

HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION

Minutes of the meeting held on June 28, 2007 at the Department of Land Use and Growth Management

Present: Hal Willard, Chairman
Bill Farrar, Member
Rob Gibbs, Member
Ruth Mitchell, Member
Karen Everett, Public Information Officer
Jason Babcock, Enterprise Newspaper
Guy Leonard, County Times Newspaper

Call to Order: The meeting was called to order at 4:00 p.m.

Approval of Minutes: The minutes of the May 24, 2007 meeting were approved as corrected. Mr. Gibbs asked if a copy of the in-progress St. Mary's County Cemetery Survey had been sent to the Anne Arundel Genealogical Society as was suggested at the May 24th HPC meeting. Ms. Wilson replied that she sent an electronic copy to them.

Dameron House, Carver Heights, Wesley Chapel: Underlying Issues

Ms. Wilson provided the HPC with updates on these properties. She discussed the memo she sent to the Board of County Commissioners about the Dameron House. The memo was a summary of the process that resulted in approval of the development on St. Jerome's Neck Road, of which the Dameron House is a part.

As per Ms. Wilson's Technical Evaluation comment, the landowner agreed to place the Dameron House on a three acre parcel and to market the house with a real estate agent who specializes in historic property sales. He fulfilled the first requirement; and is using a local real estate agent, who is not a specialist in historic properties. At the November 14, 2004 Planning Commission meeting the owner's agent said the historic house would not be demolished, but the owner also commented that he could not guarantee that it would not be demolished.

Ms. Wilson also requested that architectural historians from the Maryland Historical Trust examine the building and document it, which they did on two occasions in 2005. They wish to return this year to look at Dameron House again. Mr. Gibbs and Mr. Willard requested that the HPC be informed when the MHT architects come, because they want to accompany them. Ms. Wilson said she would let them know.

Ms. Mitchell asked if a formal letter was sent to the owner requesting the ninety day delay. Ms. Wilson replied that she had not sent a formal request, but called the owner several times to obtain permission for the MHT architectural historians to visit the site.

Mr. Gibbs asked if anyone has purchased the property and plans to demolish the building. Ms. Wilson stated that the house and three acre lot remain for sale for \$200,000. He asked if the ninety day delay kicks in automatically when a demolition permit is requested.

Ms. Wilson said that the ninety day delay does not occur automatically. She explained that resources listed on the Maryland Inventory are noted in the county's HTE system. She is informed when any plans are submitted for a land parcel containing a historic resource; she also checks the Technical Evaluation Committee Agenda each month to determine if any historic properties could be potentially affected by proposed plans. If the plans call for demolition, she makes an immediate site visit to photograph and document the resource. If the resource is to be retained, she makes suggestions in her comments to the TEC Committee for the best methods retain the integrity of the resource. These suggestions are passed on to the owner of the property. In the event of an immanent demolition of a historic resource with a high degree of integrity, the HPC would be informed and could make a written request for the ninety day delay.

Ms. Wilson noted that she is informed when a structure older than fifty years not on the Maryland Inventory is slated for demolition, and photographs and documents those as well.

Carver Heights

In 1943-4 the Carver Heights neighborhood was constructed by the Department of the Navy to house African-Americans who worked at the Patuxent Naval Air Test Center. (Lexington Manor, located to the north was reserved for whites only). The Carver Heights Building, which served as a community center and headquarters for the NCO club, is the only building still standing. The housing was demolished in the 1970s and replaced by the Southampton community.

The Carver Heights Building was purchased by the county in 1963 from the Department of the Navy. For many years the County Health Department had offices there. A Head Start Program was also located in the building, and at various times several non-profit groups were headquartered there.

By 2002 the building was vacant, and the county was planning to demolish it. Ms. Wilson made photographs of the interior and exterior in the same year. Mrs. Virginia Nolan, who grew up in the Carver Heights neighborhood, approached the County Commissioners requesting that they not demolish the building. The building is significant for the African American community's history during the World War II period when segregation was in force. It also is significant in the history of the development of naval operations in St. Mary's County in WWII. With the assistance of Senator Roy Dyson, Mrs. Nolan and her non-profit, Save the Village Inc. were able to obtain a state bond for \$250,000 contingent on the ability to raise a matching amount.

In 2007 the county again announced plans to demolish the building, but Mrs. Nolan and Save the Village are in talks with the Board of County Commissioners about alternatives to demolition. The condition of the building has worsened since county offices were removed.

Wesley Chapel

The building known as Wesley Chapel (SM-530 on the Maryland Inventory) on Washington Street in Leonardtown came to the attention of the HPC when the owners, Mr. and Mrs. Aiken contacted Ms. Wilson and Mr. Willard about their concerns. Two narrow lots on either side have been purchased by a developer who plans to construct two office buildings. Plans have not yet been submitted, but discussion of the appearance of the future buildings indicates that they will be taller than the Wesley Chapel. Also the setbacks of these buildings will be closer to the sidewalk than the Chapel, which is set back.

