

Franklin Township Historic Preservation Advisory Commission
Regular Monthly Meeting Minutes
August 4, 2015

Location

Large Conference Room, Franklin Township Municipal Building, 475 DeMott Lane, Somerset, NJ

Call to Order

The meeting was called to order by Chairperson Barbara Lawrence at 7:32 pm in accordance with the Open Public Meeting Law of 1975.

Attendance

Present

Members: Jean Ambrose, Andrew Burian, Thomas Gale, Anthony Ganim, Susan Goldey, Joanne Kaiser, Barbara Lawrence, Barbara ten Broeke

Alternates: Nancy Hohnstine

Council Liaison: Councilman Chase

Absent

Members: Frank Aiello, Robert LaCorte

Staff: Vincent Dominach, Senior Zoning Officer

Historian: Bob Mettler

Guests

Bill Bowman, Franklin Reporter & Advocate

Tiffany Delaney, Franklin Township Special Projects Manager

Angela Fernan, President, The Meadows Foundation

Jan Steinhauer, Treasurer, The Meadows Foundation

Maureen Sturgeon, Franklin Township Senior Engineer

Robert Vornlocker, Jr., Franklin Township Manager

Formal Reviews

There were no formal reviews.

Informal Review

There were no informal reviews.

Reports

1. Township Owned Historic Properties

Ms. Lawrence started with a discussion of the report on the Township owned historic properties the Township's Historic Preservation Consultant, Wayne McCabe, prepared in 2012. She shared that the report made recommendations for 3 years of phased work for an estimated \$560,000. She also mentioned that a prior survey indicated that residents were willing to expend about 8% of the Township Open Space Tax, or about \$5.6M, towards historic preservation. She noted that the Township's Open Space Advisory Committee had already authorized expending funds for the Phase One portion of that total. She offered that there are also grants available that the Township should be competing for to help with preservation expenses. Finally, she stated that there appears to have been little action or accountability on the part of the Township with regards to the report's recommendations. Therefore, she said, Mr.

Vornlocker had been invited to the meeting to bring the HPAC current and to clarify responsibilities.

Township Manager Vornlocker introduced himself and the two Township staff members with him, Ms. Sturgeon, who he explained has been tasked with managing the construction projects in the Township and Ms. Delaney, who has been responsible for procuring and managing grants as well as managing project authorizations with the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO).

Mr. Vornlocker stated that some of the Township owned historic properties are leased to The Meadows Foundation and others are not.

The first property he discussed was Tulipwood. Mr. Vornlocker noted that in his report, Mr. McCabe recommended that the Township sell Tulipwood but Mr. Vornlocker explained that the sale would fall under Green Acres regulations which require a large compensation, four to ten times the value, when a Green Acres property is diverted. He said that still may be the best plan for the property but that it would likely take a change in Green Acres regulations before it could happen.

When asked about The Meadows Foundation's connection with the property, he said that The Meadows had stopped being involved with Tulipwood in 2014. He said the building was beautiful but indicated that parts of it need work, the main floor kitchen in particular, and noted there are ongoing costs associated with the property. He reported that the property is being inspected at least once a week. He shared that there may be some non-profit interest but Green Acres regulations would govern. When asked about tenants in the past, he said there once had been Meadows employees in residence (Ms. Fernan clarified that they were caretakers) but indicated that no one is there now. When asked if the building could be leased, Mr. Vornlocker stated that the Township did not want to be a landlord so the Township did not want to lease it.

Mr. Vornlocker said that there were four sites on the list, including Tulipwood, that, because of current conditions, were being mothballed for all intents and purposes. He described them all as special but needing work.

Mr. Vornlocker then moved on to discuss the Pleasant Plains Schoolhouse. He briefly talked about the issues with the recent lead abatement project including the windows being replaced with vinyl replacements. He said that the originals were beyond repair, which some Commission members disputed, so they needed to be replaced but noted that the vinyl windows, which Commission members took issue with, could be replaced with more appropriate ones in the future. Ms. Sturgeon mentioned the lead abatement project and said that it also involved the removal of some asbestos flooring. She noted that they were still working on abating the ground around the outside but that it may just require mulching the dripline area next to the building. When asked why the Commission hadn't been advised of the project, Mr. Vornlocker said that had been discussed in the past and he wouldn't address it again.

