

**Historical Commission of Birmingham Township
Minutes of the meeting of February 23, 2021**

The regular meeting of the Birmingham Township Historical Committee was called to order by Chairperson, Mike Forbes at **7:19pm** in the township building.

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

ABSENT:

Others present: Patricia Kelly, Anne Siemer, Alan Oliver

Mr. Forbes made a motion to approve the minutes from the January 26, 2021 meeting. Ms. Fleming seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

Discussion of Battlefield Signage related topics for Birmingham Hill and Sandy Hollow

Ms. Fleming doesn't have an official update yet as she is awaiting the final approval on the wording that was submitted to the signage group (a subgroup of the Battlefield Taskforce Group consisting of Jeanine Speirs, Karen Marshall and Andrew Outten). The HC provided their input after the January HC meeting and the signage group is scheduled to discuss it on March 4th. The wording that was forwarded from the HC is in the January minutes. After that it will be able to go to the BOS for final approval and action. Ms. Fleming provided a synopsis of the signage program for Pat Kelly who is interested in joining the HC but wanted to sit in on a meeting to better understand what the committee does. Mr. Forbes noted that this signage grant project allowed for a sign to be placed in each township or municipality (location to be decided by the township) – but that the combination of signs would tell part of the story of the battle.

Ms. Siemer of Birmingham Township Recreation Parks and Open Space (RPOS) is in attendance tonight to discuss a couple items with the HC. Ms. Siemer began with a question of whether the sign that Kelly was referencing was already approved by the BOS? Kelly indicates that she had proposed this to the BOS in late 2019 (prior to when the grant monies were actually secured) – it was placed on hold then until the Brandywine Conservancy's plans for the Odell property were finalized. Once those plans were explained, it was decided to move forward with the sign. The sign will be erected at Birmingham Hill – most likely near the fence line in the vicinity of the parking lot – It needs to be visible from the road. Ms. Siemer asked if this sign is part of the driving tour that has been referenced in previous notes? Mr. Forbes indicated that the driving tour/story board is part of a larger project that is a multi-municipality project which includes historic resources centers with leaflets and/or QR codes for an audio tour.

Ms. Siemer notes that there seem to be a lot of signs at Birmingham Hill – there are already two township signs, now HC is adding one. At their February meeting, RPOS discussed adding another blue marker/sign funded by a private group to honor Lafayette. Linda Kaat presented the sign for Lafayette to RPOS in February. The funding for this sign is provided by The Sons of the American Revolution and Friends of the Huguenots. RPOS tabled a recommendation for this sign at their meeting because they were concerned that there are too many signs and a lack of coordination between the many groups proposing signs. She is concerned that there are too many different groups deciding to erect signs and believes there needs to be some thoughtful discussion about where and how many signs should be erected in order to maintain a sense of the aesthetic view that should be at Birmingham Hill. She believes the time for the thoughtful coordination is now before the money is actually spent. Mr. Forbes stated that the Conservancy folks are also planning a walking path/observation area and that should be

taken into consideration too. Ms. Siemer is planning to attend the BOS meeting on Monday and her take-away from this discussion is that there may be a better location for the Lafayette sign.

Ms. Siemer noted that there are two low profile framed signs at Birmingham Hill. One is a map of the area and the second frame rotates through different verbiage (1) about foot soldiers, (2) about false information to General Washington, (3) third is details about what occurred at Sandy Hollow. They were considering developing a fourth one about Lafayette and expanding on the story to include that he returned to the area in 1825. She suggested that another rotation for the frame at Birmingham Hill could be about the Meetinghouse.

