

Town of New Paltz Historic Preservation Commission Meeting
Wednesday November 19th 2014 7:30PM - 9:30PM at the Community Center

Commissioners attending: John Orfitelli (Chair), Helen Christie (Vice Chair), Caryn Sobel (via conference call), and Dave Gilmour

Also attending was Neil Larson of Larson Fisher Associates

Agenda

1. Public Comment
2. Review/Approve Minutes from August
3. Carolee Schneemann Inquiry
4. Landmark Initiative Grant
5. Recruitment for Commission Seat

Minutes

Meeting was called to order at 7:40pm by John Orfitelli.

1. **Public Comment:** No public comments were received.
2. **Review/Approve Minutes from August:** Dave Gilmour requested that approval of the minutes from August be moved to our next meeting in December.
3. **Carolee Schneemann Inquiry:** Julie Finch contacted John Orfitelli on behalf of Carolee Scheemann to inquire about having Carolee's property at 435-437 Springtown Road designated as a local landmark. Unfortunately, the property is located in the Town of Rosendale, and therefore not within our jurisdiction. John provided a response to Julie and Carolee that while the property is located within the New Paltz school district (which results in a New Paltz mailing address) municipal taxes are paid to Rosendale where the property is located. John suggested that Carolee check with the Town of Rosendale to determine if there is a group focused on preserving local history and land marking who may be interested in learning about her property.
4. **Landmark Initiative Grant:** John Orfitelli presented the Commission with the full set of materials completed by Neil Larson as specified in the Landmark Initiative Grant. This project was aimed at educating property owners on the importance of a local landmark designation, explaining the designation process, and compiling the documentation to support the designation of fifteen stone houses as local historic landmarks. Larson Fisher Associates was chosen to assist with our outreach efforts, conduct research on the properties, and provide the Commission with a set of nomination packages to support the designation of the fifteen stone houses as Local Historic Landmarks. The project was completed on schedule and according to plan. Neil Larson participated with the Commission in outreach efforts to stone house owners and provided an excellent overview of the context for the evaluations along with a full set of nomination packages for use by the Commission in completing the designation process for fifteen properties.

John Orfitelli worked closely with Neil Larson and SHPO in formulating the grant work-scope, as well as, participating in meetings with individual stone house owners at their homes. John and Neil found that stone house owners take great pride in their properties and are very aware of the historic significance that these buildings represent to the community. However, they are reluctant to place trust with the Commission who would oversee and approve any exterior changes despite assurances to the contrary. Several cited how a landmark designation would adversely impact their ability to sell the property.

While the Commission does have the authority to unilaterally designate a property as a local landmark, this Commission prefers to work with property owners as partners in the process. Based on our first-hand experience with stone house owners, however, a joint landmark designation process will clearly not succeed without some form of incentive to the property owners.

A discussion by the Commission of various ideas for incentives quickly focused on the most effective incentive, namely, some form tax relief to owners of historic landmarks.

- Straight x% tax abatement
- Suspending changes to assessed value due to enhancements
- Easements granted to a homeowner by a Conservancy

The Commission asserts that the inventory of historic properties represents a significant economic and fiscal benefit to the Town. Any tax incentive would be money invested in maintaining this set of assets and therefore preserving the economic viability of the town, as well as, it's historic legacy.

The Easement concept involves an agreement between the homeowner and a Conservancy Group that would give the Commission authority over changes to the exterior features of the property. The existing Certificate of Appropriateness (CoA) process would be used by the Commission to oversee and approve changes. In exchange, the assessed value of the property would be adjusted lower to reflect that portion of the 'property value' donated to the Conservancy and accordingly the property tax would be reduced for the homeowner.

Here are two examples of the Conservancy concept currently being implemented:

- Conservation easements for donations of parcels to the National Register
- Conservation façade easements, maintained by the trust holding the easement

Creating an easement for Historic Landmarks could involve a petition to the Wallkill Valley Land Trust to request that they include facades. The Town of New Paltz could also arrange to be the Conservator... a natural extension of the Town's role in the existing Open Space Plan and the Historic Preservation Commission.

The Commission will conduct further research through contacts with:

- Town Assessor regarding Conservation Easements (Helen)
- Daniel McKay from the Preservation League on New York (Dave)
- Dan Torres on how preservation fits into the Town's Comprehensive Plan (John)

5. Recruitment for Commission Seat: This item remains open.

Motion to adjourn was made by John Orfitelli, seconded by Caryn Sobel. Motion carried. Meeting adjourned at 9:15pm.

Next Meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, December 17th at 7:30pm in the Community Center.