

**Historic Review Board**

**Annual Report for 2008**

**Prepared for New Castle County Executive and Council**

**by**

**Barbara E. Benson, Chairperson**

In 2008, New Castle County's Department of Land Use received 216 land development plans and 84 demolition permit applications. The process of identifying potentially historic resources on those properties begins with the County's preservation planner, Christine Quinn. Of the total of 300 applications submitted to New Castle County in 2008, she determined that 272 did not meet a threshold for potential significance as established by the Unified Development Code. For the 72 that potentially met that level of criteria, she made site visits and conducted research that further reduced the number to come before the Historic Review Board (hereafter HRB) to 15. Her role in identifying the most significant historical resources is crucial because the volume of applications is too large for a volunteer board supported by a single professional staff member to handle in the timely manner that citizens of New Castle County deserve. The process now in place thus allows the HRB to concentrate on only those resources with the highest potential for historic value.

The HRB reviewed and made recommendations to the Department of Land Use (hereafter DLU) on ten major and minor land development plans. Our recommendations ranged from full support of applications that would require removal of old buildings, such

as 1015 Kiamensi Road, or the moving of an historic structure, such as the James Morrow House at 1212 Ogletown Road. In other cases, the board recommended acceptance of plans with the addition of note(s) designed to protect or buffer historic properties within a larger development, such as 5832, 5840, and 5890 Limestone Road.

Of all of the properties reviewed in this category in 2008, the HRB needed to study most carefully the proposed application on land for office and warehouse space encompassing Parcels B, D, and F at Glasgow Commons. After careful review and substantive discussion with the applicant's representatives, the HRB recommended some changes in building locations and buffering. We also recommended additional archaeological fieldwork for this site because it holds the highest potential of yielding information and artifacts of Native American life as well as artifacts and even human remains from the Revolutionary War. Archival research and previous fieldwork in the area strongly suggest the high probability that this site contains the remains of British soldiers killed in Delaware's only battle of the Revolutionary War. Centuries earlier this area had been a central point of trade and toolmaking for Delaware's indigenous populations. I am pleased to report that the applicant shared the board's concerns and has undertaken the level of field study recommended by the HRB.

Five demolition permits came before the HRB in 2008. The board effectively engaged applicants in discussions that resulted in two withdrawn applications, one applicant-sought hold while the applicant considers applying for Historic Zoning Overlay status (hereafter HZO), and one resolution that saved a section of a mill complex. Even

on the applications where the HRB's power to delay a demolition expired, the applicant continued working with preservation professionals to save the house *in situ*, move it, or salvage materials. The only loss of a structure occurred at Elm Grange, 2424 Du Pont Highway, which burned beyond repair during the period of the permit hold. Subsequent to the fire, now under investigation by the fire marshal, the owner did hire preservation professionals to prepare documentary and photographic records before demolition.

From the chair's perspective, the outcome for 900 Greenbank Road demonstrated the value of constructive discussion that engaged the applicant, the community, and the HRB. Over the course of several months of spirited give-and-take, the applicant, the Ametek Company, offered a compromise that enabled it to demolish most of the deteriorating and vandalized buildings while saving the oldest portions, which held the greatest historical and community value. In the process the applicant also offered to landscape the area of demolition to provide a more park-like setting, an added value for the community.

The HRB also reviewed and supported three applications made by property owners for HZO: 3701 Philadelphia Pike; 201 Bellevue Parkway; and 2900 Old Limestone Road. These properties ranged from the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries and reflected the lives of past New Castle residents significant at both the local and national levels. I am pleased that County Council concurred that these properties met the highest level of architectural and/or historic merit to be accorded HZO status. The HRB also approved two adaptive reuse plans for properties with HZO. Here particularly the

board's experience and knowledge of standards and materials were of great value to the applicants.

Finally, the HRB's work included the review and approval of a National Register nomination for Rosemont, 15 ½ Cragmere Road. The designation was sought by the owners who have carefully restored this house of unusual design. Rosemont's nomination has subsequently been approved at the state and national levels and is now part of America's list of National Register properties.

While the members of the HRB bring a range of interests and expertise to the board, we all continue to work to improve our skills and the level of skills we can provide to the citizens of New Castle County. To that end, the board held a training session on a Saturday in October. The session focused first on a review of New Castle County's land-use process and the role of the HRB within that process and then on to consider the board's responsibilities for creating a full and defensible record of its meetings and hearings.

The chair also attended, at her expense, the biannual national conference of the Alliance of Preservation Commissions, held in New Orleans, to learn about activities, challenges, and best-practice standards of boards throughout the country. The County's historic preservation planner also attended the conference. One could not come away from this national meeting (as well as all of this board's own monthly hearings and business meetings) without a reinforced sense that while every area and every property is

unique, the goals of the boards throughout the county and the local, county, and state governments through which they work share the same concerns for protection of the historical, architectural, and cultural resources that provide the context and continuity for our communities now and into the future.

Respectfully submitted

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