

**PRINCETON
HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION**

Minutes – Regular Meeting

November 30, 2015

The regular meeting of the Historic Preservation Commission was called to order 7:30 p.m. on Monday, November 30, 2015 by Chairman Capozzoli in the Main Meeting Room of the Municipal Building.

STATEMENT OF ADEQUATE NOTICE

Pursuant to the Sunshine Law, a notice of this meeting's date, time, location and agenda was mailed to the news media, posted on the Municipal bulletin board and filed with the Municipal Clerk as required by law.

ROLL CALL AND DECLARATION OF QUORUM

Present: Julie Capozzoli
Richard Chenoweth
Elric Endersby
Shirley Satterfield
David Schure (4:30)
Roger Shatzkin
Celia Tazelaar
Robert von Zumbusch

Also present: Elizabeth Kim, Historic Preservation Officer; Jo Butler, Council Liaison

2. ANNOUNCEMENTS

No announcements.

3. DISCUSSION

- a) **Witherspoon-Jackson Potential Historic District Study
Final Report Presentation by Wise Preservation Planning, LLC**

Robert Wise and Seth Hinshaw were present. Mr. Wise stated that this area qualifies as a local preservation district per the Municipality's land use ordinance. The Witherspoon-Jackson meets historic significance and integrity criteria for a historic district as established in the land use ordinance.

Mr. Wise provided background information about his firm. He then described the efforts done for Princeton in the past involving designation including a survey done in 1980, a black historic survey in 1984 by the State and in 1990 and 1994 the NJ Historic Preservation Office determined that the district is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places.

Mr. Wise stated that two areas they decided not to include in this area would be the part of the Princeton Cemetery east of Witherspoon and the Merwick/Stanworth property. In 1807 a part of the Princeton Cemetery was set forth for African Americans. The decision to exclude this parcel

was because of the management of cemeteries and because as a cemetery it not necessary to protect since it already has a level of protect. The Merwick/Stanworth property was originally an estate which was developed in the 1940's into multi-family houses; eventually the University took it over and redeveloped through demolition therefore not considered part of the W-J history.

The study area expanded to include properties in the southern part of Witherspoon Street, across Paul Robeson Place in the downtown area, where long standing African American businesses functioned. The proposed district area also includes a portion of the eastern part of Witherspoon Street and Witherspoon Lane that contained 19th century architecture whose buildings were occupied by different nationalities. The Hageman Homes are garden-style apartments built in 1953 on Clay Street which is a very much part of the W-J neighborhood history which has also been included.

The survey of the study area was done in the summer of 2015; 395 properties were reviewed which contained 385 buildings and every streetscape in the recommended district was examined. Site surveys were done for each property, including notes, pictures and descriptions which created the inventory. Four Resource Classification were formed: 1) Contributing - a building that is architecturally and/or historically significant, contributes to the view shed, and its architectural integrity is intact. Mr. Wise advised that a majority of the buildings fall into that category. 2) Non-Contributing - buildings built after 1969 or so altered they no long hold their integrity; there are 75 buildings considered non-contributing. 3) Key Contributing - There are 4 key contributing buildings. These are buildings already on the historic national register or of very significant: Paul Robeson House, Presbyterian Church, Dorothea House and the Witherspoon School. 4) Vacant Lot.

A website was created to make it easy for a property owner to go to their property, view the history, the streetscape and learn about the community. The website is designed to grow with age.

Seth Hinshaw was then asked to provide information about the research and architecture. Mr. Hinshaw stated that the key elements of the history of the community include the earliest settlement of African-Americans in Princeton in the 18th Century. In 1766 County boundaries were mapped and no buildings can be found along Witherspoon Street although there were people living there at the time. During the American Revolution the State was unsure what to do with the various slaves in their possession but there were also slaves who were granted their freedom in 1776. They had lived and some owned land along Witherspoon on the north side of Nassau Street. Slavery was abolished in 1804 and the newly freed African-Americans moved to Princeton. In the early 20th century urban planning initiatives impacted the families and pushed them away from Witherspoon and Nassau.

Mr. Hinshaw presented a power point presentation including all the historic maps of Princeton. In 1807 the colored section of the cemetery was set aside. In the 1810's white residents who owned slaves began to give their slaves their freedom so several newly freed African-Americans moved to Princeton. Separation of the two religious congregations began its segregation in the 1830's so the Witherspoon Street Presbyterian Church was built. He then described the migration into the area by the Italians and the Irish. After 1896 when the College of NJ became Princeton University construction workers were needed along with other laborers so more African-Americans moved

into Princeton which doubled their population. At this time social clubs were organized. African-Americans typically rented homes but if they wanted to buy a home they were restricted as to where they could live. The first of the urban renewal developments had been done by Edgar Palmer, he wished to build buildings that appeared to be constructed during the American Revolution. In order to achieve this, land was purchased and buildings were torn down or relocated.

Mr. Wise stated that the demographics show where people came and went in the community, the African-American people who settled in this neighborhood remained. The result was this distinct neighborhood, the vernacular architecture and density does not exist in other areas of Princeton. The historic preservation consultant recommended design guidelines for this area in order to be sensitive to the streetscape.