There was a brief discussion about some possible uses for the building, such as a meeting room, and some of its limitations, such as access to an ADA compliant restroom, but it was left an open issue for now.

The Stoothoof-Gunther Farm was reported on next. Ms. Delaney explained the Township was having some difficulty getting the SHPO to approve the stabilization plan. One issue was the architectural drawings. The current plan was to have Ford 3, who had been awarded a contract a number of years ago and had completed some of the work several years ago but who had been stalled by pending approvals, come back to the project to finish what was started. It was reported that Ford 3 indicated to the Township that due to the delay, they would need to do some extra work and would need about an additional \$8,000 to proceed. Ms. Delaney anticipated that a proposal to amend the Ford 3 contract could be going before Council as soon as their meeting on 8/11/15. She also reported that she had confirmed that there were no issues with the existing Somerset County Cultural and Heritage Commission grant due to the delay.

Mr. Vornlocker explained that the plan was to mothball and stabilize the buildings but he reported that the barns were a problem due to their deterioration. He described them as hazardous and a nuisance. When asked specifically about the cow barn, he reported that it had some damage but that it was still there. He reported that a new fence would be installed. When asked about the cost to stabilize the building, Ms. Lawrence reported that it was to cost about \$185,000. When asked what would happen if existing funds would not be enough to complete the project, Mr. Vornlocker responded that it would have to go back to Open Space for support. He also explained that the house roof was being tarped for now to simply protect the building from further damage.

The Van Liew Suydam house, a Meadows property, was taken up next. Mr. Vornlocker reported that a structural problem had to be address; specifically, a beam was found to be rotted through. Mr. Burian asked about repair details and Ms. Fernan said that sister joists were used. Another project mentioned was repairing windows and installing new interior storm windows. The completion of chimney work was also reported.

At the Wyckoff-Garretson house, a Meadows property also, Mr. Vornlocker pointed out that the 2012 report anticipated that very little work would be needed, yet much had been done. He reported that there had been a failure of the HVAC system that required the replacement of the boiler, new ductwork, and repair of interior plaster. Ms. Fernan mentioned that the Meadows is working on getting the carriage barn rehabbed and the basement electrified. She said they plan to use the carriage barn as a media center. When asked about grants, Ms. Fernan mentioned Somerset County Cultural and Heritage Commission's grant.

Hageman was taken up next. Mr. Vornlocker described it as the centerpiece of The Meadows Foundation. He mentioned that there was a grant for work at the cow barn including for a staircase from the 1st to 2nd floor. He suggested the buildings may be used as a Township Museum and there was some general discussion about tourism. Mr. Vornlocker reported that Township Council was committed to developing local tourism in hopes of attracting visitors who will stay here for a while and possibly help the local economy. The Township's open space, agriculture, and heritage were mentioned as assets to promote. Attracting the Rutgers crowd could be a goal along with people from out of town visiting family and friends locally. Ms. Delaney said the Township would be working with the New Jersey Division of Travel and Tourism and Somerset County Business Partnership's Tourism Council to further Township tourism. Ms. Lawrence mentioned the Cherry Valley report that proposed the Agriculture Center at the Stoothoof-Gunther and Dunn farms as a good source of tourism data and ideas.

Mr. Vornlocker reported that the biggest problem at the site right now was the roof on the house. He said that it was currently a failing 3-tab asphalt roof and that he would like to see it replaced before winter. Ms. Sturgeon and Ms. Delaney discussed the need for SPHO approval. Ms. Sturgeon said that the project would need to go out to bid. She said the Township was seeking a State contractor who has been doing slate work. Mr. Vornlocker gave an estimate of \$73,000 as the cost for a new roof. Members were also shown a contract from Lighton and samples of synthetic slate. The samples stimulated a discussion of the advantages of synthetic slate over real slate including that synthetic is lighter and required less care when walked on and worked with. Ms. Lawrence suggested that The Meadows could be responsible for deciding the roof color. Mr. Burian asked if the final proposal would come to the Commission for review and Mr. Vornlocker said there would be no formal presentation. Ms. Fernan asked if the existing Yankee gutters would remain and Ms. Sturgeon said they would.

