The Virtual Business Meeting of the Historic Review Board of New Castle County was held on Tuesday, June 2, 2020 via Zoom meetings.

The meeting was called to order by John Davis at [4:06 p.m.]

The following Board members were present:

Perry Patel
Karen Anderson
Barbara Silber
Steve Johns
John Brook
Rafael Zahralddin
John Davis

The following Board members were absent:

None

Historic Review Board, Department of Law

Colleen Norris

The following Department of Land Use employees were present at the meeting:

Betsy Hatch
Christopher Jackson
Antoni Sekowski
Stacey Dahlstrom

The following members of the public were in attendance:

Councilwoman Dee Durham
Pam Scott

RULES OF PROCEDURE

Ms. Hatch read the rules of procedure into the record.

MINUTES & NOTICE OF DECISIONS
May 5, 2020 Business Meeting Minutes and Notice of Decisions / Recommendations

On a motion made by Ms. Anderson and seconded by Mr. Patel, the HRB voted unanimously to approve the May 5, 2020 Historic Review Board meeting minutes.

On a motion made by Mr. Johns and seconded by Mr. Brook, the HRB voted unanimously to approve the May 5, 2020 Notices of Decision / Recommendation.

OLD BUSINESS

App. 2019-02592: 2203 Audubon Trail. (Northeast side of Audubon Trail and southwest side of W Palladio Place, north of the intersection with Mondrian Lane.) (TP 13-008.34.010.) St. Georges Hundred. Demolition permit to demolish a Folk Victorian Style dwelling determined eligible for the National Register of Historic Places and known as the J. Houston House, constructed ca. 1880. S Zoning. CD 12.

At a meeting held on June 2, 2020, the Historic Review Board considered the application, public testimony provided at its May 19, 2020 public hearing, as well as the recommendation provided by the Department of Land Use.

On a motion made by Mr. Johns and seconded by Mr. Patel, the Historic Review Board voted to ACCEPT the proposal presented by the applicant, which included two signs, one to be located in the community clubhouse and one to be located at the site of the Houston House.

Ms. Hatch gave a brief presentation on the application. She stated that pursuant to Section 06.03.020.B of the New Castle County Code, the Historic Review Board evaluated the demolition permit at its June 18, 2020 Public Hearing and its July 2, 2020 Business Meeting. The Historic Review Board voted to hold the demolition permit until the structure was historically documented and a memorialization of the structure in the development was provided to the HRB. The nine-month hold period has since lapsed; however, the applicant appeared before the HRB at its May 19, 2020 Public Hearing in order to follow up on the outstanding items. Pursuant to Section 06.03.020.B, no further action is required by the Historic Review Board on the demolition permit application.

Mr. Davis reiterated that the Board had decided to maintain the hold on the demolition permit until the documentation was completed and a plan was presented for the memorialization of the property. He stated that the hold had expired, the documentation had been completed and a draft plaque was presented to the Board. He stated that the Board’s role is limited in that the Board can only offer feedback in regards to the plaque.

Mr. Brook stated that the Board had discussed the location of the sign, and that the plaque should be where the house is currently situated so that all may see the plaque. Ms. Anderson moved that the Board further discuss the application. Mr. Brook seconded the motion.
Mr. Johns stated that he was not present during the hearing but listened to the audio. He stated that he was not sure what else the Board had to discuss other than accepting the materials provided by the applicant, as the hold had lapsed. He stated he was concerned about the permanence of the marker out on the site, as markers often fade and are subject to vandalism. He stated that perhaps a copy of the plaque could be in the clubhouse as well as a compromise.

Ms. Anderson stated her understanding was that the Board would provide commentary on the permit, as the hold had lapsed and completed. She agreed with Mr. Johns regarding the permanence of the marker on site. She also stated that it was unclear as to how the marker would be installed, and she wanted information on how the memorialization would occur. She stated it was unclear as to how the plaque would be mounted on site and reiterated the importance of covering the plaque. She stated that she did not believe the applicants had completed the two items the Board had asked for in July. She stated that it was unfair as to how the situation unfolded over time, as Blenheim had promised to preserve the structure and they have not done that.

Mr. Patel asked if materials could be used such as metal in order to help stop the sun causing the plaque to fade. He asked if it was too late to ask for that. Ms. Norris stated that because the nine-month hold period had lapsed, the Board does not have the ability to condition the demolition permit; however, the Board does have the authority to make a public recommendation.

Mr. Brook stated he believed the monument should be located where the house sat and should be made of materials that are impervious to the weather. He stated that it was important for the plaque to be located in a spot where all can visit and understand the history of the property.