Key findings for this neighborhood: Overall, this is a very vernacular setting, some front porches, a cohesive setting. Most of the functions of the homes are domestic. Typical styles are four square, bungalows and Italianate. Very few homes have visible stone foundations. He thanked everyone for all of their assistance in providing historical aspects about Princeton.

S. Satterfield read aloud a synopsis of the history of the area and the residents. The African-American citizens are a proud group of people that lived and survived in Princeton. She presented a list of over 100 names of families that have been in this town for generations. She then identified several buildings that are historically significant. Because Princeton was a Jim Crow town there were many businesses and establishments that did not welcome African-Americans. The Newspaper "the Citizen" was the local newspaper published by Henry J. Austin and dedicated to the moral, intellectual and industrial improvement of the Negro race. The corner of Hulfish and Witherspoon was called "Griggs Corner", named after Mr. Griggs who owned a restaurant in this location. The other businesses that were owned by African-American residents were identified. Significant homes of prominent African-American residents were also identified.

The meeting was then opened to the public.

Reverend Ed McEwen, III provided background of his family living in Princeton in the 1800's. He stated that because of the high taxes in Princeton the blacks in Princeton have been forced out. This is a historical site and it should be designated as a historical area.

Jay Craig, resident, stated that he had been cared for in the John Witherspoon Street area and had served in World War II. He could serve but could not attend Princeton University. 75 years ago Witherspoon Street was tree lined and very busy pedestrian traffic. This area deserves historic status.

Jim Floyd, resident, stated that this was a historic segregated neighborhood. The main trail (Witherspoon Street) was known as African Alley. The neighborhood and its characteristics were key to those who lived there and it should be recognized as a historic district.

Wendy Cotton, Executive Director Princeton Nursery School, stated that the school has been in this district for 86 years. She is in favor of having this area considered as part of this historical area.

Joshua Zinder, resident, stated that he is a local architect. He asked what the thought was about properties included in the boundary for this district, a portion of the properties across Witherspoon Street are included. Mr. Wise stated that typically you stay with the property lines. Both sides of Witherspoon were reviewed. Some properties are considered contributing so they were included. Design guidelines must be carefully considered and must be clear.

Louise Wilson, resident, supports the designation. She likes the neighborhood very much.

Linda Oppenheim, resident, commended the consultants and HPC for their work. To honor the lives of those that lived and survived in this area this area should have historic designation.

Al Carnevale, the history of this area is important to the culture. He is unsure if we need a historic district, there are six or seven homes that need refurbishment. What is the impact to those residents, what happens to the value of the homes and the taxes? He is not in favor of this until he knows the whole package.

R. von Zumbusch stated that historic preservation will help prevent tear downs which are occurring. There is no certainty that historic preservation will increase values, but it will maintain the character of the community; it will also slow the increase of property value thus stabilize it.

Neal Snyder, Princeton Tax Assessor, stated that preservation will set restrictions on the properties, if the house is sellable to everyone it is an easy sale but with restrictions the buyer is limited as to what the home would be worth. He cannot answer any questions about how much the house will be worth after designation. The neighborhood is in high demand. After re-evaluation many people in this area advised that they cannot afford their taxes. What we need is something to keep the people who lived there all of their life, have a massive reduction for seniors and retirees so they can remain there and enjoy their life. He suggested that residents talk to your State Senators. Regarding designation, he has no idea if this will help or be a hindrance.

Kristina Corvin, resident, asked what the historic district would mean, she wishes to do an addition to the rear and questioned if the cost would be increased.

Elizabeth Kim, Historic Preservation Officer, stated that there are 3 types of application. Ordinary Maintenance, Administrative Approval and an application that requires review by the full Commission. For window replacement, door replacement, foundation work that is considered ordinance maintenance and no fee is required. The owner is asked to write and advise of this work. For administrative approval, this would involve a minor change and the fee is \$75. Type 2 is what the consultant recommends which means anything that is visible from the right of way should be reviewed and this fee is also \$75.

Mary Trotman, resident, stated that she is in favor of this historic designation. This area has made Princeton a desirable area.

John Heilner, Princeton resident, this area is an integral part of Princeton, he very much supports the recommendation of Wise Preservation. He commented that he studied the evaluations of properties in historic districts for several years, what we will be seeing in this area is that people want to move here because it is Princeton. This will help the cost from going down. Any additions should be in keeping with the existing design.

Daniel Harris, Princeton resident, stated that he is speaking as an outsider. He is a child of white supremacy for all of his life, the people in this neighborhood had suffered from segregation. Here in Princeton Mr. Palmer did his work in the bulldozing and removal of populations. If we erase the history of the people in this neighborhood we will have no history to debate, no lessons to learn and no acts of human kindness.

Yina Moore, resident, stated that her grandfather migrated to Princeton in 1896. Her grandmother did piece work for wealthy residents of Princeton and the family grew in this area. The history of the neighborhood is substantiated by the report and the historic commission member Shirley Satterfield. Designation is critical, it is more threatening, more immediate to have the rising values for the homes in area, including some homes that have not upgraded, and she recommended the creation of a zoning document to protect the character of the neighborhood currently under assault. She is pursuing the resurrection of the Witherspoon Jackson Development Corporation, a non-profit organization which will raise funds to help struggling owners from rising taxes, extraordinary cost due to routine maintenance, help guide the design or ordinary construction.

