

MAHWAH HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION (MHPC)
May 5, 2008 MINUTES

The secretary read the Sunshine Law.

Salute to the flag

Roll Call	
Present	Absent
Barbara Shanley, Chair	Martha Jean Dragon, excused
Debbie Grob	Lynn Ballerina, excused
Yvonne Beatrice	Kenneth Carlo, excused
Carol Greene	Gus Vasiliadis, excused
Randall Brewster	J. Thomas Thornton
John Bristow	

Mrs. Denise Storms, the MHPC Secretary, recused herself from taking minutes in her capacity as Secretary at this meeting to allow her to participate in the public session. Mrs. Shanley acted as secretary in her place.

Public Session: Mrs. Greene moved to open the Public Session and Mrs. Grob seconded the motion. All approved.

There were two individuals from the public. Mr. Vincent LaBarbiera, with VHI Builders, who resides at 115 Seminary Drive, Mahwah, NJ 07430, and Mahwah resident, Denise Storms, 764 Wyckoff Avenue.

The Chair recognized Mr. LaBarbiera. Mr. LaBarbiera is a builder, and has a real estate license, and in that capacity, he had shown the Crocker Mansion to a friend, who is currently under contract to buy it. Mr. LaBarbiera indicated that he was seeking advice as to what the Mahwah Historic Preservation Commission guidelines were concerning any work that had to be done to the Crocker Mansion. He is aware of its historic significance.

Mr. La Barbiera gave a brief outline of some of the renovations that the prospective buyer is intending to do to the mansion.

They are looking to replace the garages that were previously there. He gave a brief description of four or five garages on the property which had been taken down due to disrepair. There are some garages there now, that are inadequate. He would use the same brick as the main building to build the garages.

Mr. LaBarbariera indicated that the 100 year old windows are not in very good shape, and he wants to propose replacing the windows, inquiring what parameters to use in getting replacement windows. They are single pane windows and are not operable anymore.

The buyer would like to put in a tennis court outside on the grounds, install a pool in a secluded area and surround it with plants. The buyer would like to delineate the boundaries of the property with landscaping to “dignify” the boundaries. So far, he said that was all they were planning to do to the grounds.

Mr. LaBarbiera indicated that they are not going to dramatically change the appearance of the place outside.

Inside the mansion, he said there is a lot of beautiful woodwork that needs reconditioning. The organ also needs to be refurbished.

On the first floor there is only one small powder room, which by today's standards he believes would not be acceptable. Also, the kitchen was originally set up in the basement and there is no kitchen on the main floor. The buyer would like put a kitchen on the main floor and attach it to the basement food preparation area with a connecting staircase. Also on the first floor, they would mostly be painting, replacing hardware on the doors that are broken.

The basement has no finish qualities at all. The buyer would like to finish it off so with possibly a theatre, and game room. The buyer would also perhaps take down some walls because there are 20 separate rooms there which may have served a purpose in the past, but inhibit present day use.

The second floor does not have a separate foyer area or old woodwork. The buyer would like to take down a couple of common walls and refurbish the bathrooms that are there now to bring them up to the today's standard.

There are 20 rooms on the third floor that may have served as quarters for servants or seminarians. Mr. LaBarbiera said that the new owners of this property would definitely need live-in help and some of these rooms could be used to house the staff. Some of the walls would need to be taken out. In addition, they would perhaps go through the floor from the second to the third floor to create more dramatic ceilings in the master bedroom and bath. The third floor has some bathrooms, and they would not be adding any. There are some back stairways for service and they would put better railings and some marble steps there to improve them. This is a basic summary of what they thus far, propose to do to the property.

MHPC member Randy Brewster asked what the square footage was of the home. Mr. LaBarbiera replied that the realtors said it is 45,000 square feet. If that is accurate, then the basement is 10,000. He does not believe it is 45,000 square feet.

Mrs. Shanley stated that the house was on the Mahwah Preservation Ordinance and asked if Mr. LaBarbiera had been given a copy of the Ordinance. She advised that since the house is 10,000 square feet that the MHPC has review rights on the inside and the outside. She asked when they anticipate beginning the work. Mr. LaBarbiera advised that they are going to start right away getting architectural plans and start the application process with Mr. Montroy, the Township Construction Code Official. He does not have a definite date yet.

Ms. Shanley asked if anyone on the MHPC had any questions for Mr. LaBarbiera. Mrs. Greene asked if the MHPC would be permitted any inspections. Mr. LaBarbiera stated "absolutely yes". Mrs. Shanley asked if any kind of an engineering report had been done on the house. The answer was that he has not done any structural engineering studies done. He does have all the information that Darlington Associates submitted in their restructuring of the building and he saw plans to restructure the stairway. He does not believe there is a structural problem anywhere in the house.