Ms. Silber stated that she agreed with the comments shared by the Board. She stated the Board needs to decide if the plaque fulfills the condition the Board had asked for and envisioned for the property. She agreed that having more than one sign mitigates some of the concerns. She asked if there were other ways to memorialize the site without the house being extant, whether through landscaping or marking the corners of the house footprint. She stated there is a possibility that the architectural features of the Houston House could be incorporated into a static exhibit in the clubhouse. She agreed that there should be more information on how the sign would be erected and the specifications as to how it would be installed. She asked Ms. Norris if the Board is able to discuss those aspects as part of the application at hand.

Ms. Norris stated the Board could discuss those items, however there was another application before the Board that deals with the future of the property. She stated that the Board’s advice and feedback regarding the marker are certainly appropriate for the applicant to hear and consider.

Mr. Johns stated that it seems that the Board has accepted the documentation of the house; however, are discussing the memorialization plaque. He stated that he would be interested
to learn from Ms. Scott, who was in attendance, what the property owner has planned for the plaque’s erection. Mr. Davis agreed and asked if Ms. Scott could address the Board.

Ms. Scott addressed the Board and stated that some of the discussion at hand had occurred at the public hearing. She stated that during the business meeting on July 2, 2019, the Board had indicated to the applicant that they did not want to dictate to the applicant what to present, but for the applicant to decide an appropriate way to memorialize the Houston house. She stated that the poster would be a 2’x3’ display that has photos and a history of the house. She stated that originally the display was proposed in the lake house, citing some of the concerns the Board had raised. She stated that because there had been concern raised by the Board regarding there being no plan for the location of the Houston House, the applicant had decided to locate a second marker on-site. She stated that the plaque would be cemented in the ground, covered with plexiglass, and placed in the location where the house currently exists and is planned to be part of the open space for the community. She stated the owner did not have an objection to locating the marker in two locations.

Ms. Anderson asked what the outdoor display would be made of. Ms. Scott stated she was not sure but expected it to be wood covered by plexiglass. Mr. Brook agreed that it was reasonable to locate the plaque in two locations in the development.

**NEW BUSINESS**


At a meeting held on June 2, 2020, the Historic Review Board considered the application, public testimony provided at its May 19, 2020 public hearing, as well as the recommendation provided by the Department of Land Use.

On a motion made by Mr. Brook and seconded by Mr. Patel, the Historic Review Board voted unanimously (In Favor: Patel, Zahralddin, Anderson, Johns, Silber, Brook, Davis) to accept the staff recommendation and recommend **APPROVAL** of the resubdivision plan, as the site does not have historical value. Discussion preceding the vote included the following:

Ms. Hatch gave a brief presentation on the application’s background and read the Staff Recommendation into the record. Mr. Davis stated that there is a lot of interest in the application and there have been issues with the application. He stated that the Board heard from many members of the public at the public hearing who raised valid questions and concerns; however, many of the concerns may be beyond the purview of the Historic Review Board to consider. He asked Ms. Norris, from the Office of Law, for additional guidance regarding the Historic Review Board’s role in reviewing the application.

Ms. Norris summarized the charge of the Historic Review Board. She stated that the Historic Review Board had received communication raising concern whether the
application at hand is required to appear before County Council or whether it can be approved by the Department. She stated that the concerns raised are irrelevant to the deliberations of the Historic Review Board. Ms. Norris stated the role of the Historic Review Board is to determine if or when the structure is demolished and before the proposed resubdivision plan is considered for approval, if the site itself has historic value under Section 40.15.010.B. She stated that if the Historic Review Board determines that there is no historic value after the removal of the house, then the Board’s analysis would be complete, and the Board should advise the Department as such. Ms. Norris stated that if the Board determines that the site does have historic value absent the historic house, that the Board must advise the Department whether the proposed resubdivision plan submitted by the applicant is in accordance with the preservation of historic resources under Section 40.15.000. She stated in such consideration, the Board must consider the factors listed in Section 40.15.010.B, such as the landscape plan and building design. Ms. Norris stated that it was raised that a previous plan had shown the further subdivision of Lot 757; however, the plan has been revised to remove the further subdivision of the lot. She stated that the discussion regarding whether the further subdivision of the lot may occur is irrelevant to the Board’s deliberation, as it is not in front of the Board under the current application. She stated there are other aspects to be taken into consideration, however that will occur under the authority of other departments such as Land Use and the Board should focus on the historic aspects of the site.

Mr. Patel inquired about the landscape plan and if there were any architectural features that could be utilized for the landscaping in the new park. Ms. Norris stated that what is before the Board is an application for resubdivision and the Board should consider what the applicant has submitted. She stated that if it comes out in the Board’s discussion that something of that nature would be appropriate, the Board can advise the Department as such.