Sean Owen, resident, stated that he just moved in to this area one month ago. Very happy to be a part of the neighborhood. In favor of keeping the key contributing structures in the neighborhood. Propose a zoning ordinance be prepared to now allow tear downs in this area. Regarding historic preservation this should be done only by the homeowner. It is not a board's right to tell an individual what to do with their home.

Thomas Parker, resident, supports the idea of historic designation for this area. In favor of stabilizing the prices so this neighborhood can survive.

Bill Urian, resident, stated that the information on his property 171 John is incorrect. His house was built in 1994, it is a modular pre-fab house. It was not constructed in 1919 as is indicated in the report. He asked what his restrictions would be. It is a pre-fab house and should not be considered historic and asked if it is possible for some homes in the area to not be included in the designation. Those homes that are historic would receive a plaque identifying it has historic. He said that although he was never notified of the surveys, he is in favor of historic designation of this area.

Richard Owen, licensed architect in the State and professional planner, he supports designation and is opposed to tear downs. When improvements are desired, the board dictates what can be done on the home. Costs will go up significantly for improvements since some of the materials used on these homes are no longer recommended for the facade. There are many neighborhoods in surrounding communities that are historic. He agrees with what HPC is trying to accomplish but homeowners will be impacted when improvements are considered.

Paul Daniels, resident, stated that he has a problem with the spread of designation, his property was improved, no changes to the façade or the porch. There are a lot of home in disrepair in the neighborhood, there has been no renovations in 60 years so further impediment on saving homes in the area, more structures may be lost. He questioned if the demographics support redevelopment because the costs for refurbishment may be greater.

Kip Cherry, resident, stated that she has been involved in forming a number of historic districts. We must never forget segregation and what occurred in this neighborhood. She recommends a Type 2 district designation which will be very flexible and will help encourage repair of homes with a budget. Feels that there will be fewer tear downs and fewer mega mansions in the neighborhood. This historic district has been a long time coming.

Leighton Newlin, resident, stated that we should all try to embrace diversity. Thank you for the Wise Group for an extraordinary presentation and thank you Shirley for capturing Princeton in its own unique way. He supports the historic designation and preservation of the streetscape.

Wilma Solomon, resident, thanked the commission members and Wise Preservation for the report. This is an opportunity for our neighborhood to come together and understand the African-American community. She has concerns about what would happen to this neighborhood if it does not receive historic designation. This will respect the history of the area.

Hendricks Davis, resident, stated that he attended the first meeting of this designation, he did have questions and reservations about a blanket designation and asked for more information. He thinks this is going to allow him to affirm that this is really a significant undertaking for town of Princeton and we should do all in our power to designate the area an historic district. Still has questions about the impact so some of the properties and he strongly feels that some structures should not be considered historic. This will provide an opportunity to provide housing for low income individuals to purchase or rent affordable homes.

Alfred Kahn, resident, hates to see the animosity that is going on here. You cannot maintain the buildings if you don't get rent to pay for maintaining the buildings. Noted the large developers constructing in the area, we need rehabilitations, he owns one building with excellent tenants, the designation will not impact him at all but we should all be together on this.

Edie Kaminer, resident, stated that she is a new homeowner. There are not many areas in Princeton where the homes are affordable. Wants her home purchase to appreciate over time since it is one of her largest investments.

Frank Smith, business owner and resident, he is in favor of designation but has concerns about some details including those who are on a fixed income. His mother has a house that has a slate roof, he asked what would happen if this needs to be replaced. Does a slate roof have to be replaced with slate because this requirement would be extremely expensive. The history of this area is very rich but we have to consider the people who are on a fixed income.

James Kilgore, Princeton Packet, three buildings are owned by the Packet are office uses and one of the buildings is considered non-contributing. He asked if this should still be included in the district. Also after the AvalonBay development is completed, he is hopeful that this district would encourage a small market so the community on both sides of Witherspoon Street will become a walking community.

Stephanie Chorney, resident, thinks that the people in this community do not know about the historic significance of this area. A museum should be considered to provide the history.

Sam Bunting, resident, stated that he upgraded his property for a market rate affordable rental unit but his expenses do not provide extra income for additional renovations. Concerned about the potential costs down the road when improvements are considered.

Bernadine Hines, resident, stated that the neighborhood has always been a contained controlled neighborhood. It was put there intentionally and the people were put there intentionally to be watched, controlled and monitored. We have now come to a point where we made the neighborhood our own, we did what we could with what we were given and now the town wants the neighborhood back. Without this designation the history will be lost.

6. **ADJOURN**

Being that there was no other business before the Commission, motion was made by C. Tazelaar and E. Endersby seconded the motion to adjourn the meeting at 11:30 pm. Motion carried.

Respectfully submitted,



Kerry A. Philip
HPC Recording Secretary