

Matawan Historical Sites Commission
Thursday, September 14, 2023 at 7pm
Matawan Municipal Community Center, Main Conference Room

Call to Order: 7:05pm

Roll Call

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

Approval of Meeting Minutes

August 17, 2023 Meeting Minutes

Motion to approve August 17th Meeting Minutes

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

Swearing-In

Councilmember Russell administered the Oath of Office to Lorraine Arnold, for a term ending Dec. 31, 2023.

Old Business

Historic Site Marker Restoration

Restoration of the historic markers by Cardinal Made has begun, and the borough has approved the vendor for commencement of the work.

New Business

Vice Chair Orr referred to an email from Chairman Roinestad outlining agenda items.

Burrowes Mansion

(via email from Chairman Roinestad): The security system at Burrowes Mansion has become a concern in recent months. The police department is prepared to acquire the video surveillance system but the concern at the moment is going to be the overall security system at the museum. Specifically, the fire, safety and security system is monitored by the security company. On two occasions this year there were alarm activations for which the security company never referred anything to the municipal government or to any list of emergency contacts. If you recall, this is what caused both of the floods we had in the winter. The security system is now billing us over \$100 per month to simply monitor the system. I think we need to discuss the possibility of merging the security system into whatever the borough uses to avoid continuing with this vendor.

Mr. Orr noted the security system in Burrowes Mansion is an issue, with the vendor billing \$100/month for minimal services. Additionally, the alarm system through the security company isn't properly communication notifications to the correct people. Further discussion will be about moving security under borough.

Mr. Orr further noted that tours will begin on Sunday, Sept. 17th. When cleaning up earlier today, he observed what appeared to be termite damage on the reading room floor; will be checking on annual pest management contract. Front parlor has saw dust under the window.

The interpretive sign to be installed in front of the mansion, with funding from the grant awarded by the New Jersey Society of the Cincinnati, was approved and will be ready to be installed in about 8 weeks. A final proof was circulated around the room.

Mr. Buckel asked about the old sign, which was laying in alleyway, and offered to pick it up.

Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) Grave Markers

Mr. Orr has the names of three soldiers that DAR provided markers for; one grave location is known but the others must be located in the cemetery and then an installation plan must be made based on the gravesite.

Noted recent Asbury Park Press article about DAR discovery of other graves and tombstones.

Commission Purpose & Ordinance Review

Ms. Arnold presented a draft document for discussion after reviewing about 150 ordinances in New Jersey, none of which look identical to Matawan's, as well as the New Jersey Statutes (N.J.S.A.) regarding historic preservation.

Mr. Buckle asked about the purpose of this task. Mr. Orr elaborated that the commission currently has a limited scope of work, overseeing a few borough-owned properties but not having any official consulting role with Planning Board or private landowners. An updated ordinance could expand oversight throughout the whole town and allow the updated commission to designate individual properties as historic properties, and possibly designate new historic districts or redefine the existing district. There could be some authority over what homeowners could do once a property is designated historic, and more guidance.

Ms. Yanny reiterated objectives of the commission, as previously stated by Chairman Roinestad, to help provide guidance, and not be burdensome, to support historic designations.

Ms. Chester supports the concept of articulating definite powers to prevent being dismissed. She noted that the majority of the commission's work is related to Burrowes Mansion and cemeteries.

Mr. Orr noted an example of the commission's existing limitations, when someone wanted to buy the fountain house and asked about restrictions. There are limitations for properties on historic registries. Matawan Borough hasn't set limitations and the historic district doesn't have restrictions either. There are some perceptions and rumors that the commission had more authority than it does now.

Ms. Arnold would like to see the commission connected to the Planning Board.

Ms. Zavorskas spoke with Karen Wynne, Matawan Borough Clerk, who is enthusiastic about the commission's interest in revising an outdated code. Ms. Zavorskas explained the municipal

process to amend existing Borough Code by adoption of an ordinance, and the timeline given reorganization in January. She suggested that when the commission draft is ready Councilmember Russell can bring this before the Governing Body and the commission should attend the Workshop meeting, the first meeting of the month, to speak to the revisions and rationale. She added that the Council may also ask for changes prior to adoption.

[Back to Burrowes Mansion]

Ms. Zavorskas noted that there are bees and termites in Burrowes Mansion. Under the cedar shingles in multiple levels by the kitchen sink there are dead bees. They are yellow jackets, damaging and aggressive. An exterminator is necessary.

Ms. Zavorskas doesn't have insight into how to end the security contract. The contract is year-to-year, so it'll be a good time to switch soon. Her understanding is that the DPW facility is the only alarmed building with security. She mentioned there is a bill in the commission mailbox, and perhaps (Karen? Caren?) in Finance can help.

Security and camera systems are different. The police took over the camera system at the mansion. The lease notes who is responsible for paying for certain things, but the alarm system is paid by contract to the Haig Service Corporation.

[Back to Commission Purpose & Ordinance Review]

Mr. Orr noted that for council to accept changes, they won't want to see something burdensome or adding bureaucracy to new development. What would powers of the updated commission be and what could private property owners do under this?

Ms. Arnold noted that the property owners can go to the Planning Board first, which could refer to the commission first before approving improvements, or alternatively property owners would first come to the commission before going to the Planning Board. Councilmember Russell asked if the commission would have veto power or an advisory role. Ms. Arnold clarified that the commission would still just give advice and recommendations, but the Planning Board could override that.

