state on scenic road designation

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ATKINSON — The history packed into a three-mile stretch of town is a little closer to being officially recognized.

Last night, the selectmen held a public hearing on designating Main Street a scenic and cultural byway, but decided to meet with a state employee before making a decision.

Although Planning Board Chairwoman Susan Killam called the designation a “wonderful accolade,” selectmen Chairman Jack Sapia said his board should have as much information as possible before making a decision.

Killam has said the state already approved the town’s application through the Scenic & Cultural Byways program, but the application is still under review, according to Town Administrator Russell McAllister.

The program’s Web site said it promotes the preservation of scenic routes, making communities eligible for grants from the

Federal Highway Administration.

The New Hampshire Department of Transportation must make the final decision on the town’s application, which was filed last year.

Selectmen are to schedule a meeting with a DOT representative to discuss concerns raised at last night’s public hearing by Philip Consentino, a resident and the town’s police chief.

Consentino said he fears the scenic byway status will increase traffic and prevent people from making changes to their homes to the point of stopping them from trimming trees in their yards.

“Why would you want to let Big Brother come in and put restrictions on what you can and can’t do?” he asked.

But Killam said the only restriction placed on scenic byways is that there can be no new billboards erected, which she said are already prohibited in town.

Consentino also said a proposed communications tower could interfere with the designation. Although Killam said the tower is unlikely to cause a problem, the

selectmen decided to take the proposal under advisement until they meet with a DOT representative.

A handful of residents, including Conservation Commission Chairman Tim Dziechowski, spoke in favor of the measure.

McAllister said the program has helped towns in Oklahoma preserve wagon tracks alongside modern roads. In Atkinson, some money could be used to maintain stone walls.

Main Street, also called Route 121, has been a primary route for travel and commerce in Atkinson since the town was settled. The application says the road has been used since Colonial times.

Along with modern homes, 25 houses on the proposed scenic route predate the Civil War. Nine are from before the American Revolution and six predate Atkinson’s incorporation as a New Hampshire town in 1767, according to the application.

“This is just a nice, prestigious distinction,” Killam said. “It’s an accolade that our town has this much history to display.”