



CITY OF PLAINFIELD
HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION
 515 WATCHUNG AVENUE, ROOM 202
 PLAINFIELD, NEW JERSEY 07060



Adrian O. Mapp, Mayor

William H. Michelson, Chairman
 Lawrence T. Quirk, Vice Chairman

MEETING MINUTES- PLAINFIELD HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION
JUNE 23, 2015, 7:30 PM, CITY HALL 1ST FLOOR LIBRARY, 515 WATCHUNG AVENUE, PLAINFIELD, NJ

Call to Order and Public Notice

Chairman William Michelson called the regular meeting of the Plainfield Historic Preservation Commission to order at 7:36 P.M. and in conformance with the Open Public Meetings Act read aloud the following: “This is a regularly scheduled meeting of the Historic Preservation Commission of the City of Plainfield, Union County, New Jersey. Adequate notice of this meeting has been given in accordance with the Open Public Meetings Act in that a notice was published in the Courier News on January 1, 2015, and the notice of this meeting was posted in the City Clerk and Planning Division offices.”

2015 Historic Preservation Commission Name, Class Designation (Term Ends)	1/27/15	2/24/15	3/24/15	4/28/15	5/26/15	6/23/15	7/28/15	8/25/15	9/15/15	10/27/15	11/17/15	12/15/15
John Favazzo, Class A (12/31/2017)		X	X	X		X						
Bill Garrett, Class B (12/31/2015)		X	X									
Sandra Gurshman, Class B (12/31/2018)		X	X	X		X						
Jan Jasper, Class C (12/31/2016)		X		X								
Elizabeth King, Class C (12/31/2016)				X								
William Michelson, Class B (12/31/2018)		X	X	X		X						
Lawrence Quirk Class A (12/31/2017)		X	X	X		X						
Gary Schneider, Class B (12/31/2015)		X	X	X								
Reginald Thomas, Class A (12/31/2018)		X	X	X		X						
Alternate Member #1 VACANT (2 year term)												
Alternate Member #2 VACANT (2 year term)												

The January 27 and May 26 meetings were cancelled.

Presentation of April 28, 2015, Meeting Minutes

Ms. Gurshman made a motion to approve the April 28, 2015, meeting minutes as presented; Vice Chairman Quirk seconded the motion and it was approved unanimously by voice vote.

New Business

1. Certificate of Appropriateness HPC 2015-15: 516 West Sixth Street; Block 768, Lot 13

Fr. Manoel Oliveira of St Mary’s Church, 516 West Sixth Street, and Mr. Raj Sookhu, a CAD Designer for Crane Associates, PC, of 313 East Main Street, Somerville, introduced themselves to the Commission. Mr. Sookhu informed the Commission that the church is proposing to install 2 new air conditioner unit condensers on the north side of the building facing West Fifth Street, and a new ground sign with LED display area at the southeast corner of Liberty Street and West Sixth Street

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New Business (continued)

The HVAC units are visible from West Fifth Street even though there are shrubs present and a chain link fence. Each condenser is 5 feet tall x 5 feet wide x 5 feet deep. Mr. Sookhu offered to add slots to the chain link fence so that the units cannot be seen from the street, as well as sound attenuating panels if the units are too noisy. Chairman Michelson informed the applicant that according to §17:9-24.E.2 of the city land use ordinance, screening for HVAC equipment and service boxes shall consist of a minimum 4 foot high evergreen hedge along all sides of the same.

Chairman Michelson opened the meeting to the public; no one from the public commented and Chairman Michelson closed the meeting to the public. Vice Chairman Quirk made a motion to approve the placement of 2 air conditioner condenser units as shown on the site plan prepared by C. Edward Coughlin with the condition that the units do not exceed 5' x 5' x 5' and the applicant install screening consistent with §17:9-24.E.2 of the city land use ordinance. Mr. Favazzo seconded the motion and it was unanimously approved by voice vote.

With regards to the proposed ground sign with LED display area, Chairman Michelson said since LED signs are not permitted by ordinance, Commission members can give their individual opinions but they are not binding and the Commissioners do not have to agree. Chairman Michelson said he felt that a LED type sign is not suitable in this location, and while he recognizes that only 1 residential use exists in the immediate area, the church is in a residential zone. The city does not have standards for LED signs to go by yet, so in absence of any standards, he is not in favor of the sign.

