

Town of New Paltz Historic Preservation Commission Meeting

Tuesday February 16th 2021 7:00PM – 9:00PM via Zoom

Commissioners attending: John Orfitelli (Chair), Susan DeMark, Matt Maley, and Dawn Elliott

Agenda

1. Public Comment
2. Review/Approve January Minutes
3. Implementation of RETT for HPC
4. Commission Plans for Outreach in 2021

The on line Zoom meeting was called to order at 7:05pm with a motion from Susan DeMark and seconded by Matt Maley. Motion carried.

Pledge of Allegiance

Minutes:

1. **Public Comment:** No public comments were received.
2. **Review/Approve November Minutes:** The Commission reviewed, and approved [minutes from our January 19th meeting](#) as amended and John Orfitelli agreed to post on our Town web page.
3. **Implementation of RETT for HPC:** The Commission continued to discuss implementation of the Preservation Fund for purposes of facilitating historic preservation efforts.

On January 21st, John Orfitelli and Susan DeMark met via phone with Jennifer Robinson, Director of Preservation Services at the [Preservation Alliance for Greater Philadelphia](#), about façade easements. Here are notes/links from that call:

- The [Alliance's easement program](#) has been employed throughout the Philadelphia region since 1979 to preserve historically certified properties and residences such as the Drake Tower in Center City, the Alden Park Apartments in Germantown, an Oskar Stonorov modernist house in Chester County, and more than 240 other historic properties. The benefit to donors is a Fed Tax charitable contribution.
- A [Letter of Intent](#) describes the requirements for how the process works. In particular, donors are required to pay *5% of the independently appraised value of the easement. To cover the direct out-of-pocket expenses—primarily legal expenses—incurred in the preparation of the easement materials and to support the easement program and future monitoring activities.*
- A sample easement agreement and list of appraisers is provided on the [Easement Site](#). Jennifer suggested we contact Michael J. Samuels of Clarion/Samuels Associates to provide additional insight into the façade appraisal process.
- Jennifer agreed to find a façade easement for single-family house from their inventory that will provide expenses for the appraisal, legal fees, and other related expenses.
- Use of grants to support property owners of locally designated landmarks would be a highly effective incentive.
- We discussed several points regarding how the HPC could proceed, namely,

- Consider using the Preservation Fund to cover the 5% for related expenses for a façade easement.
- List candidate properties in National Register as a prerequisite for easement tax incentives.
- Create an information package for property owners with details about their property and how it fits into the context of the history of New Paltz.
- Build awareness of the importance of historic preservation within the community through social media and post-pandemic in person meetings.
- Provide 'how to' information for repairs to historic buildings along with contacts to local resources.

The efforts by the HPC should be aimed at establishing an understanding within the community of why preservation is important for New Paltz. Once property owners embrace the notion that it is in their best interest to become involved in preservation, they will presumably be more inclined to participate in an easement or local designation process.

On January 23rd, John Orfitelli called Attorney Christine Chale to obtain clarification regarding possible application of the Preservation Fund for grants to homeowners of designated landmarks. Christine explained that the Town simply cannot provide funds to homeowners from tax dollars for any reason. When the Town spends money, it must get something tangible in return. In the case of a conservation easement, a property owner agrees to deed development rights to the Town in exchange for a one-time payment. The arrangement is conducted through a binding legal contract between the property owner and the Town that remains with the property in perpetuity. Façade easements are basically handled the same way with monies paid by the Town for deeded rights to the building façade. In both cases a third party is involved (usually a Trust) that manages and enforces the easement.

Here are a couple options that the Commission can pursue:

- Christine feels that **linking a Local Historic Landmark Designation to a façade easement** is doable. This would allow review/approval for changes by the HPC via the existing CoA process. The Easement, which would be held by the Town, would also need to be supported by a third party. The Preservation Fund would be used to cover all expenses (mostly legal) associated with creating the façade easement.
- **The Commission can explore creating a legal arrangement between the Town and property owners of designated local landmarks like that used for the façade easements.** Specifically, deeding the right to make any changes to the exterior of a house or building that has been designated a local landmark by the Commission. The property owner would be required to first obtain approval and a Certificate of Appropriateness issued by the HPC.

In this case, however, rather than the Town paying out a lump sum to the owner, the Town would provide funds incrementally through a matching grant process administered by the Preservation Fund Board.

In both a façade easement contract and a landmark designation contract, the Town receives a deed to property rights. In the case of the designation, payments would be made incrementally and for specific maintenance items aimed at preserving the property.

The incremental distribution approach would avoid the lump sum distribution and lack of controls as to how the owner chooses to use the funds paid by the Town.

4. **Commission Plans for 2021:** The Commission discussed several ideas aimed at expanding public awareness of landmark designations and the importance of preservation of our historic assets. Matt Maley provided this sketch as an example for how we could create a little narrative with historical details...like Jan Elting's eldest son, Roelif. Matt's ability to create an

illustration and narrative presents an exciting option for making historic materials fun and meaningful to the community.

The Commission discussed making a homeowner package specific to each property using the historic data already available from the HPC site along with helpful information about restoration techniques of historic properties.

Susan DeMark agreed to draft an outline for the content and check with the Hudson-Mohawk Vernacular Architecture organization for examples of similar documents that they may already provide. John Orfitelli agreed to check with the Kingston HPC for examples as well.

The goal is to gather material for one property into a document and use it as a template that we can replicate for all the historically significant properties. These homeowner packages will be distributed to the respective homeowners who hopefully will learn how their property contributes to the historic fabric of New Paltz.

Motion to adjourn was made by Susan DeMark and seconded by Matt Maley. Motion carried. Meeting adjourned at 8:35pm.

Next Meeting will be held via Zoom at 7:00pm on Tuesday, March 16th, 2021.