Mr. Orr noted that 45 days response time is a long delay. Councilmember Russell stated that the more information and recommendations the commission prepares and provides can reduce the length of time. Ms. Arnold added that having more information, examples, and recommendations on the webpage will provide ideas and a better understanding of how the process works, and reassure that owners can perform work on their homes. Councilmember Russell suggested having example of houses done appropriately, which could also encourage people to update or maintain their homes in an historic manner.

Mr. Buckle noted that the Planning Board is a unified Planning/Zoning Board in Matawan and since the construction office is consolidated with Aberdeen and they don't have an historic preservation entity this will be new to them.

Ms. Arnold shared that after reviewing many ordinances, she watched several meetings in Maplewood, which operates similarly to Manhattan, where people come in with an architect, present plans, and ask advice and with approval goes to the Planning Board for permit.

Affordability was an issue some homeowners brought up too, so there must be options with different price points. Councilmember Russell added that affordability can affect businesses too.

Mr. Orr noted that section 237.7, concerning certificates of appropriateness, doesn't really emphasize the advisory nature of the ordinance. Restoring to historic appropriateness can cost a lot more and there shouldn't be the perception that the commission is looking for authority [to enforce expensive upkeep].

Councilmember Russell added that there needs to be a bank of affordable options, in order to encourage derelict properties to do something without a presumption that it's costly and easier to avoid taking action. Prefers an ordinance that encourages historic upkeep. Ms. Yanny added that some vagueness could be beneficial in this regard.

Ms. Chester noted that there is a groundswell of interest in historic Matawan, and the timing is right to make a change but a certificate of appropriateness may sound intimidating. Supports owners coming before the commission for advice they can choose to use or ignore.

Mr. Buckle noted that this would work more easily with new construction coming here. Renovating or restoration would take more work.

Councilmember Russell asked about the commission identifying model properties and acknowledging or endorsing them. Even without an ordinance, endorsing historic properties can be powerful.

Ms. Yanny noted that the commission website needs to sell the historic concept but needs to balance this with suggestions and recommendations.

Mr. Buckle asked about whether the Stanley Fisher house is considered historically appropriate, after the recent renovations. From the outside it seems like a classic example of historic restoration. Mr. Orr responded that the owner made effort in that direction but didn't believe it was restored historically in its entirety; updating in a historically appropriate manner can also be subjective.

Mr. Buckle suggested that the Council could provide property tax breaks to incentivize restoration. Mr. Orr noted that the commission has discussed property tax credits for appropriate historic preservation.

For the ordinance language, Mr. Orr noted that generally it should start by defining the structure of group and its purpose, before moving on to advisory and then enforcement responsibilities. Ms. Yanny added that the ordinance can be changed in the future, so it can start broader and be updated later.

Ms. Arnold wants to encourage this especially in the historic district. Historic towns have an atmosphere, beyond shopping and coffee and walkability, that encourages commerce in the town and brings in more businesses. Emphasized the importance of avoiding intimidating wording.

Mr. Orr offered that the Planning Board could request a certificate of appropriateness from the commission, which the commission would then issue. It wouldn't be mandatory but would be middle ground between the doing nothing, at present, and full enforcement.

Councilmember Russell asked if other towns have the authority to designate homes appropriate for this process. Ms. Arnold responded that many other towns note what homes can be considered historic and get information about maintaining it in this way. People may ignore commission suggestions, or won't be able to afford to follow guidelines. However, if guidelines are too relaxed then people will wonder what's the point and disregard them.

Ms. Yanny thinks it's essential that the commission be included in the conversation when things go before the Planning Board. Councilmember Russell asked about crafting language.

Ms. Denholtz Lewandowski offered language that any application and plan before the Planning Board for a property in the Matawan Historic District shall also be submitted to the commission concurrently.

Ms. Chester stated that the commission previously got a list of building permits and reviewed it to see what was in the historic district, but it was after the fact once the building permit was already issued. The commission was never told ahead of time about the applications, even when the property was in the historic district.

Mr. Orr thinks most of the draft language can be used as is but must determine what would be optional versus mandatory. As a first step the commission needs to determine what properties are within the historic district before expanding the district or creating a new one. Councilmember Russell added the commission could also designate buildings not in the district but of historic nature.

Ms. Chester and Mr. Buckle referenced a list by (Al Salvaline) of buildings 100+ years old, located throughout the town.

Councilmember Russell was asked how this ordinance would be received, to which he replied that he thinks it would be well received if it's worded reasonably, the commission provides its research and can explain how it works in other towns – maybe by calling other similar commissions. A presentation to council by the commission will be well received.

Overwhelming extension of gratitude to Ms. Arnold for leading this effort and for her thorough research. Councilmember Russell imagines that the Council will be impressed by the thorough research that was done, and offered to call a counterpart in an exemplary town to better understand their approach.

Discussion/Public Comment

Ms. Arnold and Ms. Denholtz Lewandowski mentioned that the commission was established as the "Historical Sites Commission," not "Historic Sites Commission." Ms. Denholtz Lewandowski previously requested the webpage be updated to refer to the commission as Historical.


Next meeting scheduled for Thursday, October 12, 2023 at 7pm.

Upcoming historical events include Thurs. Sept. 28th 6:30pm jeopardy and 7:30pm video reenactment.

Adjournment

Motion to adjourn: Chester 2nd: Yanny Ayes: all present Nays: none
Adjourned: 8:27pm

Respectfully submitted,



Amy Denholtz Lewandowski
Recording Secretary