

## Schuylkill Township Historical Commission

### Minutes of Meeting – April 17, 2017

**Members in Attendance:** Sandy Momyer, Khalil Hihi, David Kiefer, Dorothy Bedford, Jay Stearly, Ginny Stearly, Dianne Cram.

Also in attendance were William Bolla, Esquire representing the Historical Commission and Robert Wise.

Sandy called the meeting to order at 7:04 and introduced Mr. Bolla as representing Schuylkill Township.

**Minutes** of the March meeting were reviewed. Dorothy asked that a correction be made to change the proposed name of a stream from Unami Run to Lenape Run. Minutes were approved to include that correction.

**Announcements:** Sandy reviewed the dates of the announcements listed on the agenda including the upcoming June 8<sup>th</sup> program on historic barns.

#### **Whitehorse Road-Phoenixville LLC**

In attendance and representing Whitehorse Road-Phoenixville LLC were: Julie Von Spreckelsen, Attorney at Law of Eastburn and Gary, PC; Adam S. Benosky of Bohler Engineering; Douglas F. Seabolt of Mainstay Engineering Group, Inc.; Greg Richardson of Traffic Planning and Design, Inc. and Rick Myer of Commonwealth Heritage Group.

Ms. Von Sprekelsen introduced the members of the development team and explained the background of the proposal for development of the corner at Whitehorse Road and Route 23 that would be a consolidation of three parcels into two parcels, Lot 1 and Lot 2, and include a convenience store, five gas dispensing facilities serving 10 cars at one time, an additional retail building and parking. She stated that conditional use will allow for this development, that the site has been designated in 2008 for development by Phoenixville Regional Comprehensive Plan and that, in her opinion, the two Class II historic resources have been heavily altered.

Mr. Benosky presented plans including aerial photos of the properties and surrounding area. He also showed an overlay of the proposed plan showing the location of buildings, gas pumps, parking areas, access points and driveways and landscaped buffers. He explained that the access point and driveway along Whitehorse Road calls for the demolition of the existing “Twin Bays” building. He said that more information on grading, utilities, etc. was to come. Mr. Bolla asked what were the Penn Dot requirements for the access way. Mr. Benosky replied with explanation about setting the access point as far back from the intersection with Route 23 as possible. He said there would be one driveway off Rt. 23 with no left turn onto Rt. 23 when exiting. White Horse Road would have two in and out driveways. The facility will be open 24/7.

Mr. Myer addressed the Commission and explained that Commonwealth Heritage Group completed the Historic Resources Impact Statement. He distributed two aerial photographs that update the ones that were initially included in the report: Figure 3. *Class I and Class II historic resources within 300 feet of project area*, and Figure 4. *Project area showing boundary of Class II historic resource*. He explained that, in his opinion, the area did not show any potential for archaeological importance. This was a Phase I survey that did not involve any testing but determination was achieved by his assessment based on literature search. This did not indicate potential as an archaeological site and it was concluded that the potential for pre-historic objects to be quite low. He stated the site is too far from water. He said there was slightly higher probability for the presence of historic archaeological material but at low sensitivity. He described the Class II resources as: An 1850 five-bay Gothic Revival, heavily altered in 1890s with interior features typical of 1890 millwork and two major 20<sup>th</sup> century additions; an 1890 carriage house with low integrity and with a completely altered interior. He addressed the surrounding area that included what he considered the “remnants” of a historic commercial corner. He gave his opinion that there is little of Corner Stores left. Mr. Myer commented that the Class I property across Whitehorse Road would today not qualify for National Historic Register status due to the lack of supporting farmland with the property. He said that the proposed vegetation buffer will protect the view of the surrounding properties and enhance the environment.

Mr. Bolla asked how this vegetation will enhance the environment of the Class I and II properties. Mr. Myer answered that it would enhance the ambience.

David Kieffer asked if they were aware of the documented association of the Class I property with the Underground Railroad. His answer was vague about the association of Pennypacker with the Underground Railroad.

Bob Wise asked for the last name of Clarence and Elizabeth who are noted on page 8 of the impact statement. The answer was that it is unknown and not available.

Mr. Bolla asked why it was not feasible to continue commercial use of the Class II buildings and if the team had discussed whether it was feasible to continue such use. Mr. Myer’s answer was no they had not looked into adaptive re-use of the structures.

Bob Wise asked if design alternative plans were discussed about the flexibility of moving the access road. Mr. Myer answered no.

