

**Historical Commission of Birmingham Township
Minutes of the meeting of March 27, 2018**

The regular meeting of the Birmingham Township Historical Committee was called to order by Chairperson, Mike Forbes at **7:17 pm** in the township building.

PRESENT: HC Members: Kelly Fleming, Mike Forbes, John Ponticello

ABSENT: Kate Marshall, Matt Bedwell

Others present: Kimberly Venzie (Buckley, Brion, McGuire, Morris & Sommer LLP)

Karen Marshall, Chester County Heritage Preservation Coordinator

Verne Weidman

Mr. Forbes made a motion to approve the minutes from the February 27, 2018. Ms. Fleming seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

Review Guidelines and Procedures for Applications being reviewed by HC

Mr. Forbes stated that the first agenda item is to review this process for the new members and also because there was change in Chairperson of the Committee at the same time. Mr. Forbes began by asking when an applicant comes to the township to request changes to an historic resource, how do they actually get to the HC. Kim Venzie from the township solicitor's office attended this meeting to do a quick overview of the process. She provided some handouts for the members to use for reference. She provided a copy of the Birmingham Township Ordinance (Chapter 122.Zoning Article VIII. Historic District (H)) and the Guidelines that were created a couple of years ago to assist with the process. The Guidelines are like a cheat sheet that outlines the actual Ordinance. She suggested that each member read through the Ordinance in order to be familiar with the detail that is required in Birmingham Township.

Mr. Forbes stated that what he found difficult with the last applicant was that they showed up with a pre-completed Form and then the HC was attempting to validate or invalidate the applicant's responses. Ms. Venzie stated that it is acceptable for the applicant to complete the Form. However, ideally that Form should be submitted to the township and reviewed by the Zoning Officer and then provided to the HC members ahead of the meeting on which the applicant is on the HC Agenda. That would allow the HC members time to review and absorb the applicant's answers ahead of the meeting. Discussion ensued about the process for HC reviews and how we can have a better communication of the actual administrative process. Mr. Forbes stated that two items that came out of the special committee he was part of for the past year to streamline the process were: (1) that the Office have a list of all the historic resources in the township and that they verify that the applicant gets funneled into the proper channel; and (2) getting the applicant the necessary materials upfront and then advising the HC that they have an application to review. Mr. Forbes stated that was disconnected this time.

Ms. Karen Marshall asked if there are different requirements for different classifications of Historic Resources in Birmingham township. Mr. Forbes stated there are not.

Ms. Venzie indicated that the ordinance specifically outlines the timeline for the process on page 7. The HC would like to have a cover letter that explains the process to the applicant and also provides the

timeline in which the process must be followed. Pursuant to discussion, the timeframe in which the neighboring property owners are notified of an upcoming meeting may be increased to 14 days if the 7-day requirement is not specifically stated in the ordinance. Ms. Venzie will look into this issue further and advise the HC if this can be changed or not.

Mr. Forbes asked a question about how he can address the future use of the property in question 7, when he was told that was not in his purview. Mr. Forbes asked Mr. Hill for clarification. Mr. Hill stated that the HC can't ask questions about the subdivision because the question before the HC is if they can demolish the historic resource. Ms. Venzie stated that the HC can only ask questions about the future use of the site pertaining to adaptive re-use of the materials, etc. It is a natural question to want to ask as you are going through the process, however, you cannot expand on it or allow public comment on it.

Ms. Venzie stated that the 10 questions located on page two of the Guideline document are very important to be answered as they deal with the substance of the ordinance. Addressing these questions with very detailed answers provides the Board with substance when they are making the final decision based on the recommendation from the HC. The more detailed these answers are the more helpful the document is for the Board of Supervisors in making a final decision.

Ms. Fleming asked questions about the property owners rights vs. historical preservation. Ms. Marshall stated that this is why the financial hardship clause is so important.

Mr. Forbes recapped that we will revive the cover letter/sheet that was created previously for the guidelines and send to the members of the HC and to Kim Venzie. Ms. Venzie will help the HC create a timeline sheet to be used for the HC process (similar to the one used for the PC). Ms. Venzie will research the required time for the neighbor notification and determine if it can be increased to 14 days. If that is the case, it will need to be recommended to the BOS for adoption.

Ms. Venzie also noted for the HC that although there are time deadlines within the ordinance, the HC can talk with the applicant during the process and agree on extensions to those as long as the applicant is on board. Mr. Forbes stated that he will be asking the BOS to have a solicitor present the next time one of these applications comes before the HC to make sure that the process is followed correctly.

Discussion of support for township historic sites linked to the Battle of Brandywine

Ms. Marshall presented two proposals to the HC tonight:

1. She proposed that Birmingham Township join the Brandywine Battlefield National Historic Landmark Chester County Connectivity Plan in conjunction with the Brandywine Conservancy on a multi-municipal project that would be partly funded through the Vision Partnership Grant Partnership. The plan will complement the Master Plan for Birmingham that the Brandywine Conservancy has initiated for the O'Dell property. Birmingham Township can either take the lead on this or they can just agree to be a participant but have another township be a lead. The Township will need to commit to this initiative in order to get the match through the grant program. They also plan to ask Thornbury, Westtown and Pennsbury Townships to join this venture. There are no final details on the financial aspect of this commitment. This is just a conceptual discussion to see if there is interest from Birmingham. Discussion ensued about having RPOS involved in this decision. If it is decided to move forward, then Sheila from the Brandywine Conservancy will come in and discuss the next steps.

2. Ms. Marshall stated that much work in historic preservation has been done by non-profit ventures created to raise awareness within communities. Mr. Verne Weidman plans to start a Friends of the Battlefield Group to assist with the Dilworth Farm property and also Birmingham Hill. His first proposal is to start a pop-up interpretation program from 10am-2pm the first Saturday of the month from June-September at Birmingham Hill parking lot.

Secondly, Verne Weidman is an engineer by trade and he would like to obtain access to the Dilworth Farm Barn and develop a 3-year post and beam construction plan for the property. He is in contact with the Civil War Trust organization to move forward with this.

3. Ms. Marshall is also requesting that Birmingham Meetinghouse and some other private homeowners agree to be participants in the Candlelight Christmas House Tour on 12/1/2018.
4. They are proposing coordination with RPOS on a clean-up park day at Sandy Hollow and the Dilworth property on April 22, 2018. Volunteers will be provided with t-shirts and water during the clean-up process. Mr. Forbes will discuss this with Anne Siemer, the RPOS Chairperson, since they may already have a clean-up day planned.

The three action points from the discussion tonight are:

1. Park Day
2. Pop-interpretation days
3. Candlelight House tours for Saturday December 1, 2018

The longer-term item from tonight is whether Birmingham Township wants to be a part of the proposed multi-municipal vision partnership grant.

New Business

Mr. Forbes made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 8:59pm. Seconded by Mr. Ponticello and voted unanimously. The next meeting will be April 24, 2018 at 7:15pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Jennifer Boorse
HC Secretary