

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

Present:

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

Attendees:

Jennifer Sizemore, Secretary
Jim Ruspi, Mayor
Matt Benning, Consultant
Ann Fitts and Bill Fitts, St. Bartholomew's Church

Opening:

Chair Simonetti called the meeting to order at 7:05 p.m. She noted that a quorum was present and read the mission statement. Mayor Ruspi swore in member Drouliskos.

Minutes:

Member Hendricks made a motion to approve the September meeting minutes as amended, Member Ruspi seconded, all approved.

Old Business:

HDWP 01-18: Memorial Garden with Labyrinth on Parcel P662 (6920 Sundown Road): Ms. Fitts stated that the approved application from February stipulated additional approval was needed for more benches and specifics of the lighting design. An additional bench will be added in front of the four blue spruces, closest to the driveway; more benches are not anticipated. The church received lighting quotes from three companies and decided on Dominion Electric. There will be six bronze path lights, starting at the entrance behind the garage, placed every 20 feet. They will be 9 inches tall and will be similar to the lighting in the parking lot. There will also be four lights around the labyrinth, pitched down toward the ground so they don't reflect outside the labyrinth. Two additional lights will shine on the Tree of Life. These fixtures were selected because they are dimmable. They will be close to the ground, so they don't obscure the landscape design, and will ensure safety for those in the garden after dark. The lights will be on all night, similar to the parking lot lights, but can be turned off if needed. Mr. and Mrs. Fitts confirmed the lights would not disturb any neighbors and leaving them on is a safety measure. Member Hendricks thanked the representatives of St. Bartholomew's for submitting updated plans and moved to approve the benches and lighting, Member Ruspi seconded, all approved.

New Business:

Zoning Change for 7000 Brink Road: Mayor Ruspi said the resident at 7000 Brink Road, Christine Wilkinson, would like to change the zoning for the residence from historic residential to historic commercial. The mayor is inviting each commission and board in the town of Laytonsville to submit a recommendation they want the Town Council to consider, though he noted the council doesn't have to follow the recommendations. Chair Simonetti thought the Historic District Commission (HDC) wouldn't have standing in the decision because they are not altering the property, but Mayor Ruspi clarified that he was asking for input out of courtesy. If the HDC wants to submit something, it would need to be received before November 13. Any statement should be from the HDC as a whole, not from individuals, and needs to be in writing. The HDC could submit a statement saying they have no opinion if they wish. The mayor was hopeful that a final decision can be made at the November 13 council meeting. Member Shortley departed early in this discussion.

Mayor Ruspi stated that the mayor and town council have the authority to make a decision without input from the county or town commissions or boards. There is a significant burden on the person requesting reclassification to prove it's a justifiable request; substantial legal requirements must be met. There is a work session on Tuesday, October 23, that's open to the public, though oral testimony cannot be given unless requested by the council. The town attorney will be present to provide guidance. Chair Simonetti noted that the decision would set a precedent, though Mayor Ruspi reiterated that the legal requirements are substantial. Several HDC members mentioned concerns about property values if the rezoning were approved. The HDC members and the mayor discussed the approval process in more detail, including appealing decisions not in the applicant's favor. They also discussed the responsibility of real estate agents to notify purchasers about the requirements for maintaining property in the historic district.

Member Hendricks suggested the HDC consider what recommendation they wished to make to the council. Member Ruspi read from the Comprehensive Plan, pages 15 and 16, related to "establishing a main street concept with emphasis on preserving the rural character." The HDC members discussed the types of businesses that could be included if the property is rezoned compared with commercial enterprises that are allowed under special exception for residential properties. Member Hendricks thought that, based on the public hearing, there was a lot of interest from residents in the historic district to have more opportunities for commercial interest for their property. The HDC members further discussed owner-occupied commercial properties and existing commercial properties that are zoned residential but whose commercial uses were grandfathered in. Mr. Benning suggested the HDC members consider the consequences of rezoning in terms of the historic character of the town. Member Drouliskos thought the location of the property could cause traffic issues and questioned whether there was sufficient parking. He didn't think the rezoning would cause aesthetic issues, but Alternate Phillips suggested the sudden addition of a lot of traffic could impact the historic character. The HDC members discussed the possible motivation for switching the property from residential to commercial.

Member Ruspi said the HDC is essential to the Comprehensive Plan goal to preserve and protect historic resources, and the property in question is the most historically significant building in town. The HDC members discussed whether the building could be moved and requirements for

parking based on the size of the structure. Mayor Ruspi said the most important consideration is whether the area around the house has changed enough that it doesn't make sense to keep it residential. Alternate Phillips said there seems to have been a large increase in the number of cars parked for businesses along Laytonville Road. Member Hendricks asked how the HDC members feel about whether the changes to the area are significant enough to change the zoning. Member Ruspi said the current owner feels the gas station is a big factor related to traffic and residual light. The HDC members discussed how the rezoning would affect the historic character of the town and the commitment a homeowner may have to maintaining the property compared with a business owner. Member Ruspi made a motion that "in order to retain the historic district integrity, with recognition that the Layton House is the most historic property within Laytonville's historic district, the HDC recommends that zoning for the property remain Historic Residential, recognizing that a residential property may have a special exception for specified commercial uses." Member Hendricks seconded and all present approved.

Member Ruspi moved to adjourn the meeting at 8:40 p.m., Member Hendricks seconded, all approved.

Respectfully submitted,

Jennifer Sizemore