

WESTTOWN TOWNSHIP HISTORICAL COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES

Westtown Municipal Building, 1039 Wilmington Pike
Tuesday, November 14, 2023 - 7:00 PM

In attendance: Chair Pamela Boulos (PB), and Members David Walter (DW), Dan Campbell (DC), Patrick McDonough (PM), Paul Vartan Sookiasian (PVS), Stephen Wahrhaftig (SW), and Stephen Dabrowski (SD). Also present was Mila Carter, Assistant Township Manager.

Call to Order

Pam Boulos called the meeting to order at 7:00 pm.

Adoption of Agenda (PB/DW) 5-0

Pam Boulos made a motion to adopt the agenda as presented. David Walter seconded. All were in favor of the motion.

Approval of Minutes (PM/SW) 5-0

Patrick McDonough made a motion to adopt the minutes as presented. Stephen Wahrhaftig seconded. All were in favor of the motion.

Public Comment (Non-agenda items)

None.

New Business

1. Participation

A. Chester County Historic Preservation Network

Mr. Wahrhaftig provided a recap of the 2023 Fall Workshop organized by the Chester County Historic Preservation Network which was predominantly focused on the Chester County America250PA planning, heritage tourism planning and themes, how to select and give a successful program, and specific case studies. He felt that the main objective of the County was to enhance tourism through a variety of planned activities. He explained that the County came up with several main themes for celebration activities, such as natural landscape, cultural landscape, evolving values, Philadelphia campaign, iron and steel, and creative expression, all or some of which might not be applicable to several municipalities. Mr. Wahrhaftig further noted that the County is developing a marketing toolkit that is envisioned to be used by municipalities for all materials, publications and websites pertaining to America250 activities. He was concerned that the County was not proactively seeking feedback on the creation of such toolkit and felt that it was important for municipalities to participate in all America250 discussions. He reminded the HC that the County has already designated a webpage with resources, which will continue to evolve as specific planning activities take place. He announced that there might be grants offered through America250PA for municipalities to prepare for celebration and suggested to come up with ideas for long-lasting initiatives, such as the installation of

historic interpretive signage and/or preservation of historic resource. Ms. Carter asked whether there was a concern of duplicate activities taking place in close proximity. Mr. Wahrhaftig noted that many attendees raised the same question and the County suggested hosting a list of all activities with dates on the website to minimize scheduling conflicts. He also suggested to consider incorporating Oakbourne Mansion and the Village of Darlington Corner (with collaboration with Thornbury Township) with focus on agricultural history. Pam Boulos suggested to have a living history museum at Oakbourne Mansion and to reach out to Amish community through the Westtown Amish Market to see if they might be interested in participating. David Walter suggested to consider sponsored lecture series that can focus on the County's themes without a need to travel to specific areas. Mr. Wahrhaftig thought it was a great idea but believed that the goal of celebration activities is to get people to visit places to boost tourism and local economy. Stephen Dabrowski asked about the heritage center at Marshallton and whether something similar could be installed in Westtown. Ms. Carter explained that the center was supported by the Brandywine Battlefield Heritage Interpretation Plan (HIP) that Westtown participated in, but was not chosen as a location for such center. She wondered whether it might be a possibility now considering the future acquisition of the portion of the Crebilly Farm with Darlington Inn. Mr. Wahrhaftig suggested for Dan Campbell to be designated as the HC's liaison for America250PA to participate in the meetings and keep the HC up to date on any progress and opportunities. The HC anonymously agreed.

B. Urban Centers Forum – Historic, Habitable, and Hospitable

Mr. Wahrhaftig recapped the Urban Centers Forum organized by the Chester County Planning Commission that focused on the Chester County Planning Commission Adaptive Reuse Guide, lessons learned from completed adaptive reuse projects, historic resource ordinances, historic tax credits, and Historic Commission education. He announced that the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission (PHMC) is developing a Village Preservation Guide and believed that the Village of Darlington Corner might qualify as a lost village or hamlet. Mr. Wahrhaftig also explained that the County has funding available for assistance with historic ordinances. He also noted that grant funds might be available for historical interpretation of villages whether existing or former. Mr. Wahrhaftig suggested for the HC to potentially explore the applicability of village designation to the Darlington Inn and to reach out to the Community Preservation Coordinator at the PHMC for any questions pertaining to funding opportunities. Ms. Carter added that the Chester County Planning Commission has previously developed a Village Design Guide, sometime in 1996, and wondered whether the County was working towards updating that planning document. She thought it would be beneficial for the HC to read it.

Old Business

1. Ordinance Amendments - Historic Resources

Pam Boulos recapped that draft ordinance amendments have been presented to the Board of Supervisors to collect feedback and tentative approval for moving to the next steps. She believed that the proposed changes were well received and explained that

after the Township solicitor reviews the language, the HC would reach out to property owners of historic resources to gain input prior to initiating a formal amendment process.

2. Community Engagement

A. History Lectures

David Walter provided a summary of the first history lecture given on November 4 about Camp Elder. He noted there were about 20 attendees. Mr. Wahrhaftig thought that more effort could be made to promote such events and provided an example of East Brandywine Township's speaker series program that he felt was very well organized and presented in such a way that attracted participation. He suggested in the future to include background information about the speaker and photographs and promote it more widely on social media. He expressed concern that such announcements might get lost in the body of an email sent to the Township subscribers and recommended sending email notifications specific to the event to generate excitement. Patrick McDonough proposed to provide an option for subscribers to sign up for the HC related content, which he felt would be helpful to know who to send the emails to about historic related initiatives. Mr. Wahrhaftig provided examples of various marketing platforms, some of which might be free, to utilize for such purposes. Paul Vartan Sookiasian suggested to utilize RSVP functions to determine potential attendance and to send reminder emails to those who signed up. Ms. Carter promised to look into whether these email suggestions could be incorporated and asked about the plans for the next lecture and advocated to plan early to ensure larger attendance. The HC agreed to review a list of potential topics that was previously compiled at the next meeting to schedule the next lecture.

3. Community Education

A. Historic Markers

Mr. Wahrhaftig provided a handout with the summary of his research on Sarah Starkweather. He pointed out the inconsistency in when she became the superintendent, which he felt was important because if the reports written by her and about her from the school district are correct, she might be America's first superintendent of schools. Mr. Wahrhaftig explained that Elizabeth Powell, of Townsontown, Maryland is believed to be America's first superintendent, but the date of her appointment is six years later than the potential date for Sarah Starkweather. The HC expressed support for his efforts in continuing exploring the resources to clarify the dates. Mr. Walter suggested to reach out to Robin Young, who has been successful at securing funding for historic markers commemorating women in history, for assistance.

B. Newsletter Articles

Pam Boulos provided an update that she is working on the article about serpentine stone in architecture and asked for a feedback on which photographs to include. Mr. Wahrhaftig asked Ms. Carter about the general guidelines for the articles so that the HC is aware of the expectations and rules.

Public Comment (All Topics)

None.

Announcements

1. Dan Campbell noted the upcoming meeting pertaining to the Chester County Heritage Tourism Messaging & Marketing on Thursday, November 16, 2023 at 4 pm via Zoom. Ms. Carter would send a link to all HC members.

Adjournment (SW/SD) 7-0

David Walter made a motion to adjourn at 8:43 pm. Paul Sookiasian seconded. All were in favor of the motion.

Next HC meeting: **December 12, 2023 @ 7:00 pm**

HC Representative at next Board of Supervisors Meeting:

- **Monday, December 4, 2023 @ 7:30 pm** – David Walter

Respectfully submitted,
Paul Vartan Sookiasian
Historical Commission Secretary