

Matawan Historical Sites Commission
Thursday, August 17, 2023 at 7pm
Matawan Municipal Complex Conference Room

Call to Order: 7:06pm

Roll Call

Members present: Kurtis Roinestad, Gail Chester, Lorraine Arnold, Barry Orr, Janilee Yanny
Members absent: Ray Stuetz
Council liaison: Councilmember Steven Russell
Recording Secretary: Amy Denholtz Lewandowski
Public attendees: Daisy Orr, Cathy Zavorskas, John Lazar

Approval of Meeting Minutes

May 11, 2023 Meeting Minutes

July 13, 2023 Meeting Minutes

Motion to approve May 11th and July 13th Meeting Minutes

Main Motion: Yanny 2nd: Chester Ayes: all present Nays: none

Old Business

Historic Site Marker Restoration

Motion to Approve Cardinal Made to restore the historic markers for 8 historic sites within the borough.

Main Motion: Roinestad 2nd: Yanny Ayes: all present Nays: none

Roll Call:

Ayes: Roinestad, Chester, Arnold, Orr, Yanny
Nays: none
Abstain: none
Absent: Stuetz

Purpose, Ordinance Review, & Synergy with Master Plan and Borough Departments

Chairman Roinestad noted that the commission's purpose is to preserve the historic district of Matawan, but its responsibilities have varied over time, from significant involvement with Main Street projects to minimal relevance some years. The State designated the Matawan Main Street Historic District in the 1970s. Borough ordinances and planning and zoning policies have been inconsistent but the commission's overarching goal is to help preserve and restore historic sites, and not be burdensome.

Ms. Arnold researched the involvement and operations of other historical commissions in New Jersey. Comparatively, this commission's ordinance establishes limited powers, only focusing on borough-owned sites rather than also being involved with the historic district. Ms. Arnold found no other historical sites commission only overseeing municipal-owned sites; all other commissions had additional advisory responsibilities or involvement with other historic sites.

Discussion continued about the disconnection between the commission and the Planning Board, previous involvement by the commission with the historic district and Main Street, prior

experiences where the commission was asked for permission for building improvements, architectural review requirements, and opportunities for collaboration. Since the commission is presently only responsible for borough-owned sites and not the historic district, the ordinance would need to be revised to connect the commission to the work of the Planning Board and clarify the commission's authority to support the preservation of the historic district. Suggestion that the Commission's webpage could provide guidelines and visuals for what's acceptable and recommended for historic properties.

Discussion evolved to the 2015 Master Plan and its acknowledgement of the importance of historic character, but this has not been prioritized or well-implemented. The 2015 MP was revised/reaccepted but the executive summary notes it has a "new" vision statement, goals, and objectives, and land use recommendations, and it reiterated most of the prior 1965 MP.

In recent years there has been significant discussion about the development near the train station, the hole in the ground (former Foodtown site now known as Matawan Town Center), and other development concerns, as well as controversy and questions about the boundaries of the historic district. Sometime in the 1990s a portion of Main Street was cut out of the original preservation district, which had extended all the way to Route 34; somewhere down the line the Borough stated the district ended at Church Street, where subsequently the strip mall with Starbucks was built. There was discussion about converting some homes to Victorian shops with village-style walkways before a strip mall was approved; one of the historic buildings torn down as a result of that was Governor Bedle's (NJ Governor 1875-1878) house. According to the State, the historic preservation district extended up to Route 34 but what Matawan did in the 1990s to exclude certain properties from the district and approve the commercial development was a special exception.

The Historical Society and Historical Sites Commission are frequently asked about restrictions on building improvements. This is an opportunity to provide homeowners and businesses with guidance on historic buildings in Matawan and how the Commission can provide assistance. A great example is Dr. Panezai (177 Main Street), who used reclaimed bricks to recreate the original look of the building.

Additional complications and challenges are a result of shared services, because planning, zoning, construction, and code enforcement are now all shared with Aberdeen, and both towns have the same professionals but different borough codes. The consolidation is experiencing growing pains and they're still working things out. Aberdeen's historic experience and relationship with Matawan's historic district is unclear. Aberdeen doesn't have an equivalent historic commission entity. Interlude about the history of why Matawan Borough seceded from Aberdeen Township and how the municipal boundaries were drawn.

Ms. Zavorskas noted that her community engagement work encompasses supporting commissions with tasks. There is an opportunity for the Commission to have more content on the borough's (Commission) webpage but not have a wholly separate website.

Ms. Arnold noted there's no historic preservation element of the MP and asked what is the best mechanism for this to be included. A new Master Plan is supposed to be adopted in 2025, which would be a prime opportunity to integrate historic preservation elements.

There are outdated ordinances, some of which contradict each other, so Ms. Arnold's research and this Commission's recommendations for updating the ordinance can eliminate ambiguity and incorporate historic preservation in the MP, and drive the trending narrative that Matawan is a great historic town. Some popular ideas are the house plaques noting a home's age and signage noting the historic district as people come into town.

Generally, there is public misconception about what it means to have a house with a historical-designation, and what can be done (renovations). There's confusion about the definition of the Matawan Historic District, since the State and Matawan designate different boundaries, and some properties aren't listed on the State or National registries. An example of contradictions and complications was when a developer wanted to build apartments and may have listed a house on the registry, but this conditional requirement couldn't be imposed because the house was ineligible due to its unsatisfactory condition; accordingly, the stipulation wasn't adopted as part of the developer's approval and the house fell into further disrepair. One house can make others look bad, and even if the Commission sends a letter offering to provide assistance to a private property owner, encouraging restoration may be ignored or drawn-out by the property owner; the Borough may prompt action sooner as a result of tax assessment or property maintenance or code enforcement and compliance. However, it's the goal of the Commission to provide help, rather than punish violations, so more historic sites can be properly restored or maintained.

Ms. Arnold agreed, on behalf of the Commission, to deliver a presentation or provide further information to Council about her findings related to historic sites commissions and ordinances.

Historic Building on NJ Transit Property

Discussion concerning the status of the historic NJ Transit-owned building at the Aberdeen-Matawan train station, which is vacant. A private business person is considering acquiring the building, and received estimates to take the building and move it to a lot he owns near the recycling center and closed liquor store. The estimates are approximately \$100,000 to raise it, move the power lines and lights, and transport it to his property (and won't crossover the tracks). It would be his building and not the borough's, but it would be a better introduction to the historic district, especially if he renovated it to restore it to how it originally looked. The idea is still in flux, but likely welcomed by NJ Transit. Moving and restoring the unique building would be much more beneficial than demolishing.

Recognizing/Incentivizing Historic Homes

Revisited the idea of house markers noting the age of a home, similar to Keyport's program. Commissioners expressed an interest in incentivizing restoration because of the many 100+ year-old homes in the borough, and homeowners who take on the added tasks and expenses of proper restoration work should be recognized. Given the maintenance required for older houses, which is often expensive, a financial incentive, like a property tax discount or PILOT (payment-in-lieu-of-taxes), can be an appealing incentive.

Ms. Arnold noted that some of the other commissions supported financial incentives such as restoration grants, but the source of funds – whether from government funds or a charitable foundation or fundraisers – would need to be determined.

Discussion/Public Comment

Chairman Roinestad will send the Borough Clerk a list of Commission members who were not sworn in at a Council meeting.

Next meeting scheduled for Thursday, September 14, 2023 at 7pm.

Adjournment

Motion to adjourn: Roinestad 2nd: Yanny Ayes: all present Nays: none
Adjourned: 8:14pm

Respectfully submitted,



Amy Denholtz Lewandowski
Recording Secretary