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Town of Stafford

Stafford Historical Advisory Commission

Warren Memorial Town Hall

1 Main Street

Stafford Springs, CT 06076

Veterans Meeting Room

October 30, 2017; 7 p.m.


TOWN CLERK

REVISED
11-02-2017

Minutes of the Special Meeting

1. **The special meeting was called to order at 7:01 p.m.** Members present were Leonard Clark, Chairman; Donald Passardi, Vice Chairman; John Perrier, Town Selectman; Maureen Griffith; Becky Kraussmann; Roger Ingraham; and Beth Magura, Secretary. Alternate Steve Squire was also in attendance. Six out of six appointed members of the Stafford Historical Advisory Commission (SHAC) were present, therefore a **quorum was established**.
2. Donald Passardi made a motion to **accept the minutes of the 9-25-2017 meeting**. Roger Ingraham seconded the motion. Members unanimously agreed to accept the 9-25-2017 minutes.
3. Discussion and review of the state statutes ("Chapter 97a. Historic Districts and Historic Properties"), as they may relate to the Commission's mission.

(a) In the context of the state statutes, SHAC members discussed the new Planning & Zoning Commission regulation, "5.13. Adaptive Reuse Overlay Zone." Chairman Clark urged members to consider that the Historical Advisory Commission may have a broader community role, as suggested by aspects of the "Adaptive Reuse Overlay Zone." But he also pointed out that various details of the state statutes could be pertinent to SHAC's advisory mission regarding the Witt and Pinney school buildings. Members agreed with this opinion to varied extents. This is a matter to be discussed further at future meetings, as members' perceptions of this evolve and prospective action items reach consensus.

(b) SHAC members discussed various aspects of the possible establishment of a historic district in the proximity of the Witt School and Hyde Park because it may aid prospective developers in obtaining funding for rehabilitation of the building. Certain historic designations (both at the state and federal level) may convey degrees of protection and may facilitate matching grants or allow for certain tax abatements (e.g., members cited a 20% income tax credit for rehabilitation of a historic, income-producing building).

Members agree that being able to succinctly present the pros and cons of establishing a historic district is essential. In addition, members seek clarification of the distinctions between the national and state historic designations and the advantages these types might afford property owners. The State Historic Preservation Office will be contacted by Becky Kraussmann to arrange for a site visit in Stafford by a preservation staff member, who will provide expert input related to the pragmatics of establishing a historic district in the vicinity of Hyde Park. In addition, collateral materials that would

be easier to read than the CT State Statutes, yet provide substantive pros and cons related to a historic district, will be sought so SHAC members can educate themselves.

Members' opinions differed in regard to the appropriate role and responsibilities of the Historical Advisory Commission as they relate to historic districts.

Donald Passardi made a motion to table this topic until the 11/27/2017 meeting; John Perrier seconded the motion. Members unanimously agreed to the motion, and the motion was passed.

4. Discussion of research pertinent to the Hyde Park endowment that might affect the disposition of the Witt School.

During the past month, members received and had the option to read a variety of historic documents obtained from the Town Clerk's office pertaining to the Hyde Park endowment in an effort to understand the progression of events that led to building the Town's second high school (now known as the Witt School) in Hyde Park. This endeavor is aimed at confirming the ability of the Town to sell the Witt School building along with a certain amount of land and a parking lot.

Selectman John Perrier will report back to SHAC members at the 11/27/2017 meeting regarding the research done by First Selectman Tony Frassinelli and attorney Edward Muska regarding their interpretation of documents indicating that the path to sale is unhindered.

During November, SHAC members Leonard Clark, Maureen Griffith and Beth Magura will continue to delve into Town records in a due-diligence effort to ensure that no pertinent details are missed which might ill-effect future prospects for rehabilitating and reusing the Witt School.

Members also conveyed to Selectman John Perrier their dismay at not being formally invited to the 10/24/2017 presentation given by architect and developer Joe Vallone, who presented a slide show describing his completed project in Rockville, CT (i.e., Loom City Lofts, the former Roosevelt Mills). Mr. Vallone proposes to develop affordable housing (i.e., approximately 35 apartments) in the Witt School.

SHAC members who heard Mr. Vallone's presentation generally concurred that Mr. Vallone's rehabilitation of Roosevelt Mills is proof that he was able to find the necessary funding and carried through on a difficult, long-term project.

At the 10/30/2017 SHAC meeting, a lengthy discussion ensued about the pros and cons of such a project. How many school-aged children would be added to the school system? Would the project be tax revenue-neutral in the long run? Would the space available for parking vehicles be adequate? Would traffic in and out of the area be excessive for current neighbors?

SHAC member Roger Ingraham lives on Highland Terrace adjacent to the Witt building, and he provided firsthand accounts of types of traffic in and out of the area, both when the Witt building was actively a school and more recently with civic events held in Hyde Park.

5. Update by SHAC members on the School of Innovative Learning presentation, held on Oct. 18, 2017, at the Stafford Community Center.

A subset of SHAC had enough forewarning to be able to attend Nicole Waicunas's presentation. The team is now considering other facilities in Stafford for their school, the Witt representing a rehabilitation challenge for a fledging school.

a. Discussion of the need to further secure the two historic properties currently under SHAC's mandate before structural deterioration further hinders plans for adaptive use, as alluded to by SIL organizers.

Members agreed to call the attention of the Board of Selectmen to the alarmingly rapid degradation of the Witt building due to vandalism, which, sooner than later, is likely to jeopardize efforts to market the structure for rehabilitation and reuse.

Although the structure is currently equipped with an alarm, SHAC members agreed to submit in writing a statement of concern, requesting information from the Board of Selectmen about reputed plans to add a security camera system to the structure.

Roger Ingraham made a motion that SHAC communicate, as described above, with the Board of Selectmen. Donald Passardi seconded the motion. Members unanimously agreed to the motion, and the motion was passed.

6. Discussion of future plans for the Pinney School.

Due to the lengthy discussion described in Item 5, above, Becky Kraussmann made a motion to table this topic until the 11/27/2017 meeting and move it to Agenda Item #1 at the next meeting. Roger Ingraham seconded the motion. Members unanimously agreed to the motion, and the motion was passed to table the discussion.

7. Public comment

Steve Squire, SHAC alternate member, was in attendance throughout the meeting. He offered to contact a State of Connecticut employee whom he had met last winter while on Main Street. She had been discussing Enterprise Zones. He recalls that the woman had mentioned that abandoned railroad stations may qualify for certain funding. Given that Stafford's railroad station is currently occupied, this may be irrelevant to the railroad station area. But Mr. Squire will contact this person to acquire additional information for the 11/27/2017 SHAC meeting.

9. New business.

There was no new business, this being a special meeting.

10. Adjournment. Donald Passardi made a motion to **adjourn the meeting at 9:24 p.m.** Roger Ingraham seconded the motion. Members unanimously agreed to the motion. The meeting adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,



Beth Magura

Secretary

Stafford Historical Advisory Commission