Mrs. Shanley asked how many windows there were. He said 250 windows, all square; no ovals. Carol Greene said she was concerned about the replacement of the windows and that something must be done about them. She indicated she hoped that they would try to get windows as much like the original windows as possible. Mr. LaBarbiera indicated that the only windows that have any uniqueness to them are the windows above the front door. All others are regular pane windows. But he said they are concerned with keeping the same look. He has been asking around for a couple of weeks, about work to be done on the house. They want to preserve the value of the house.

Mrs. Shanley advised Mr. LaBarbiera that the MHPC will watch carefully what they do to this house because not only is it on our ordinance, but it is a nationally registered site. She gave him a copy of the Design Guidelines for Historic Structures and a copy of the Township preservation ordinance 1313. She invited him to come back to any meeting, or email her with questions. She indicated that she would try to find for him what, if any, tax breaks there might be for them, because this is a nationally registered property.

Mr. Brewster asked about the windows, and Mr. LaBarbiera indicated they are looking at Marvin windows and other companies that do window replicas. There were no further questions for Mr. LaBarbiera; he was thanked for coming to speak with the MHPC.

The second guest from the public was Mrs. Denise Storms of 764 Wyckoff Avenue, Mahwah, NJ 07430.

Mrs. Storms stated that she has come to the Public Session regarding the application of Karl and Francine Kern to build an addition onto the Ackerman House at the corner of Wyckoff Avenue and Forest Road in Mahwah, which was previously presented at the April 7 2008 MHPC Meeting, as Docket #: 125608. She indicated that the applicant is also asking for a use variance to make the property commercial.

Mrs. Storms indicated that the argument of the applicant in asking for a variance on this property to make it commercial, cites that the area has changed. Mrs. Storms stated that the area has not changed, even though the road has been widened, the improvements that have been made really were of benefit to the house. It has been hooked up to water and sewer; the stone retaining wall, which was falling apart, has been restored. The house now has a gated and fenced yard and new roof. The front porch has been replaced and the house has been painted all one color. The basement has been restructured with new support beams.

The traffic at that intersection impacts other houses around that intersection, all in a residential zone. The widening of the road again benefits them because there are stores across the street, instead of backing out onto Forest Road; it is now a one way. The vehicles have to come in off of Wyckoff Avenue. The neighbors want to keep this a residential area. Mrs. Storms gave a brief history of the commercial buildings on the corner, stating that in 1965, the Township re-zoned it as a residential, non-conforming zone. The Ackerman House was the farmhouse for that whole area there. Mrs. Storms also noted that ninety percent of the old homes are close to the road. The Valentine House off of Forest Road is just a few feet from the road. All the surrounding properties are residential. Since the last application, any building that has gone on, has been residential. Mrs. Storms pointed out to the commission, that the (Ackerman) house has been rented in the past and a family is living there right now. There is a yard in the back. Mrs.

Storms stated that the applicant's arguments will go before the zoning board and she realizes that the MHPC is not a zoning board.

Mrs. Shanley asked Mrs. Storms if she knew the reason the house was improved in recent history. Ms. Storms indicated that Jahn, (a previous owner before the Kerns) wanted to add onto the house also. His application was denied and he sold the property. The new owners were told by the Township Property Maintenance Inspector and Construction Code Official to make the necessary repairs.

Carol Greene stated that yes, the MHPC does not have any jurisdiction over the zoning, and should not appropriately comment. However, we do have jurisdiction over the architecture of the building and are being asked to comment on the change of the building from a residence to a commercial building, if we approve it is implied that we approve the zoning change. Do you have any comments on that? Mrs. Storms said that the applicant is asking the Historic Preservation Commission to approve or disapprove the addition. But she does not feel that this should be part of the consideration of the zoning change, but the MHPC should consider how the addition would affect the historic significance of the house.

Mrs. Shanley asked Mrs. Storms that she has said, aside from the zoning issue, that as a resident of the area, that it would be dangerous to the existing homes if this is turned into a commercial property. How do you feel that would endanger that area? Mrs. Storms indicated that the parking and exiting of the commercial property would affect the neighboring homes because the entrance and exit to this property is all off of Forest Road and the commercial zone could encroach on Forest Road and increase the traffic on an already busy road.

Mr. Brewster indicated that currently it looks like only five cars can fit appropriately in that parking area and the proposed parking on the application indicates much more than that. Mr. Brewster stated he is also concerned about the well that is 15 to 13 yards away from the house, and based on the parking lot plans, it appears that the proposed parking area is getting pretty close to that well and would threaten it. Aesthetically, the well, adds something to the historic look of the house.

