**LAYTONSVILLE HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION**

**Meeting Minutes**

**Monday, October 21, 2019**

**Present:**

Charles Hendricks, Chair

Susan Phillips

Jill Ruspi

**Absent:**

Andy Drouliskos

Lisa Simonetti

Michele Shortley, Alternate

**Attendees:**

Jennifer Sizemore, Secretary

Jim Ruspi, Mayor

Neal Bataller

Tyler Smith

**Opening:**

Chair Hendricks called the meeting to order at 7:08 p.m. He noted that a quorum was present.

**Minutes:**

Member Ruspi made a motion to approve the September 2019 meeting minutes as amended, Member Phillips seconded, all approved.

**Old Business:**

New light fixtures for the Town Hall driveway and parking lot: The Historic District Commission (HDC) members discussed the various street lights around town, including the fixture sizes and pole heights. They further discussed the new fixture in the town parking lot and viewed pictures of the fixtures in Mobley Farms. Member Phillips asked whether brighter lights would be disruptive to neighboring residents, and Chair Hendricks said he talked with Judith Schneider and she didn’t think it would be a problem. Mayor Ruspi mentioned that the lights are on all night. Member Ruspi suggested the timing could be adjusted if residents complained, but thought it important to not have large, dark areas in town. Member Ruspi moved to recommend the town replace the existing lights with the type of fixture in Mobley Farms using 22 watt, 1274 lumen bulbs that generate no more than 4,000 degrees of heat. Member Phillips seconded, and all approved.

7329 Brink Road (Rigoberto and Celina Fuentes): Chair Hendricks shared the additions to the Fuentes’ application and asked the HDC members to consider whether more details are needed before scheduling the hearing for November. The HDC members discussed the property boundaries in relation to the areas zoned agricultural and the agricultural reserve. No additional information is needed; the public hearing will be scheduled for November, and Mayor Ruspi will talk to the chair of the planning commission regarding the HDC’s questions about the agricultural zone and reserve.

HDC Guidelines: Chair Hendricks introduced Tyler Smith, who works as a senior planner for the Maryland–National Capital Park and Planning Commission in Prince George’s County. The HDC is interested in updating its guidelines. On October 5, 2004, general design guidelines for the HDC and rehabilitation of structures were adopted, along with a second set of guidelines specific to residential properties. Chair Hendricks mentioned that the HDC can only make recommendations—all changes must be approved by the mayor and town council. Member Ruspi provided some historical detail. The original HDC wasn’t effective. There was a short period of time when nobody was monitoring changes, and people installed siding and windows that aren’t historic. The HDC was reconstituted with a strong leader and has been active ever since, including setting up the current guidelines using documents from other towns as templates. Member Phillips mentioned the University of Maryland study, and Member Ruspi said a professor had used Laytonsville for one of his classes after the guidelines were established. The professor sent the findings to the Maryland Historical Trust.

Member Hendricks said the HDC members had worked on updating the guidelines but found it slow going and difficult. There hasn’t been much work done in the last 4 years, but questions often come up during meetings, e.g., whether applications are needed for in-kind replacements and what qualifies as in-kind. The HDC would also like the guidelines to be more clear and understandable to the public. Mr. Smith thought the residential document had strengths and weaknesses—there’s good specificity in some areas but things that aren’t addressed can cause confusion. Prince George’s County has criteria to evaluate permit applications. Most are handled by staff with just the tricky ones going to the county’s Historic Preservation Commission. Member Hendricks shared that Laytonsville applications are submitted to the town clerk for coordination, but there are no staff other than the HDC volunteers. A public hearing usually follows, though items can be put on a consent agenda if a public hearing isn’t needed. In some cases, county approval is also required.

Member Phillips said she liked the idea of having objective criteria for materials as well as style, though the current HDC members don’t have the expertise to create them. Member Ruspi mentioned the structural diversity within the town, and Member Phillips agreed that the combination of older buildings that are expensive to repair with newer structures with historic features is a challenge. The HDC doesn’t want to be seen as a barrier, but rather as supportive of people while maintaining the integrity of the town. The HDC members discussed some specific examples of challenging decisions. Mr. Smith mentioned that the staff in his office spends a fair amount of time trying to sell people on the benefits of using historic materials for replacement; windows are probably the most common issue. Member Ruspi mentioned affordability, and Mr. Smith said they have tax credit and grant programs. Member Phillips suggested the criteria need to be something of a rubric, and Mr. Smith agreed that a more philosophical, rather than prescriptive, approach may work.

Member Ruspi mentioned her own challenges with replacing a non-standard front door. Mr. Smith said they ask people to consult with a preservation contractor and provide a list of potential contacts, then talk about alternatives if there’s convincing evidence that a repair or replacement with original materials isn’t possible. Mr. Smith and the HDC members further discussed potential approaches to specific situations, noting that the ultimate goal of preserving a historic property is to keep it lived in and used. Sometimes flexibility is needed.

Chair Hendricks asked about the list of preservation contractors, and Mr. Smith said he could share what they use. He also suggested the Maryland Association of Historic District Commissions could be helpful. Chair Hendricks speculated that, due to the lower cost of historic properties in Laytonsville compared with other areas of Montgomery and Prince George’s Counties, owners may not have as much money for repairs or upgrades. He suggested talking to the town council about a possible incentive program, though Member Ruspi thought it was out of scope.

The discussion returned to the current guidelines, which Mr. Smith thought are very understandable in terms of what is or isn’t allowed for things that are addressed but the subjects considered should be expanded. It may be impossible to include every material, but general guidance on how a decision is reached could be helpful. The issues of HardiePlank® and vinyl siding, in particular, are challenging and are dealt with differently in different districts. The HDC members discussed the rules around fencing, and Member Ruspi suggested it may be time to reevaluate the current rules. They also discussed the differences between residential and commercial properties. Member Phillips suggested establishing a set of questions used to evaluate each application, and Mr. Smith said their criteria are modeled on the [Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation](https://www.nps.gov/tps/standards/rehabilitation/rehab/stand.htm). Member Ruspi asked if this is something Mr. Smith could help with, and he responded that he would need a more specific scope of work. He further suggested the HDC do some more research, particularly looking at a variety of guidelines to narrow the scope of the project. Chair Hendricks set a goal for the HDC to develop a clearer understanding of what they want and need by the end of the year. Mr. Smith shared a sample of the application for Prince George’s county and said he’s happy to serve as a resource.

Miscellaneous: Chair Hendricks stated that the next meeting is November 18.

Member Ruspi moved to adjourn the meeting at 9:03 p.m., Member Phillips seconded, all approved.