Vice Chairman Quirk said he knows it is difficult to send a person out each day to change the letters of a sign but LED signs are not appropriate in the area where the church is located. Ms. Gurshman said she is not comfortable doing anything about the proposal at this time. Mr. Sookhu asked if there was any opposition to the ground sign without the LED display area- would the Commission approve without the LED area? Chairman Michelson suggested that the applicant consider the comments of the Commission and carry the ground sign proposal to the July 28, 2015, meeting. The applicant agreed with Chairman Michelson's suggestion. Ms. Gurshman made a motion to bifurcate the application separating the HVAC condenser units from the ground sign with LED display area proposal and carry the sign proposal to the July 28, 2015, meeting; Vice Chairman Quirk seconded the motion and it was approved unanimously by voice vote.

2. Certificate of Appropriateness HPC 2015-12: 825 Hillside Avenue; Block 630, Lot 22

Neither the applicant Leandro Romero of L&A Contractors, LLC nor the owner Mr. Donnell Howard was present. Mr. Bauman informed the Commission that the applicant served notice for the meeting. Ms. Gurshman made a motion to carry the application to July 28, 2015, and Vice Chairman Quirk seconded the motion which was unanimously approved by voice vote. Mr. Bauman will reach out to the applicant.

Discussion

1. Sleepy Hollow Historic Plainfield neighborhood signs proposed by Friends of Sleepy Hollow (FOSH)

Patrik Florencio of 977 Belvidere Avenue and David Cook of 937 Oakwood Place thanked the Commission for their time and introduced themselves as representatives of the non-profit group FOSH- Friends of Sleepy Hollow. Chairman Michelson informed those present that this is an informational hearing- the Commission has been asked if we like the design of the proposed neighborhood signs- that task has been delegated to the Commission.

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Discussion (continued)

Vice Chairman Quirk asked the FOSH representatives why they are here tonight; Mr. Florencio said they were directed by Planning Director William Nierstedt to meet with the Commission. Chairman Michelson reminded those present that this is an informational meeting and that pursuant to §17:4-10 of the city land use ordinance, the Commission may grant a Certificate of Appropriateness at an informational meeting, if the data is sufficiently explicit, for projects which it deems to be very minor, involving exterior repairs or alterations to existing buildings, signs, walls or fences. Chairman Michelson said we are not saying we are going to grant a Certificate of Appropriateness or not yet, but he sees no harm in weighing in on the sign design.

Mr. Cook said FOSH is a 501(c)(3) organization and their goal is to enhance the Sleepy Hollow area and improve the community. FOSH has defined Sleepy Hollow to include houses built mostly from the 1920s and 1930s within a large geographic area. FOSH has chosen 9 locations to place neighborhood signs; FOSH has raised \$10,000 for these signs and they are not bought yet. FOSH members believe the neighborhood signs will make the area identifiable, attract buyers, and enhance property values.

Mr. Florencio added that the bulk of historic homes are on certain streets that are not part of a historic district or neighborhood; the Sleepy Hollow area is the area towards which FOSH decided to dedicate its time and energy. Other enhancement ideas include newly designed street signs and planters at the beginning and end of each block. FOSH is putting together a website that is aimed at attracting buyers. Mr. Cook said FOSH is not looking to change any of the historic districts.

Chairman Michelson said to Messrs. Florencio and Cook that they might want to consider forming a new historic district. Vice Chairman Quirk asked what is the historic basis for Sleepy Hollow, and further commented that Sleepy Hollow is a concept. Vice Chairman Quirk asked if FOSH collected any petitions or letters from people from the area in favor of the signs. Mr. Florencio said they have representatives from each street in the Sleepy Hollow area; when asked if a majority of people in the area were in favor of the signs, Mr. Florencio said they did not have such documentation. Vice Chairman Quirk informed Mr. Florencio that he is now defining the district on a map.