Mrs. Shanley asked how much land there was with the house. Mrs. Grob advised there is three fourths of an acre there. Mrs. Greene asked if the applicant does not get the zoning change, then is there any reason for him to make the addition onto the residence. Mrs. Storms indicated that this is also a non-conforming lot in that it is now a two family home. The owner cannot add onto it as a two family without appearing before the Zoning Board of Adjustment.

Mrs. Shanley asked Mrs. Storms if Gary Montroy would have a copy of the reports that generated the need for the township to tell the previous owners to repair the property. Mrs. Storms said, yes.

Mrs. Storms advised that as the secretary to the MHPC she had extended an invitation to Mr. Kerns to attend this meeting. Mrs. Shanley indicated she did not receive any messages at home or at her job as to whether or not they would attend.

Mrs. Storms indicated that her husband's Grandmother was born in that house, and gave other details about how the Storms family has connections with the history of the house.

Mrs. Greene made further comment by asking Mrs. Storms if we voted to approve the addition with absolutely no relation to the zoning issue, do you feel that addition in this application is compatible to the character of the house and is it not going to overwhelm the house? Ms. Storms responded no.

Mrs. Grob indicated that the existing building is 2500 square feet. Discussion followed concerning the size of the home and the size of the addition.

Mrs. Storms had no further comments.

Mr. Bristow made a motion to close the public session, Mrs. Grob 2nd –

Vote: 6 yes , 0 no: . Grob yes; Beatrice, yes; Brewster, yes; Bristow, yes; Greene, yes; Shanley, yes.

Minutes:

March 3rd minutes - Mrs. Grob's vote to approve the March 3rd Minutes must be removed, as she was not officially a member of the MHPC at that time.

Mrs. Shanley advised to change the spelling of Minuets in the first line of the “minutes” section, be changed to Minutes.

Mr. Bristow moved to approve the March 3rd as amended; and Mr. Brewster seconded the motion.

Vote: 6 yes; 0 no: Grob, yes; Beatrice, yes; Brewster, yes; Bristow, yes; Greene, yes, Shanley, yes.

Legal: The attorney was not present

Chair's Report

Cleveland Bridge

Mrs. Shanley asked Mrs. Greene to advise the members about anything new on the Cleveland Bridge repairs anticipated being made by the County. Mrs. Greene indicated that this is not going to happen in the near future. However, Mrs. Greene said she had discussed the bridge repairs with Robin Brown of the County Historic Preservation Office. Mrs. Brown had discussed the repairs with the County Engineers and they indicated to her that current bridge materials are to be re-used in the rebuilt structure. Carol Greene indicated she was going to try to have further discussions with Robert Mulder, an engineer with Bergen County.

Master Plan

Mrs. Shanley reported that the MHPC received an extension from Kevin Kane at Burgis on the date when the Commission needs to submit their final Historic Plan element. The Commission did not ask for one, however, Mrs. Shanley advised Mr. Kane that the Commission is adding on West Mahwah homes and he advised that the Commission had some time. He indicated the Commission does not have to meet the April 30th date, but the Commission could not take three more months; the end of May would be acceptable.

Mrs. Greene and Mrs. Grob had done extensive work to document the house numbers, and blocks and lots of the homes on the streets in West Mahwah. The homes built by the Brakeshoe Factory for their employees in the early part of the 20th century. They had come into the

township offices and done this work on a Saturday morning in April. The houses were added to the Master Plan. The special MHPC meeting called in April did not have a quorum, so there were no minutes, however, Denise Storms had done a survey of homes in the Fardale section that were not on the previous Master Plan, and offered them to be added. The members examined information they were able to discern about from the township tax records, and while not all of them had historic value, some of them did and they were added.

Randy Brewster had done further research to clarify information on some homes on the previous lists about which we had questions.

Mrs. Grob asked if there were any areas that we had not covered in town. Ms. Shanley indicated that there are probably sites on Stag Hill that could be documented which had previously been recognized in the Bergen County Survey, which have since then been demolished. But she stated that she feels we need to go up there and re-look at the area to be sure as there are probably some ruins that should be documented. Randy Brewster had found a cemetery at the base of Stag Hill that needs documenting. He had identified it with his GPS.

Carol asked if we should take pictures of the houses in West Mahwah. Ms. Shanley indicated yes, it would be very helpful to take pictures.

Ms. Shanley indicated that she realized the Miller Estate Milk Coolers on Malcolm Road were not mentioned on previous historic plan elements to the Master Plan. Mr. Bristow indicated that there was also a small smoke house in the retaining wall on Malcolm Road, which needs to be added to the Master Plan. Ms. Shanley asked Mr. Bristow if the rock walls that are across the street from Betsy Ross School are from the Miller Estate or were they built when the Cragmere homes were built. Mr. Bristow advised that those retaining walls were part of the Miller Estate and should be listed on the Master Plan as well.