The discussion of State approval touched off a brief discussion about the status of the Township's CLG application that was submitted to the SHPO years ago. It was reported that Mr. Kinney in the SHPO had finally reviewed it and had suggested revisions so it is still a work in progress.

Mr. Vornlocker moved on to discuss the Kingston School. He reminded the Commission that it had recently seen the plans for the proposed renovation of the school by a non-profit. He noted that the plan is for the non-profit to allow an existing private school to relocate and operate in the building as a private school yet offer a community use space as well. He reported that the Township has been battling with Green Acres over the contract with the non-profit. Two clauses are causing problems: the term of the lease (the non-profit is seeking a 24 year 11 month lease) and the non-profit's request for the right of first refusal if the property is sold. Both are contrary to Green Acres normal acceptable practices, he said. Mr. Vornlocker said the Township was trying to act in good faith but was having trouble even communicating with the Green Acres staff. He said it may be necessary to get our local Representatives involved. The Commission was reminded that, at a Kingston Village Advisory Committee meeting two years ago, a proposal was presented to preserve the earlier portion of the school but raze the 1950s addition due to its deteriorated state. It was felt that the current proposal should be seen as a much better option. Ms. Lawrence reported that it was her understanding that the local residents are "thrilled" with the plans.

Next discussed was the Dunn property, which Mr. Vornlocker described as beautiful and one of his favorite places in Franklin Township. It was humorously referred to as the "The Manager's Mansion". The house and setting are both very nice but the building is rapidly deteriorating, according to Mr. Vornlocker. He reported that holes in the roof had been repaired and it was being maintained with only minor damage. He also reported that a boiler had frozen but that it had been repaired. A new roof, which is currently slate, is needed. Ms. Sturgeon reported that there are structural problems with the roof so the whole roof needs to be rebuilt. Mr. Vornlocker reported that the porch in back had been stabilized and that one side of the building had vinyl siding. He said the goal is stabilization for now, noting that the windows were in good shape though it does use some oil but added that to make it livable, the plumbing and electrical would have to be upgraded.

Finding a use is a priority but it will be difficult for several reasons. Mr. Vornlocker said that it had been a mistake to take both the Dunn and Stoothoof properties from the developer as a

whole. He said they should have been subdivided but the State won't allow the change now. It also has an access problem as it only has a long, 10' wide driveway off Suydam Road that runs between and close to two houses that front the road. Wetlands and deed restrictions were also discussed. If it becomes possible to subdivide and divest of the property, the need for a façade or preservation easement was mentioned.

Ms. Lawrence asked if the Township might work in cooperation with agencies that provide housing to the needy to make some of the Township properties available to them. Mr. Burian cautioned that the requirements for public housing like fire protection etc. would be costly to install and they may be destructive to the historic fabric of the building.

Mr. Vornlocker summarized the discussion by noting that, unlike Tulipwood, for example, which has potential to be used in multiple ways, the Dunn site's potential is limited.

The next property discussed was the Van Wickle House, the original Meadows property. Mr. Vornlocker reported that significant structural issues have developed and been identified. Ms. Fernan reported that there were problems with the beams which are supported by stones. Mr. Vornlocker said that an engineer did a structural analysis and for now the building is no longer available for public use. He said the Township got recommendations that suggested repairs would cost \$150,000 but because Council believes the house cannot be lost \$45,000 will be put toward the first phase of the repair. To some Commission members surprise, Ms. Fernan mentioned that a caretaker was still in residence. Ms. Goldey questioned that it had not condemned and Mr. Vornlocker confirmed that it had not. He mentioned that Mr. Zilinek, Township Director of Engineering, had a fondness for the property so had been voluntarily working on the grounds.

There was a question about a Historic Structures Report for the property. Ms. Kaiser said there is a legend that the Meadows had been reluctant to get one earlier because there was a belief that the house was built at a certain date and members didn't want that disproved by a report. Ms. Lawrence mentioned that grant opportunities were available from sources other than Somerset County including the 1772 Foundation and the New Jersey Historical Commission.