Mr. Aiken made a computer generated photo with the proposed buildings inserted, which he shared with Mr. Willard. Mr. Willard stated that if constructed in the manner shown, the buildings will engulf the older structure, especially if the setbacks for them are close to the sidewalk.

Ms. Wilson informed the HPC about the Wesley Chapel owners' concern for the building, and they directed her to prepare a letter to the Leonardtown Commissioners and Planning Commission expressing concern about the proposal. Included with the letter were copies of the Historic Preservation Design Guidelines for St. Mary's County. There has been no response from the town as yet.

Ms. Mitchell asked when the Wesley Chapel was constructed. Ms. Wilson replied that it was constructed in the mid-nineteenth century, and though some features of the exterior have been altered, the building retains most of its original exterior appearance.

The HPC also discussed the Sterling House which is located next to Wesley Chapel. The same developer has purchased it and is converting it for use as a restaurant. The siding on the building at the time of purchase was aluminum. Mr. Willard noted that it can be difficult to find original materials, giving the example of 1940s homes in Patuxent Park constructed with a

cement/asbestos siding. He repaired his house in the development by scavenging the siding from a neighbor who was replacing his. Ms. Wilson noted that in some counties there are sites at which materials removed from older buildings are stored and given or sold to restorers.

The discussion moved on to speculate if buildings constructed in the past fifty years will acquire the same level of historic significance as buildings constructed earlier. Mr. Farrar noted that vinyl siding will not last fifty years. He mentioned an Italianate house in Chicago that the owner described as "lovingly restored with vinyl siding."

Ms. Mitchell remarked that not all buildings from earlier periods are deemed historically significant, and in the case of buildings under fifty years old the same criteria would apply.

Ms. Wilson noted that if the Sterling House had been listed as a local historic landmark, the exterior appearance would have to have conformed to the county design guidelines.

Mr. Farrar informed the HPC that he and Amy Carter of the county Public Information Office have been working on the public service video that will promote the local historic landmarks and district designation process. He and Ms. Carter visited and interviewed Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Dick of St. Michael's Manor, which is a local historic landmark. A portion that explains the process of designation will be filmed in the coming weeks. The HPC hopes that providing the information through a video will interest more homeowners in the program and result in the protection of more historic resources.

Historic Roads Survey Phase II

The Maryland Historical Trust informed St. Mary's County that it has received a grant to continue its survey of historic roads. Ms. Wilson will meet with the staff of the Trust in mid-July to discuss details of the grant. Work is underway in the Department of Land Use and Growth Management to craft a text amendment protecting historic roads that will be sent to the County Commissioners for a first reading by the end of the year.

Religious Freedom Scenic Byway Advisory Committee

Ms. Wilson informed the HPC that the first meeting of the Byway Advisory Committee was held June 26th in Hughesville. The portion of the Byway located in St. Mary's includes Route 234 (Budds Creek Road) and Route 5 (Point Lookout Road) from Leonardtown to Point Lookout. The committee began by listing the qualities of the roads that have special cultural, historical, environmental, architectural or archaeological significance. It also noted areas that could be improved and stories that are currently not included in the Byway guide in its current form. The public meeting introducing the Byway planning process to the public at large will be held on July 31 at the Charlotte Hall Library from 6 to 8 p.m.

HPC Vacancy and Reappointment

Ms. Wilson noted that the County Commissioners have reappointed Mr. Gibbs for a second term and will be appointing a new person to serve the remainder of Mr. Johnson's term.

Items from the Floor

Mr. Gibbs asked what the status of the cemetery on the Laurel Grove South development was. Ms. Wilson said that she had sent a letter to the developer requesting permission to return to the property to take GPS coordinates with county equipment. When permission is granted she and the GIS specialist will visit the property. She also noted that in her comments to the Technical Evaluation Committee she suggested that permanently fencing the cemetery should be made a condition of final approval of the plans. Ms. Mitchell asked if she could be informed of when the site visit will be so she can attend and possibly determine if other graves are present that are unmarked.

Mr. Gibbs noted that the McIntosh development is going forward on the property that was the site of a firm that made blasting caps here during the Korean War.

Mr. Willard said that he was on the Planning Commission at the time the first proposal came through, but it was rejected then because of concerns about danger from possibly explosive material left at the site. Tests were conducted then on these materials which did not ignite, but doubts remained and the proposal was not approved then. Apparently, the county is now confident that constructing homes on the site will not pose any danger.

Ms. Wilson introduced Ms. Karen Everett, Public Information Officer, Jason Babcock of the Enterprise and Guy Leonard of the County Times at the start of the meeting and apologized for not doing so at the start of the meeting.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 5:30 p.m.

Submitted by: _____ Signed by: _____