Lastly, Ms. Siemer noted that they have links on the township website to history pages that are linked to the QR codes that are located on some of the framed maps/wording at Sandy Hollow and Birmingham Hill. She noted that they originally put those pages together when they placed the sign at Birmingham Hill with a QR code. She is concerned that the information in the links might not be the most accurate, but was hoping that perhaps the HC would be interested in looking into the QR codes and linking them to accurate information. It doesn't need to be someone actually writing the content that the QR codes link too – but just verifying that the link is an accurate depiction of what occurred at the location. RPOS has included links to Sean Meyers Battle in Motion and to Chester County u-tube videos but they don't feel like they have the expertise to maintain the accurate story. The QR codes are the same on each sign – it takes you to Birmingham Township Battlefield and then it gives you a menu to select from – Township History, Birmingham Hill, Sandy Hollow and the Philadelphia Campaign. There are links to the Chester County maps and links to some of the links to the three topics in the menu. She feels that with another reenactment upcoming, it would be a good time to take a fresh look at the information and make sure that it's accurate as people seem to get more interested in it around/during a reenactment. Discussion ensued about the idea of the RPOS and HC collaborating on this project going forward.

Radley Run Mansion House Discussion

Mr. Oliver is attendance tonight from Radley Run. The Radley Run Board is developing a long-range Master Plan and attempting to bring all of the assets of Radley Run into better order; they currently do not have sufficient funds to maintain the historical assets they own with historical integrity. The Radley Run Board established a committee and they have established a 503-c foundation -- The Mansion House Foundation at Radley Run. The mission of the Foundation is to restore, preserve and protect the historical assets at Radley Run. The mission includes mention of the Battle of the Brandywine and they have been advised to include the Brandywine Meadow Farms Fox Hunt era in what they are trying to preserve, protect and educate people about. They have subsequently hired Milner Architects – they are developing a conceptual design for how to restore the Mansion House. They are looking to ask for donations and apply for grants to maintain the historical integrity of the Mansion House and the other buildings.

They are also working with Jane Dorchester (Historical Preservationist) – she is providing a proposal for National Registry nomination. In 1999 they went through the nomination process and were denied. They were advised to emphasize the Brandywine Meadow Farm aspect more in this second attempt.

He wanted to attend tonight to let us know about these two recent developments and find out what guidelines they need to follow and what assistance the HC can provide as they move forward. They are looking to any suggestions that the HC has to help them be a valuable asset to the community.

Mr. Forbes indicated that he can forward the guidelines that they will need to follow in terms of any historical updates they plan for the historic resources within Radley Run. Mr. Bedwell indicated that he

spoke with Marge Kennedy earlier today and he is hopeful that the HC can be helpful in assisting them throughout the process of preserving the historical integrity of these resources. Mr. Forbes is in agreement and he is willing to provide the connections for the Radley Run committee to the individuals that the HC relies on for assistance – Karen Marshall and Jeanine Spears. Mr. Bedwell encouraged Mr. Oliver to continue to use the HC and any other resources to assist them in the National Registry process and also in the historic preservation of the various buildings.

Ms. Fleming asked how many historic properties are at Radley Run. Mr. Oliver indicated there are four historic properties: (1) Mansion House; (2) the Doll House; (3) the Lye/Springhouse House and (4) the Kennelman's House. They may end up having to focus on the historic resources in phases, and if so, the Mansion House will be the first focus.

Mr. Oliver noted that they were planning to host a 250-year anniversary last year on September 11, 2020 but it was cancelled due to Covid. They are hoping to instead hold it this year as a 251st celebration. It has been suggested that they have a Lafayette theme – so he thought it was very interesting that the previous topic on the agenda tonight referenced Lafayette. He mentioned an author, Bruce Mowday, who is writing a book about Lafayette and all he did for America in helping France to provide more financial assistance. They are considering having the Lafayette reenactors involved with the Radley Run 251st anniversary celebration. They would like to be involved with any special events the township is planning for the September 11th date.

New Business

Mr. Forbes made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 8:25pm. Seconded by Ms. Fleming and voted unanimously. The next meeting will be March 23, 2021 at 7:15pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Jennifer Boorse
HC Secretary