

LAYTONSVILLE HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION
Meeting Minutes
Monday, January 15, 2018

Present:

Andy Drouliskos
Charles Hendricks
Jill Ruspi
Michele Shortley
Susan Phillips, Alternate

Absent:

Lisa Simonetti, Chair

Attendees:

Jim Ruspi, Mayor
Jennifer Sizemore, Secretary
Deborah Howard, Ann Fitts, and Bill Fitts, St. Bartholomew's Church

Opening:

Member Ruspi called the meeting to order at 7:03 p.m. and read the mission statement. She noted that a quorum was present.

Minutes:

Approval of the November 2017 meeting minutes was suspended to allow more time for review.

New Business:

HDWP 01-18: Memorial Garden with Labyrinth on Parcel P662 (6920 Sundown Road): Ms. Fitts provided the Historic District Commission (HDC) members with a packet of information about the proposed garden. The area to be used is northeast of the church on the far side of the church's maintenance shed, behind and to the left of the church. The area is currently an empty field. Ms. Fitts said a volunteer committee came together about 6 months ago to discuss ideas for a sacred place for prayer and meditation and to honor loved ones, a tranquil garden. The church owns three acres adjoining the corner of Sundown Road and 1st Street that they want to put to good use. The committee considered many aspects, such as location, design, and components. Church members were given a briefing about the idea just before Christmas, and people are already pledging.

The committee members talked to many different churches and looked at existing labyrinths and gardens. Along with a landscape architect, the committee developed a tentative design. The biggest part of the discussion was location. The area behind 6920 Sundown Road, which is now being used as a church boutique, was determined to be close enough to the church to be visible but far enough back that traffic and other noise wouldn't be disruptive. Labyrinths are becoming very popular, particularly at hospitals, colleges, and urban areas. The committee is working with [the Labyrinth Company](#) on a design and has selected the "Vision Quest" kit. It's a 30' diameter

labyrinth, which will fit nicely into the space at a reasonable cost. The labyrinth will be a dark path, not a maze, and will be within the middle of the garden.

The committee envisions a country garden surrounding the labyrinth focused mainly on trees—something that isn't fancy or needs a lot of maintenance. A main feature will be a Tree of Life mounted on a Memorial wall and comprised of 200 bronze acrylic leaves that can be engraved to memorialize loved ones or special events, such as weddings, graduations, etc. The leaves will be mounted on a clear Corian base. From distance, it looks like artwork and will allow many people to dedicate memorials with a minimal donation. Trees in the garden will include Armstrong Maples (fall fiery red), Evergreens (year-round beauty), and Charry Grove (Easter colors). The garden will also include benches for quiet reflection. Memorial plates will be available for the 22 trees and 5 benches. In addition, the Tree of Life can be expanded to 400 leaves. The church's Ladies Guild is donating the Tree of Life. There will be no memorial stones on the Memorial wall. It will be comprised of stone with a background of granite or stucco. The group hopes to use stones from the foundation of a demolished 1812 parish church on Sundown Road. There will be a donor-level memorial at the garden entrance to thank those who have made large donations. There will be a paver walkway from the entrance to the labyrinth and gravel tree walkway. The Tree of Life will be lighted so it's visible at night and candles would be used for lighting during evening events.

Member Hendricks asked about the placement of the Tree of Life in relation to the labyrinth, and Ms. Fitts clarified that it would be further away than depicted in the labyrinth image. Member Ruspi asked about lighting, and Ms. Fitts said only the Tree of Life would have constant lighting, but other lights could be turned on when needed and candles would be used for special events. Member Shortley asked about visibility from Sundown Road or Route 108. Ms. Fitts said there should be some visibility from Sundown, though it would be lower in the spring and summer due to the cherry trees, and Mr. Fitts added that the boutique and gas station would likely block much of the view. The aim is to give those walking the labyrinth or visiting the garden to have a sense of privacy. Member Drouliskos asked whether pavers were the only option for the labyrinth, and Ms. Fitts said it was the most practical. Grass would be high maintenance and brick or stone is not an option. The pavers will have fill between the blocks to make it look solid. Ms. Fitts said several local churches have used the kits and speak highly of them, including a Methodist church in Rockville and the Episcopal Church of the Redeemer in the Glen Echo area of Bethesda. Alternate Phillips thought the idea would be a great addition to the community given that there are not a lot of places for people to gather. Mr. Fitts said events could be held for a minimal fee, and Ms. Fitts suggested it may be a good location for a wedding.

Member Hendricks asked about a columbarium, and Ms. Fitts said it wasn't part of the current consideration. Member Drouliskos asked about the maturity of the trees. Ms. Fitts said the church planned to buy maple trees which would be 10 to 14" in diameter, weigh 600 pounds, and be 12' tall. Member Shortley asked if it would be enough screening to block the gas station, and Mr. Fitts replied that it is already hard to see from that lot. Member Hendricks asked about the size of the evergreens, and Ms. Fitts said they would be shorter because they grow wider. They may also want to plant additional trees in the future. There was additional discussion about the exact location, existing trees, and lighting options.

Member Ruspi said there were some items needed to complete the application: original photos of the area with views from public areas; samples (a copy of the ad from the paver company would suffice); and the display of a sign advertising a public hearing. Member Ruspi suggested postponing a final decision until February to give Chair Simonetti a chance to weigh in and for the church representatives to complete the application. She suggested they contact the town clerk about the public hearing sign. Member Hendricks said the lighting issue is a significant concern and suggested that a more detailed plan would be helpful to the HDC. Member Hendricks moved to continue the hearing on the application until February. Member Shortley seconded, and all approved.

Old Business:

21728 Rolling Ridge Lane (historic Rolling Ridge house, Lot 14, Rolling Ridge subdivision): Member Hendricks distributed copies of the resolution of the Town Council from 2005 (Resolution 5-05) designating the house and surrounding property as a historic resource. While not in the historic district in terms of zoning, it is a historic property thanks to the resolution. It also includes the driveway from the cul-de-sac to the house. So, any exterior changes need to be applied for and approved by the HDC. Member Shortley suggested sending the owner a letter reminding him about the requirements with a link to the website, copy of the guidelines, and other relevant information. Mayor Ruspi said he would like to see the HDC find ways to help Mr. Davila and other homeowners get assistance from grants and other programs. The HDC had previously discussed having an event for all homeowners with contractors that have experience with historic homes. Member Shortley suggested having a guest speaker talk about the process for getting financial assistance, perhaps Elizabeth Tutton with the Maryland Historical Trust. Alternate Phillips said the Maryland-National Capital Parks and Planning Commission has a Montgomery/Prince George's County division overseeing historical issues. Member Ruspi said Gaithersburg and Rockville also have their own organizations. The HDC further discussed the requirements for getting county tax credit for improvements, including the need to get HDC approval prior to conducting work.

Member Ruspi moved to adjourn the meeting 8:45 pm. The motion was unanimously approved.

Respectfully submitted,

Jennifer Sizemore