

Matawan Historical Sites Commission
Thursday, February 6, 2025 at 7pm
Matawan Municipal Community Center Conference Room

Call to Order: 7:08pm

Roll Call

Members present: Kurtis Roinestad, Barry Orr, Lorraine Arnold, Gail Chester, Janilee Yanny
Council liaison: Steven Russell
Recording Secretary: Amy Denholtz Lewandowski
Public Members: Borough Administrator Ryan Michelson, Jason Peist, John Lazar, Suzanne Reynolds, Cathy Zavorskas, Reggie Hawn, Maria Milazzo, Sharon Laporta, and others

Chairman's Introduction

Chairman Roinestad noted this is a Special Meeting to review the revisions to the draft ordinance.

Revised Ordinance

Ms. Arnold provided a brief background of the ordinance review, proposed changes by the commission, and an overview of the comments from the Borough's attorneys. In particular, she noted that the commission and Borough could be eligible for grants.

Generally, Ms. Arnold noted that the attorney's changes repeated the phrase "with the approval of Borough Council," which is redundant and unnecessary. The attorney's revisions also appeared to have a misunderstanding of the federal U.S. Secretary of the Interior standards for historic preservation. Additional clarifications are necessary.

Ms. Chester noted that the changes effectively prevent the commission from working with other government entities, and take away the commission's agency.

Mr. Orr added that it appeared to make council an additional layer after the commission.

Borough Administrator (BA) Michelson disagreed, stating this has not been an issue that's been before the council, and the revisions were not meant to transfer power.

Ms. Arnold emphasized the commission is advisory and sharing expertise.

BA Michelson suggested that the revisions could better clarify that the commission doesn't need permission to work with others.

Ms. Arnold reiterated her review of all the historic commissions and ordinances throughout New Jersey, none of which restricted the authority like the changes proposed by the attorney.

Discussion ensued about who is advisory or seeks benefits, the commission of Borough Council, and in what direction the process moves.

Ms. Arnold observed that the draft language provides the Borough Council with the authority to decide whether a property is historically significant but the council doesn't have the knowledge to make those determinations, although the council can choose to ask the commission for an opinion. She questioned why the draft established this authority with the council without requiring the commission to provide advice. She reiterated that Planning/Zoning doesn't have the authority to provide State designation for a building as historic, that's the NJ DEP. A referral of designation is to see if Planning/Zoning has any issues. The real authority remains with the owner, who could choose not to designate the property as historic, and the council and commission would have no

authority to force the designation. She contended that the draft language about the council's authority and lack of recommendation thereto is problematic.

Discussion ensued concerning the designation and definition of the historic district and underlying zoning regulations, especially as it related to the NJ DEP-designated downtown preservation district (DPD) and the Matawan Main Street historic district, and objections and approvals subject to the Council's purview and Planning/Zoning radius.

Ms. Chester noted the draft language sets forth a draconian method for getting an historic district approved; the process would have to start all over if there are objections, since "20% of the people, parcels, or landowners, or people in the district plus people within 100 feet" of it can object, effectively giving a minority the ability to veto it.

BA Michelson opined that it may have been an oversight to remove or omit the original district. He understood why the attorney removed certain language the commission proposed, but was unsure why the current district was removed and will note that it should be retained.

Mr. Roinestad noted that this draft language could lead to the whole concept being usurped compared to the Planning/Zoning 200 ft radius where there is a vote one way or the other.

BA Michelson clarified that the designation of a district puts requirements on a whole set of owners, unlike Planning/Zoning which is specific to a particular property, which imposes requirements on folks who don't want that. He suggested there may be a way to work on changing the percentage or numbers but advocated for there being a stopgap to protect residents that don't want historic requirements imposed on them.

Ms. Arnold referenced the commission's intent with the proposed draft was to have a larger area.

Mr. Roinestad added that there are two overlays that's left ambiguity about the designation, since the State boundaries is larger, going all the way to train station, and the Planning/Zoning is smaller, ending at Church Street. This incongruity is what led to some historic homes being leveled in the 1990s, like Governor Bedle's house. Emphasized the need to eliminate ambiguity and clearly define the district boundaries and the work of the commission.

Discussion arose about the district boundaries in the draft language and the DEP reevaluating the district.

Ms. Arnold noted the draft language about having reviews attached to a permit, but that wording prohibiting informal reviews. Since some property owners may come to the commission seeking advice, this language is exclusionary and should be removed.

Ms. Chester questioned language about government action that affects municipally-owned historic landmarks, like the Burrowes Mansion.

Ms. Arnold added that it would be ideal to work with the Borough Council to develop an aesthetically cohesive historic streetscape, and emphasized the value in walking the streets to update the map of historic homes.

Discussion included a general consensus about the commission being more restricted in this draft than it currently operates. Discussion further ensued about the planning and zoning approvals required for new development.

Mr. Roinestad noted the major areas, historic sites and houses and structures, as well as the historic DPD. Mr. Roinestad noted the interest in the commission preserving the DPD and preventing historic Victorians from being in the shadow of modern high-rise buildings from

Ms. Arnold added that the 2015 master plan emphasizes history and historic buildings being Matawan's greatest asset.

BA Michelson would like to schedule a small subcommittee meeting with the attorney, after first discussing some necessary corrections.

Public Comment

Maria Milazzo, Main Street resident in the district – expressed concerns about inconsistent enforcement of property standards since she was told when she moved here that fines would be assessed if repairs weren't made and she received a letter about painting the shutters, but she sees other properties in disrepair that aren't making improvements. The chairman noted that some property owners on Main Street don't live there and aren't as invested, plus there isn't anyone strictly enforcing historical standards, only property maintenance and code enforcement which relies on complaints.

Sharon Laporta, Washington Street asked whether there would just be an historic area designated, or guidelines for the historic district, to which the chairman responded it would be both. Ms. Laporta also asked about neon lights and providing aesthetic guidelines like in Nantucket and Martha's Vineyard. Ms. Arnold replied that certain historic standards are set by the NJ DEP but the commission hopes any person would reach out so the commission can provide guidance.

Cathy Zavorskas suggested designing a brochure to educate homeowners about historic district guidelines and demystify that historic homes can be modernized following aesthetic guidelines. Chairman Roinestad remarked that this could be instituted when a Certificate of Occupancy is provided or applied for, instead of through a realtor.

Reggie Hawn, Main Street resident on the corner of Main and Church, noted that her house has a plaque but isn't located within the historic district boundaries. She expressed concerns about aesthetics, defining and clarifying what constitutes historic.

Mr. Orr noted that there should be a procedure for designating properties outside of the historic district too, since a home doesn't have to be located within the boundaries to be designated historic.

The next meeting is scheduled for Thursday, February 13, 2025 at 7pm.

Adjournment

Motion to adjourn: Russell

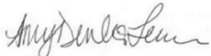
2nd: Chester

Ayes: all present

Nays: none

Adjourned: 8:27 PM

Respectfully submitted,



Amy Denholtz Lewandowski, RMC

Recording Secretary