Carol Greene stated that the rock walls on Rt. 202 should be added. She reported that some of them were built by Havemeyer, but she indicated not all. However, the dry rock wall construction on other areas may have been done by the same stone masons in the late 1900's. The stones that are in the best shape are built up from the road, for example by the Carmel Retreat. Where the rock walls have been collapsed, we can exclude those sections and identify the ones to add by the properties they border.

Randy Brewster said there are some ruins at the top of Bear Swamp Road there are ruins of houses. He asked if they were on the original Master Plan. Ms. Shanley said there are some archaeological areas identified in Bear Swamp area and these might be the ruins Randy refers to.

Carol asked if we have Camp Glen Grey on the Master Plan, as she believes it is the oldest Boy Scout Reservation in the United States. Mrs. Shanley will see if she can check with Anne Banta whose husband ran the camp for the Boy Scouts for 25 yrs.

Ms. Shanley will send everyone emailed copies of the Historic Plan Element and she advised that the Commission will need members to volunteer to proof read it.

Quackenbush Historic Marker

Ms. Shanley indicated that she had found in the MHPC files, a description of the Quackenbush Barn, which she believes had been written specifically for the marker. She gave the new Commission members a brief description of the history of the move of the barn, and read the paragraph to the commission. Discussion followed and the historic sign wording as follows was the final version voted on for approval:

The Quackenbush Barn – c. 1850

The Quackenbush barn was once part of the mid-nineteenth century Way family farm on Sparrowbush Road in the Masonicus section of Mahwah. It was sold in 1868 to Cornelius A. Quackenbush, and remained in the family until 1942. It is a typical English style bank barn. Animals were kept on the lower level, not reconstructed here, with produce and equipment stored above. The barn was moved here in 1998 by the Mahwah Historic Preservation Commission, financed by the property owners, Mr. & Mrs. V. Politis, the Mahwah Historical Society, local businesses and individuals.

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Motion made by Ms. Grob to approve the Quackenbush marker wording here and seconded by Carol Greene.

Vote: 6 yes; 0 no: Grob, yes; Beatrice, yes; Brewster, yes; Bristow, yes; Greene, yes, Shanley, yes.

Motion made by Carol Greene to table the New Business portion of the meeting, in order to move to the Application on the Ackerman House; motion seconded by John Bristow. All in favor 6 yes. 0 no.

Applications:

1.) Docket #: 125608 – Karl & Francine Kern, Ackerman House.

Let the minutes reflect that there was a thorough review of Docket # 125608. During this discussion and review, a motion was made to re-open the meeting to the public in order to ask Mrs. Storms a question about a well on the property. Motion made to open to public by Carol Greene, seconded by John Bristow. All in favor, yes 6; 0 no votes.

Mrs. Shanley asked Mrs. Storms if there was a well on the front of the property before the rock wall was reconstructed. Mrs. Storms advised yes, that it was the original well to the house and was closed but the above the ground structure was kept and is part of the historic property.

A motion made by Mr. Bristow to close the 2nd public session, and seconded by Mr. Brewster; all approved.

After further discussion and review, Ms. Deborah Grob moved to deny the application, citing the following reasons:

1.) The proposed addition is a 66% increase to the size of the existing residential

farmhouse and would destroy its historic façade.

- 2.) The historic well on the property was not described as required on the MHPC Data Sheet accompanying this application. This well is an integral part of the farm property and should be preserved.

Mr. Randall Brewster seconded the motion.

Vote: 6 yes; 0 no: Grob, yes; Beatrice, yes; Brewster, yes; Bristow, yes; Greene, yes; Shanley, yes.

New Business:

Robbie's Music Barn Complex. – Mrs. Shanley reported that the property on Rt. 17 has been sold and the outbuildings will be destroyed, except for the actual building where the Music Barn is. That is to be preserved. The Commission will probably have at our next meeting proposed drawings of a hotel to be built where the proposed demolished outbuildings (barns) on Rt. 17 which were part of the Winter Dairy Farm at the turn of the century. Mrs. Shanley asked if one of the members has a camcorder and would volunteer to take motion pictures of the outside and inside of the barns. These barns are on the Master Plan. They have been vacant for 30 + years. Dick Greene has volunteered to take photographs of the barns including the Music Barn Store. The Commission needs to contact Robbie's Music Barn as to whom will let the Commission volunteer into the barns to photograph them. Mr. Brewster advised he has a camcorder and would be glad to take tapes of the barns

Motion made to close the meeting by Mr. Bristow, seconded by Mrs. Grob. All in favor. The HPC meeting was adjourned at 9:45 PM.

These minutes are a synopsis of the MHPC tapes which are on file at the Township Hall.

Respectfully submitted

Barbara Shanley
Chair/ MHPC