

MINUTES of the September 19, 2023 Meeting of the Commission (via Zoom)

Adopted October 17, 2023

Members Present: The meeting began at approximately 7:40 p.m. Bob Booher, Wendy Harris, Marilynn Frey, David Stopak, and Mimi Styles were present. Jeff McCrehan and Rob Gilmore, TC liaison, were unable to attend.

Approval of Agenda: Modifications were made to the proposed agenda, and it was unanimously approved.

Adoption of Minutes: The Minutes of the August 15 meeting were unanimously approved.

Review Session: There were no projects for review.

150th Year Celebration: Bob reported that Meredith held another meeting at which she proposed a screening in town of the MMC-TV video. She has also corresponded with Wendy about a look into “Washington Grove” and environs pre-1873. Wendy suggested that representatives from Montgomery County Parks Archeology could be invited to make a presentation about the area’s indigenous and enslaved people--perhaps even within the bounds of the present-day town. Phil Edwards also had some suggestions relating to research he had done. Meredith is also interested in putting together a volume to document significant events that take place during the entire anniversary year – essentially a “time capsule”. Bob and Pat met with a representative from Arcadia Press, which publishes historical “picture books” (the Gaithersburg Community Museum bookshop carries them). The rep was directed to information about the Town on the website, and Bob gave him a memory stick with additional information that had been prepared for the 150th. Another meeting with Arcadia is anticipated.

Masonry restoration: Bob followed up with the masonry restoration specialist, but it may be a while before their report is received.

Building Permit Process: David had circulated a draft of modifications to the building permit process document published on the Town’s website. It was discussed, keeping in mind that it is a Planning Commission document, so HPC will keep suggestions to a minimum. The separate document that covers HPC Review of Permit Applications was also reviewed. The need for modifications to these documents is predicated on proposed changes to the permit application process that will separate the HPC Review from the building permit application and require the HPC Review as the first step in the process.

The new process will encourage dialogue between homeowners and applicants early when planning changes to their homes. There is consensus among HPC members on the revised process, whereby HPC will review projects before the building permit application is filed and then examine documentation submitted when the building permit application is eventually filed, to

ensure no significant changes have been incorporated. Projects that do and don't require HPC review should be clearly identified in the instructional documents.

ADU Draft Ordinance: Bob reported on the Maryland State ADU Task Force that held the first of a series of meetings to look at state enabling legislation for ADUs. The goal is model legislation that counties and municipalities can adopt -- ADUs are a local zoning issue. It is hoped that the PC will participate in this series of meetings. Generally, thorny issues are parking, maximum square footage (either of the ADU itself or as a percentage of the principal building), the owner-occupied requirement and greater design scrutiny than the underlying zone.

Bob generally reviewed his recommendations that were incorporated in the "proposed HPC revisions to the ADU ordinance" document that he had circulated. ADUs could be fully integrated into existing residences, added on to existing residences, or free-standing. Issues of the definition of "rear lot", lot coverage, square footage, height, and compatibility were discussed.

Re the Town's draft ordinance, Bob gave his own property as an example of the outsized ADU, dwarfing his principal residence, that could be constructed under current zoning regulations.

A "contingent review" by HPC for ADU additions and freestanding units will be critical to ensure compatibility and the integrity of the historic district. An ordinance enabling the Planning Commission to accept HPC recommendations will be critical.

Bulletin Material: Mimi will work with Pat on a piece that will summarize congratulatory messages for the 150th anniversary that have been received from various congressional, state, county, and local officials.

Planning Commission Meeting: Bob attended the September PC meeting and reported that the 102 Center Street (Mento) permit application was approved. The ADU issue was discussed at length. The discussion about moving the dumpster at the commercial corner from the front to the rear of the buildings was postponed. The PC will issue an RFP to have the Town's zoning map redrawn because it's very old and Town boundaries are not up to date. For example, the map doesn't include Ridge Road extended. Decommissioning both Center Street and Oak Street between Hickory and WGL was also discussed.

Town Council Meeting Report: Rob Gilmore was not present to give a report, and Bob related that although he had not attended the TC meeting, he understands that there was a long discussion about the stormwater recommendation report from Soltesz. This will likely be high on the list of action items as there is a deadline to use the available federal funds. Marilynn reported that she saw the presentation and that it was impressive. Bob has asked for a copy of the report but has not yet received it.

Web Info Update: It was pointed out that the list of HPC commissioners is not up to date (Darrell Anderson is still listed as the Council Liaison) and the list of contributing structures is based on the original National Register nomination, rather than the recent update.

Permanent corner markers for the missing buildings: It was mentioned to Bob that it might be desirable to install permanent corner markers (concrete with bronze tags, or possibly granite) for the missing buildings that were (approximately) staked out for the 150th anniversary weekend.

Professionals would be able to determine more accurate locations than Bob was able – Phil Edwards and Phil Winters noted that the marked location of the auditorium was not quite correct. An RFP would need to be issued for this work.

Serpentine Barren: Following our last meeting, Wendy reported that she provided Jack Fassett with all her archeological records about the steatite quarry; after reviewing them, Jack has concluded, possibly in consultation with his son, Caleb, that Washington Grove is not on a serpentine barren, and he will provide another report about this conclusion.

Adjournment: The meeting was adjourned at approximately 9:30 pm. The next meeting will be on Tuesday, September 19, at 7:30 pm via Zoom.