Mr. Favazzo said two signs are located in historic districts- those signs do not identify the historic districts that the signs are in. Chairman Michelson added that Sleepy Hollow was an invention of a land developer in the 1920s- there is an Alton neighborhood still appearing on maps of Scotch Plains, though the name is seldom used now, but there are no similar Sleepy Hollow references on either old or current Plainfield maps. Chairman Michelson asked how could Sleepy Hollow extend west of Woodland Avenue- realtors have expanded it to improve the market. Chairman Michelson added that the Commission has a duty to maintain geographical truth; he further recommended that FOSH create a new historic district or seek to expand historic districts that already exist.

Mr. Cook asked what the Commission thought about the design of the signs. Chairman Michelson said the signs are nicely designed, the posts are nice, the city ordinance details such items as the distance from the post to the pavement, the extension of the sign over the public right-of-way, etc. The signs should be perpendicular to the street, not parallel like shown in the samples provided by FOSH. Mr. Favazzo said the signs are beautiful and great, but he cited concern about two of the signs that are proposed to be located in historic districts- he wants to avoid competing neighborhood signs. Ms. Gurshman said she has a problem with messing with history- the Sleepy Hollow area is supposed to have winding roads, no sidewalks, hilly

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Discussion (continued)

and bucolic- west of Woodland Avenue the streets are grid-system and different from the properties east of Woodland Avenue. Mr. Cook said it's a balance of history and moving forward- the United States started out as only 13 states and then it grew. Vice Chairman Quirk said it's history versus marketing; he continued by saying that he is all in favor of community building and keeping neighborhoods in good shape, but he is having difficulty with moving Sleepy Hollow west of Woodland Avenue and having Sleepy Hollow in two historic districts.

Mr. Florencio said it's about identity- trying to create a label. Mr. Thomas suggested that they create their own historic district and if they did that they would come back to the Commission with a different understanding. Chairman Michelson said if it's historic Plainfield that FOSH wants to publicize they can ask the city to place Historic Plainfield signs all over the city; the impression he is getting is that Sleepy Hollow does not want to be like the rest of Plainfield and that idea may backfire. A discussion ensued about moving signs #5 and #6 outside of the historic districts.

Chairman Michelson opened the meeting to the public. Charles Lawrence of 1215 Watchung Avenue said he lives in the Putnam Watchung Historic District but is in the area where FOSH wants to install Sleepy Hollow signs. Mr. Lawrence said he is disturbed by the proposal- it pits areas of the city against each other. Mr. Lawrence noted that at least FOSH admits that they are doing this for marketing reasons and that they denigrated the Plainfield School System 6 times in their addendum to their application to the Historic Preservation Commission. Mr. Lawrence said he was not asked by anyone from FOSH if he was in favor of this proposal and he feels like they want to make a little Colonial Williamsburg.

Nancy Piwowar of 1129 Myrtle Avenue said she is a lifelong resident and she lives in the oldest part of the city, she also serves as the President of the Plainfield Historical Society. Ms. Piwowar continued by saying she is upset that FOSH called the current Drake House location isolated and poorly located in a commercial area of Plainfield and that one of FOSH's mission-driven activities is to move the Drake House to a historic neighborhood. Ms. Piwowar said General George Washington picked the Drake House to stay specifically because it was in an isolated area. Ms. Piwowar continued by citing different towns, states, and countries where visitors to the Drake House are coming from.

Ron Scott Bey of 1070 Rose Street said if the Commission is going to vote on this matter, they should put in the resolution the size of the sign, all of the details that would normally go into a case, and that they are only making a decision on the signs in historic districts.

Stina Nanavati of 1155 Evergreen Avenue introduced herself as part of the FOSH board who recently moved to Plainfield from Rochester, New York. She loves Plainfield and is happy to be here- she is not doing this for the money, but instead for neighborhood pride- a neighborhood that is proud of its existence- It's not about us as individuals feeling good. Finding common causes and bringing pride to our neighborhood is why she is involved.

John DeMarco of 940 Glenwood Avenue cited recent sales prices of properties in the Sleepy Hollow area and concluded that the area really doesn't need the name Sleepy Hollow. Mr. DeMarco provided the Commission with multiple copies of a handout for "Quaint Sleepy Hollow- New Jersey's Picturesque Residential Community"- a sales map created by a realtor in the 1920s.