Last on the list were the Canal Road houses. A plan for what to do with them has been hard to develop in part because of their location which limits parking. Councilman Chase said that practically there is space for only two vehicles at one house and only a single vehicle at the other. Mr. Vornlocker said one benefit is that they are not subject to Green Acres regulations so an option might be to offer to sell them with a preservation easement via a \$1 bid sale. A problem with that plan is the existing Somerset County Grant that in part paid for tarping them. Ms. Lawrence wondered if the contract has a life, Mr. Vornlocker suggested it was 10 years, and Ms. ten Broeke said that we might already be in years 8 to 10. Ms Lawrence asked if they were part of the Millstone Valley Scenic Byway and Ms. ten Broeke confirmed that they were.

After the presentation, there were several other discussions with Mr. Vornlocker. Councilman Chase brought up the Green Acres requirement that to take something off the list, the Township needs to replace it with other property. Mr. Vornlocker said there is property on South Middlebush Road the Township might be able to qualify as replacement property. Councilman Chase mentioned the Higgins House in Kingston and Mr. Vornlocker indicated that it was for sale. Councilman Chase suggested Mr. Dominach talk to the realtors to insure that the

Township's significant investment in its preservation is understood and protected. Ms. Lawrence offered that lack of knowledge about regulations with historic properties and districts is an ongoing problem. Mr. Vornlocker said that there should be full disclosure with property transfers but lack of knowledge is not a valid reason for not following regulations.

Mr. Vornlocker summarized by saying that ideas for the properties will dictate the work that needs to be done. He said he feels it's all about the house.

Ms. Lawrence thanked Ms. Delaney, Ms. Sturgeon, and Mr. Vornlocker, for attending. Mr. Vornlocker said he hoped it was helpful. Staff left the meeting at about 9:30 pm.

At this point in the meeting, due to the hour, a motion was made to amend the agenda to suspend all other agenda items except New Business item 2. Honeyman House and Public Discussion.

New Business

1. Honeyman House

Ms. ten Broeke shared some information she had about the property. She said that the c. 1740 house's historic significance was that it was once owned by John Honeyman, the purported spy for General Washington, who help Washington before the successful Battle of Trenton. She said the property consists of about 4+ acres between Canal Road and the D&R Canal. She reported that the property had some nice features but that the interior had some less than appropriate alterations. She asked how a façade easement might be placed on the property. Mr. Burian suggested that the owner would need to agree. Councilman Chase suggested that the seller might be approached with the suggestion of placing the easement. Mr. Gale explained that typically an easement is held by an entity or organization so there may be an initial fee to help with the organization's future costs to insure easement compliance. He said that sometimes a current owner cares enough about the historic property to protect it with an easement themselves prior to sale. Mr. Burian asked to be excused at this point (9:50 pm). Possible actions were discussed including a suggestion that the current owner be approached about creating a façade easement. Ultimately, a motion was made and passed to create a resolution to recommend the Open Space Advisory Committee recommend that Council be prepared to make a financial commitment to protect the house and make its preservation affordable. Mr. Gale was to work on the resolution and forward it to Ms. Lawrence.

Public Discussion

Ms. Fernan invited the Commission to use Meadows' properties for meeting. She also asked how to get use of the land between the Hageman and Wyckoff Garretson properties for a path to connect them. Members suggested that since the property is State land, The Meadows Foundation may want to approach the staff in the D&R Canal State Park Office. Members also suggested they reach out the Township's Trails Advisory Committee for suggestions.

Upcoming meetings

Next meeting – September 1, 2015

Adjournment

At 10:00 p.m. a motion to adjourn was made and passed by unanimous voice vote.

Respectfully submitted,

Thomas Gale, Secretary

Action Items:

1. Mr. Gale to prepare and forward to Ms. Lawrence a resolution on the Honeyman House.

EC:

Robert Vornlocker, Township Manager
Ann Marie McCarthy, Township Clerk
Mark Healey, Director of Planning
Vincent Dominach, Senior Zoning Officer
FTHPAC members