Mr. Sebolt, a structural engineer, addressed the Commission with his findings on the condition of the buildings stating that there is currently a leak in the roof of the “Twin Bays” building and that extent of damage could not be determined unless the area was opened. He gave his opinion that this would do damage to the house and could make it unsafe. He stated that it would be difficult to move the carriage house from its current location due to the fact that the building is not tied together at the foundation.

Mr. Bolla asked if any efforts were made to stop the leak in the roof. Mr. Sebolt answered no, but the owner had placed buckets under it.

Sandy Momyer pointed out that the owner is under obligation to repair the leak since this could constitute benign neglect.

Bob Wise asked about possible ways to move the carriage house. Mr. Seabolt answered that it could be taken apart and re-assemble it, however, that would be costly.

Mr. Greg Richardson of Traffic Planning and Design, Inc. explained the proposed access points, driveways, and extended turning lane for Whitehorse Road. He said they plan to consolidate four existing access points down to two and place them as far from the intersection as possible. He said that the complete traffic study has not been completed and repeated that there would be no left turn onto Rt. 23 and the driveway would be 10 ft. from the traffic signal to avoid the intersection.

Mr. Bolla asked if the Twin Bays structure could be preserved by moving the driveway 15 to 20 feet. Mr. Richardson answered that this would require redesign and coordination with Penn DOT.

Bob Wise pointed out that approximately 90% of the structure appears to be within the proposed vegetative buffer.

Mr. Wise presented his comments on the impact report. He stated that the Corner Store commercial area was historically from the 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries and that there would be underground archaeological resources pertaining to the history of the area and that since this is an old road with old commerce there will be more clues in the ground. He suggested that Phase 1 archaeological study be reconsidered to include construction monitoring with test pits even in the disturbed areas. Mr. Wise made the following points:

- He questioned the planned use being reported as consistent with the development in the area, and brought up that the reported impact to surrounding Class I and Class II properties in the 300 foot radius was inconsistent with the impact statement
- He stated that the developed area was not going to be improved by the proposed vegetation buffer; there still would be a great amount of adverse impact from noise, light, traffic and activity and that the buffer will not address these concerns for other historic resources. This is not just a gas station as those in existence; this is more, operating 24/7 and affecting the quality of life here.
- No alternative plans were being presented to look at different uses for the historic building.
- The Twin Bays / Rossiter house was a buffer in itself acting as a buffer from an already commercial property to the surrounding properties.

Mr. Bolla asked if the Historical Commission could tour the Twin Bays house. No, time appointment to do so was suggested.

Sandy invited comments and questions from the audience.

- One resident asked about the possibility of not allowing left hand turns. Mr. Richardson answered that this would create potential safety concerns.

- Another resident questioned if the traffic studies would be taken during peak travel times. Mr. Richardson answered that the studies are taken across various times and dates.
- Dianne Cram commented that the impact study repeatedly refers to the structure being “heavily altered” and rather than detracting from the historical integrity it is itself the history of the structure that has at least three distinct periods of architectural history.

Sandy concluded by explaining that the Historical Commission will review the proposal as it applies to our Historical Ordinance and it will be discussed again at the next meeting on May 15<sup>th</sup>. A recommendation will be made to the Schuylkill Township Board of Supervisors at least 10 days prior to the hearing date when such date is established. She also reiterated that it was imperative that the owners of the Twin Bays property address the leaking roof to prevent deterioration and demolition by neglect.

### **Anderson Barn**

The sale of the property did not take place and there is no further update.

### **Stream Naming Project**

Dorothy is pursuing research and is tracking down the appropriate name for a run at Thropp’s Mill.

### **PASD**

A task force meeting is scheduled for April 24. The BOS voted to accept the withdrawal of the application for demolition and not to impose the fee again if re-applied for. This withdrawal now allows for open discussion with BOS about alternative use.

### **Old Business**

- Creek Road bridge – Dianne will follow up with Karen Marshall for advice on moving ahead.
- Trolley Station – Dianne will follow up with Mary Bird to get dehumidifier in place.

### **New Business**

Schuylkill Township announced an open-space easement for 41.6 acres at Freedoms Foundation. The question was raised about potential impacts this will have on protecting the historic structures.

Meeting adjourned at 8:55 pm.

Submitted by

Dianne M. Cram

**NEXT MEETING – MAY 15, 2017 at 7:00 pm**