

NEW CASTLE COUNTY HISTORIC REVIEW BOARD

ANNUAL REPORT

2011

In 2011 the agendas of the New Castle County Historic Review Board (HRB) continued to reflect the much reduced pace of development in Delaware. Business before the board increased from its lowest point of 2009-10. Presentations or previews of three major land development plans containing historic assets suggest some forward economic momentum. Too much of the HRB's work, however, reflected rising concerns over protection of some of New Castle County's historic assets that are on or eligible for the National Register of Historic Places, have Historic Zoning Overlays and/or historic preservation easements held by a governmental or nonprofit entity.

Land Development Plans

The HRB reviewed three major and one minor land-development plans deemed by the Department of Land Use to have potentially significant historic resources: App. 2011-0029: Deats Farm, 4564 Summit Bridge Road; App. 2011-0168: Whitehall, 948 Lorewood Grove; App. 2011-0028: Roberts Farm, 263 and 315 Taylor's Bridge Road; App. 2010-0566: A.I. DuPont Hospital, 1600 Rockland Road; App. 2010-0825: All In Acres, 640 Blackbird Station Road. In all cases the proposals

to the HRB were clear, thoughtful, and forward thinking, as typified by the Nemours Foundation's plans for a major hospital expansion. In reviewing those proposals the HRB determined that no additional levels of protection or fieldwork were required. A fourth major land development plan came before the HRB as a preview rather than an application because of the evolutionary nature of the project. This concept plan for the area around Summit Bridge Airport showed an interesting mix of industrial and residential development that will require additional review by the HRB when completed.

Demolition Permits

Five demolition permits came before the HRB in 2011, and all were dealt with expeditiously. Under section 06.03.19 the HRB can hold an application for up to nine months should it determine the resource rises to a level of significance, as listed in Unified Development Code section 40.15.110, that the board needs time to work with the applicant on options other than demolition.

One of the demolition permits was for the Murphy House, located at 1601 Rockland Road, just outside the entry to the A.I. DuPont Hospital. This application attracted great public interest and concern, ranging from concerned citizens, professional nonprofit organizations, and government entities at the state and national levels. In the end, though, the fate of this nineteenth-century farmhouse rested not with the HRB but with the Delaware Department of Transportation (DelDOT), which held, but chose not to enforce, an historic preservation easement on the property. The HRB worked with the applicant, the Nemours Foundation,

within the parameters of prevailing County Code, asking the applicant to try to find and subsidize a buyer willing to move the structure and to document the house to professional preservation standards before moving forward on demolition. The applicant complied with all the Board's requests.

A second property, Ball Cottage, was built as a dormitory for the old Ferris School, now a part of the larger holdings of the Delaware Department of Service for Children, Youth and The Family. This application first came to the HRB in 2006 and then was put on hold while the applicant attempted to study alternatives to demolition. The hold ended in 2011 when the state agency determined that there was no cost-effective alternative.

Of the remaining demolition permits, two (2335 McCoy Road and 1930 Brackenville Road) were approved with no delay and one (1019 Corner Ketch Road) was withdrawn because of a property transfer.

Historic Zoning Overlays

Three properties with HZO status came before the HRB with six applications for changes. Three of those applications came from Rockwood, a property owned by New Castle County. One application sought guidance on signage that would make the park and museum more easily accessible to visitors. The HRB encouraged staff to consider visitor needs, believing that size and placement are more important than number. The other two applications came from the caterer who leases the visitor center. Over the course of the year efforts approved by the HRB moved from roll-up acrylics to glass and metal panels as the caterer strove to find a noise abatement

solution for a neighborhood concern. The HRB approved both efforts even though the second required penetration of original building materials.

The Wellness Community sought permission to replace windows in their headquarters, the Grubb/Armour Tenant House at 4810 Lancaster Pike. After reviewing replacement window specifications and making site visits, the HRB quickly approved the application.

Two applications, one major and one minor, were received on 2495 Pulaski Highway (La Grange). The first, for sewer work, was approved easily after the HRB reviewed existing archaeological reports. The second application proved less straightforward for the HRB because the application was for a road to be constructed through land that constitutes a portion of the buffer created in decisions by the HRB on previous applications. After reviewing the application with the owner's representative and with a representative of DelDOT, the HRB denied the application because of seemingly contradictory statements by the testifying representatives and the lack of need for a road through an area that, according to the owner's representative, was not slated for development.

Two exceedingly worthy properties came before the HRB with owner-proposed applications for Historic Zone Overlay status. The first, 411 Lore Avenue, was deemed by the HRB to be worthy in a number of categories designated in the UDC, most particularly its association with Collins J. Seitz, a distinguished jurist best known for his decision upheld in the seminal *Brown v. Board of Education* decision by the U.S. Supreme Court that ended segregation in public schools. The HRB found the second property, 4677 Summit Bridge Road, known as Weston, to be an

excellent example of (1) a house whose front façade reflects both Greek Revival and Italianate architecture and (2) a rare surviving property with all its outbuildings intact. The HRB thanks New Castle County Council and New Castle County Executive for affirming both designations.

Miscellaneous

In addition to the applications reviewed, the HRB completed its review of the cultural resource work done by archaeological and historic preservation teams led by two professors from the University of Delaware as part of the agreement to document and preserve elements remaining from 6580 Lancaster Pike, the Coffee Run Mission site and home of Father Edward Kenney, Delaware's first resident Roman Catholic priest, tragically burned by arsonists and then demolished without a permit. The HRB also received a presentation by a potential applicant about adaptive reuse plans that might be sought if the applicant went forward with a proposal for a resident curatorship for the New Castle owned property at 1301 Naaman's Road known as Ivyside (Bechtel Park). Lastly, the HRB was brought up to date on a property at 300-02 Philadelphia Pike, known as the Weldin House. The property has New Castle County HZO status as well as an historic preservation easement held by DelDOT. The Weldin House had appeared to be on its way to full rehabilitation until the current economic downturn. Now the community fears for the worst as the house steadily deteriorates. Currently the HRB has extremely limited power, but the DelDOT easement should be sufficient protection unless it

chooses the path it took on the Murphy House. That would be a great loss to a local community, New Castle County, and the state of Delaware.

Board and Staff Changes

In 2011 John Davis and Paresh Patel were appointed to the HRB to fill vacancies. The HRB now has a full complement of members. The HRB also experienced a change at the staff level. Christine Quinn resigned and has been replaced on a temporary basis by Valerie Cesna Cartolano. Ms. Cartolano is a Planner II with past experience assisting the HRB so we are in good hands.

As always, the HRB stands ready to discuss our work on specific applications or in general with members of Council or the County Executive's Office.

Respectfully submitted,

Barbara E. Benson, Chair

Historic Review Board