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Discussion (continued)

Tony Mitchell of 1419 Evergreen Avenue said he agreed with what Ms. Nanavati said- he used to live in Westfield until he moved to Plainfield about 5 years ago. Mr. Mitchell said that FOSH does not want to provoke animosity and that he does not agree with moving the Drake House.

Dottie Gutenkauf of 414 Randolph Road said the “Sleepy Hollow Historic Plainfield” signs are fine for Sleepy Hollow- not the rest of Plainfield. The signs are pretty but they do not belong in the Van Wyck Brooks, Netherwood Heights, or Putnam Watchung historic districts. FOSH is not a historic organization- anyone can be a friend of Sleepy Hollow, but that doesn’t mean they are geographically part of Sleepy Hollow. It’s sinful to put Sleepy Hollow signs in other parts of Plainfield. Ms. Gutenkauf said she has no objection to having “Historic Plainfield” signs put up around the city- there are plenty of places that are historic Plainfield. FOSH is trying to shape a community around an image that doesn’t exist- it does a disservice to all of us- they are talking about marketing, not the quality of life of all of us who live here.

Chairman Michelson closed the public portion of the meeting and asked Commission members for their comments. Ms. Gurshman said she felt they cannot do anything at this time. Vice Chairman Quirk said the signs proposed in the historic districts should require a Certificate of Appropriateness with notice.

Mr. Cook concluded by thanking the Commission for their time; he said FOSH got a lot of helpful comments and they learned a lot. Chairman Michelson told Mr. Cook that he gives the group a great deal of credit and that they are welcome back to the Commission anytime.

2. Request to renew membership to the National Alliance of Preservation Commissions

Vice Chairman Quirk made a motion to renew the Commission’s membership with the National Alliance of Preservation Commissions at a cost of \$100.00. Ms. Gurshman seconded the motion and it was unanimously approved by voice vote.

3. Dendrochronological Study of the Lampkin House, report submitted May 10, 2015

Mr. Bauman reported that the study was included in the meeting packet- the study was inconclusive and dendrochronological testing could not age the trees used in the Lampkin House. Mr. Barton added that the test is for white oak and when there are more rings present the better the chance to determine the date of the tree.

**4. Status of Abbott Manor, 810 Central Avenue; Block 760, Lot 6; Van Wyck Brooks Historic District
Status of 117-125 North Avenue; Block 315, Lot 2; North Avenue Historic District**

Chairman Michelson shared with the Commission his June 16, 2015, memorandum to city officials requesting a meeting to discuss buildings in the historic districts.

4. New Historic Districts or the Possible Expansion of Existing Historic Districts

Chairman Michelson reported that he is going to research the St. Mary’s historic district reports that were prepared in the 1980s by then HPC consultant Gail Hunton; Chairman Michelson will report his findings to the HPC.

5. Revisions to the By-Laws of the Historic Preservation Commission

Chairman Michelson reported that Mr. Bauman retrieved by-laws from the 1980s and after review he feels that they are not usable under the current ordinance. This item should remain on the meeting agenda.

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Reports

1. Community Outreach / Historic Preservation Awareness Committee

Historic Preservation Award Program: no report.

Social Media: The discussion of having a Facebook page is being carried to the July 28 meeting. Mr. Schneider did perform some research on the topic but was not present to discuss his findings.

Spanish Translation of Design Guidelines: Mr. Bauman reported that he is waiting for the translated document to be added to the city's website and for a Spanish translation of a press release he prepared. Upon the completion of both of these tasks, the translated design guidelines will be released.

2. Ordinance Revision Committee

Chairman Michelson and Vice Chairman Quirk agreed to meet to review the ordinance in preparation for working with the Planning Board to update the Land Use Ordinance.

3. Architectural Review Committee

Ms. Gurshman reported on the activities of the Architectural Review Committee for May and June.

Adjournment

There being no further business, Ms. Gurshman made a motion for adjournment, seconded by Vice Chairman Quirk; all voted in favor, none opposed. The meeting adjourned at 10:22 PM

Respectfully submitted,

Scott Bauman

Scott Bauman, AICP, PP

Principal Planner / HPC Secretary, Plainfield Planning Division

Prepared: June 25, 2015

Approved by the Historic Preservation Commission: July 28, 2015