

LAYTONSVILLE HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION
Meeting Minutes
August 21, 2017

Roll Call: Chair Lisa Simonetti called to order a meeting of the Laytonsville Historic District Commission at 7:25 p.m. Commission member Jill Ruspi and Alternate Susan Phillips were present. Commission members Andrew Drouliskos, Charles Hendricks and Michele Shortley were absent.

Public Attendance: Kimberly Hobbs, Mayor Jim Ruspi, and Marcos Ulloa (representing Moises Figueroa) were also present.

Minutes: Chair Simonetti presented the draft minutes of the meeting of July 17, 2017, that had been prepared by Member Hendricks. The minutes were approved as presented.

Public Hearings:

Work Permit Application HDWP-05-17, 21532 Laytonsville Road (Figueroa residence): Applicant Moises Figueroa of 21532 Laytonsville Road requested addition of fence, replacement of windows, and permission to keep and park one work truck, two pickup trucks, and one trailer on the property. The request to park commercial vehicles on the property, which was included in HDWP-05-17, had already been addressed at a meeting of the Board of Appeals and was not within the purview of the Historic District Commission. Current discussion pertained to replacement of fence on right side and back of property and replacement of broken windows. Application was not complete and lacked copy of plat. Photos were presented showing the placement of fence posts that were installed before owners knew of application requirements. Mr. Ulloa, the applicant's son and representative, stated that all posts have been removed and the property is back to original condition. He stated that if new fence is approved, it will cover same location on property as posts shown in photos. Fence material is to be wood and nail.

Applicant's representative was not sure of the number of windows to be replaced, but he said it would consist of all windows on the front of the property and several on the side. He estimated 10 windows.

Discussion returned to fence. Photos were shown depicting potential layout of fence. Chair Simonetti reiterated that fence will be constructed of wood, finished side should present to street, that the fence will have vertical pickets, and that posted rail and split rail are not permitted and the maximum height to be 3' (on front side of property). No chain link fences may be visible to the public.

Applicant's representative stated that there will be no fencing in the front of the property or on the left side. The family originally requested a 6' fence to cover rear of property becoming an L shape on side. Chair Simonetti stated that it would be impossible to approve request without seeing a plat that would show property lines. It was agreed by all parties that once the plat had been produced and reviewed, a final decision would be made.

Further discussion took place regarding approval of the new windows proposed for property. The motion to approve the portion of HDWP-05-17 relating to window replacement was made by Chair Simonetti. Motion was seconded by Alternate Phillips and approved unanimously.

Work Permit Application HDWP-04-17, 21607 Laytonsville Road (Town Hall):

Mayor Ruspi had presented preliminary information regarding the lighting at a prior meeting and now produced diagrams and pictures of the proposed new light poles as well as the old fixture, which had become inadequate. Initial plan was modified from using fiberglass poles as originally proposed to using metal poles. The new poles would be a bit more expensive but would be made of aluminum in the same 3-inch diameter size as before, would be painted black and 10 feet in height. Poles would be placed two feet into the ground, so that actual above-ground height would be 8 feet. The bottoms of the poles would be fluted.

Mayor Ruspi presented an actual old light fixture from Mobley Farm Drive that had been replaced because it did not produce enough light. The old light was a 12-watt light. The new fixtures are rated by lumens, but the new lights on Mobley Farm Drive are currently 52 watts.

The proposal is to install 6 new lights starting at the entrance to the Town Hall parking lot and extending along the side of the parking lot adjacent to the Town Hall. They are to be spaced approximately 20 feet apart. The sixth light is to be installed next to the fire pit. The lights will have sensors and will be LED. All wires will be underground.

The new fixtures will have the ability to have one or more glass lenses replaced by opaque lenses to keep the light from shining into someone else's windows or onto their property. One fixture will be kept as a spare.

Questions from Kimberly Hobbs and responses from Mayor Ruspi:

“Will that amount of lights be adequate?”

-Yes, original request was for 7 lights but it was determined that 6 were quite enough.

“When will the lights be in operation, what time of night?”

-Sensor will bring the lights on at darkness and off in the morning light. Because they are LEDs they will be inexpensive to operate compared to other lighting options. Lights will be approximately 40 watts.

“Will the new lights and poles be painted?”

-Yes, they will be painted black,

“Will the light fixtures have all plastic lenses in place?”

-Yes, unless an opaque lens is used to block the light from shining in one particular direction.

“How long will the lights and fixtures last?”

-The manufacturer estimates 20 years.

Motion by Chair Simonetti at 7:50 to approve HDWP-04-17 for the new Town Hall parking lot lighting. Motion seconded by Jill Ruspi. Approved unanimously.

New Business

Concern voiced by Kimberly Hobbs of 21604 Second Street that meeting notice signs are hard to read. Commission agreed to try to make them darker so that they are more legible.

Concern voiced by Kimberly Hobbs about the status of the property at 21411 Laytonsville Road, next to the elementary school, that, she said, is in total disrepair and has been for quite some time. Member Ruspi stated that the owner is a restoration expert who is repairing and restoring home from the inside first. He is in good standing with the community. It would be a legal issue to apply for a "cease and desist" order to compel the owner to make changes in a specific timeframe. The only other legal option would be to file for "demolition by neglect," which would be a court matter. She stated that the commission does not otherwise have any legal authority to force an owner to do something to their property.

Ms. Hobbs also asked about the house at 21601 Laytonsville Road next to the funeral home that is showing excessive signs of wear. The commission stated that the owner's original replacement request was for the house to be covered in white Hardy Plank rather than wood, which would be cost prohibitive and not as durable. The commission denied her request to use this material because of the historic nature of the property.

Ms. Hobbs mentioned that some other owners had spoken to her about their impression that the commission seemed to show favoritism to the owner of the home next to the school. It was mentioned that in the past few years, no one remembers the owner coming before the commission with any application. She voiced concern that if an owner does not make an application to the commission, nothing can or will be done about issues like the condition of this home and that the only way to have any action would be for the owner to make a request. Then the commission would take a look at the property. She again stated that her comments were based upon discussions with other homeowners and what their perceptions were.

Member Ruspi mentioned that repairs and painting could have been done on a more timely basis to keep the costs of repair down. Ms. Hobbs voiced concern that the owner who is trying to make repairs and improvements was receiving "a hard time" while the owner whose home was a complete eyesore was allowed to do nothing to remedy it.

Member Ruspi reiterated the commission's position that it is up to the owner to explore all available avenues to help defray the costs by looking into tax credits, grants or other financial options. She also stated that no discussion can take place or decision be made without an application from the owner.

There was discussion that some properties were modified before there was a Historic District Commission and that owners were not obliged to make applications for adjustments or repairs before then. Some alterations were thus "grandfathered."

Mayor Ruspi addressed the concerns about the house next to the school. He stated that he is also concerned about the property and said he would like to look into the possibility of finding a solution to help people who want to make improvements but are finding it cost-prohibitive.

Laytonsville Historic District Commission Minutes, August 21, 2017

Call for any other new business at 8:15 p.m.

Adjournment: The meeting adjourned at 8:20 p.m.

Respectively submitted,
Andi Tozzoli