

HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION

Minutes of the meeting held on May 22, 2008 at the
Department of Land Use and Growth Management

Present: Hal Willard, Chairman
Jim Grusholt, Vice-Chairman
Robert Gibbs, Member
Mary Hayden, Member
Teri Wilson, LUGM Staff
Ruth Davis-Rodgers, LUGM Staff

Call to Order: The meeting was called to order at 4:10 p.m.

Welcome

Mr. Willard welcomed Susan West Montgomery of the Maryland Association of Historic District Commissions who is in the process of visiting historic commissions around the state.

Approval of Minutes

The minutes of the April 24, 2008 meeting were approved as submitted.

Update on Historic Roads Survey

Ms. Wilson informed the HPC that the consultant, A.D. Marble has submitted Maryland Inventory forms for four of the twelve roads to be surveyed. They are All Faith Church Road, Bushwood Wharf Road, Millstone Landing Road, and White's Neck Road. Mr. Willard asked if the work will be completed by the June 30th deadline. Ms. Wilson said that since the historic context document was prepared in the 2006 Phase I survey that there is adequate time to survey all twelve roads.

Text Amendments for Historic Roads

Ms. Wilson and Mr. Willard reported that the proposed text amendments for establishing design guidelines for the designated historic roads was presented to the Board of County Commissioners for a first reading on May 13th. The Commissioners disliked the use of "shall" phrases for the guidelines and wanted the word "should" instead. They also had concerns about property owners' rights. Accordingly they directed the Department of Land Use and Growth Management to revise the text amendments and resubmit them at a later date.

Conversation with Susan West Montgomery

Ms. Montgomery said that she visited ten historic commissions last year and that St. Mary's County is her second visit this year. The commissions she has visited are both urban and rural and have different needs. She noted that she had read the St. Mary's historic ordinance (Chapter 42 of the Zoning Ordinance) and the county design guidelines and rules of procedure. Her assessment is that the St. Mary's County HPC has a very good structure in place and is poised for defensible decision making, but because there are so few locally designated historic landmarks, the HPC has not been able to apply its resources.

Ms. Wilson mentioned that the first goal she and the HPC achieved was obtaining Certified Local Government status from MHT. This has allowed St. Mary's County to apply for grants- the two most recent being the Phase I and II Historic Road Survey.

Ms. Montgomery noted that it is more difficult to interest owners of historic properties in rural areas to seek local historic landmark status, and that it is easier when historic resources are next to each other.

Mr. Gibbs asked how proactive other historic districts are in promoting local designation. Ms. Montgomery noted that jurisdictions that have a lot of project reviews come before them function as regulatory bodies and do not actively promote districting. In some places like Baltimore and Montgomery County there are non-profit groups that function to promote historic preservation.

Ms. Montgomery said that Calvert County is more similar to Saint Mary's and has focused more on education and did one grant project on tobacco, the book titled The Money Crop and they are currently working on an oral history of tenant farmers. She suggested that St. Mary's and Calvert HPCs could attend each other's meetings.

Mr. Gibbs said that he believes that a very important problem facing St. Mary's County is the preservation of rural character. Ms. Montgomery said that it is more difficult to regulate landscapes and she is looking into whether there are successful measures that have been developed to preserve landscapes.

Mr. Gibbs thought that there may be a way to encourage compatible building styles that harmonize with what already exist in the county. Ms. Montgomery said that such an approach is more of a conservation district than a historic district and it can work. She noted that in some areas have created conservation districts to prevent "McMansionization."

Mr. Gibbs said that the Breton Beach neighborhood is facing such a challenge. It may be possible that the homeowners there would be receptive to forming a conservation district.

Ms. Montgomery said that the HPC could look into offering a historic easement program which would give owners a tax brake for donating an easement on a historic property. The HPC would have to monitor the easements to ensure that the terms are followed.

Mr. Gibbs asked if the historic preservation movement is embracing the new green building interest that is developing. Ms. Montgomery said that the National Trust has published several papers that point out that preserving historic buildings is green since fewer resources are used in that effort than in creating new green buildings.

Ms. Montgomery mentioned that one of the sessions at the upcoming preservation conference in Hagerstown will deal with this issue. The governor's Smart Growth representative will participate in a panel about Priority Funding Areas and she wants to advocate for giving credit for historic buildings that are retained within Priority Funding Areas.

Ms. Davis-Rodgers noted that many farmers are coming in to apply to subdivide their property sometimes for children but also for subdivision development. She said that many of them are unhappy about doing so but see no alternative. They often bring old deeds to show how long their families have owned their property.

Many are also proud of their farmhouses, but are often at a loss as to how interest potential buyers. It was suggested that a pamphlet showing typical St. Mary's houses could be prepared to hand out at the permitting counter.

The HPC thanked Ms. Montgomery for her visit.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 5:20 p.m.

Submitted by: _____ Signed by: _____