Ms. Silber stated that the Board should discuss the historic value of the property. She stated that the Board should seriously consider this, given the testimony provided at the public hearing. She stated that just because a building is removed, that does not always mean that the land does not have historic value. Ms. Silber stated the Board should discuss whether the land has a sense of historic heritage and sense of place absent of the structure. She stated that in some cases, there is land without buildings that have historic value. She stated that once the building is demolished, the last extant architectural aspects will be gone. Ms. Silber stated that the Board needs to consider whether the land has historic value without the house and what the parcel represents regarding the environs and potential historic value. She stated there were several folks who mentioned the agricultural past of this part of the County. She asked for guidance regarding what eventually may happen and whether the Board would take into consideration any future applications on the property.

Ms. Norris stated the Board is charged with reviewing the application as presented by the applicant and the Board should take into consideration Section 40.15.010.B and the features listed in that code section. She stated the Board needs to look at the application as it was given to the Board and if the application is in keeping of the interests of the code.
Ms. Silber referenced the Criteria for Listing and the fact that the Board utilizes them for guidance on how historic properties are evaluated. She stated that since the property has been undeveloped, that there could be a potential for archaeological resources; however, it is unknown whether those resources are significant.

Mr. Brook stated that he agreed with Ms. Silber and that it was more difficult to determine if the property was historic with the house gone; however, the land could have historical value in regard to where the Houston house stood. He stated the open land is an example of the history of the area of the County which was largely used for agricultural purposes. He stated the land is also associated with people associated with New Castle County. He stated that the Board is charged with determining if the land has historic value. Ms. Norris stated that the Board should be specific in why the Board believes the site has historic value, and any recommendation by the Board should specifically address those aspects.

Mr. Johns stated that there are two aspects that are being discussed by the Board. First being whether the site has historic significance and second, if historic, how should the historic significance of the site be factored into the development. He stated he questioned whether the site has historic value absent the Houston house and noted that the site where the Houston house is located will be converted into open space for the community. He stated that the surrounding lands have lost context regarding the house’s history as a farmhouse and how the farmhouse related to neighboring properties. Mr. Johns stated that if the Board determines the site is historically significant, he understood the concern regarding archaeological resources. He stated the plan proposes to move the boundary line to encompass the existing house and that the Board should consider the movement of the boundary line and its impact of the historic value of the site. He stated that he did not believe that the line adjustment would impact the historic nature of the site.

Mr. Davis agreed with Mr. Johns and stated that the Board needs to determine if the site has historic value absent the house and what impact the adjustment has on any historic nature of the property. He stated that the Board could evaluate the purpose note of the plan and discuss how that may impact historic aspects of the land. Ms. Anderson agreed with evaluating each item under the purpose note. Mr. Davis stated that the Board should determine, first, if the property absent the house has historic value.

Ms. Anderson stated that she had looked at the plan that was submitted and the old versions of the recorded plan and noted that other structures had been removed, with the house and granary to remain. She stated that she did not believe there was historic value of the property absent the house and granary, and it there was historic value it would be very small. She stated that she agreed with Mr. Johns. She stated that it would be difficult to communicate the historic nature of the property without the property. Ms. Anderson stated the circumstances were sad and disappointing. She stated the plan as presented would retain little to no historic value and agreed with Mr. Johns.

Mr. Patel stated that he agreed with Ms. Anderson and Mr. Johns and that the plaque would help people realize that the house was once there and could learn about the history of the land.
Ms. Silber stated under Criterion K, which deals with likelihood of archaeological resources, those resources would likely not be disturbed. She noted that if any archaeological remains and their significance have not been evaluated, and that there are situations where archaeological resources lend themselves to historic contexts and landscapes for further interpretation. She noted the importance of interpretative signage, which notes that a place does have history and sense of place. She stated that it was hard to quantify or define and based on the testimony that there are people who do feel the site has a sense of place. She agreed with the sentiments brought up by other Board members and agreed that going through the purpose note would help identify any adverse impacts.

Mr. Brook stated that if the Board determines that the site does not have historic value, there may be no need to go through the Purpose Note. He asked if the Board is ready to accept a motion of the sort and stated that he regretted that he had to agree that absent the house the land does not have much historic value. He stated he did have concern regarding the potential of any archaeological resources; however, the plan does not call for land disturbance, but the adjustment of property lines.


At a meeting held on June 2, 2020, the Historic Review Board considered the application, public testimony provided at its May 19, 2020 public hearing, as well as the recommendation provided by the Department of Land Use.

On a motion made by Mr. Brook and seconded by Ms. Anderson, the Historic Review Board voted unanimously to RELEASE the demolition permit. Discussion preceding the vote included the following:

Ms. Hatch gave a brief presentation to the Board and read the staff recommendation into the record. Mr. Patel stated that the applicant is on the line. Mr. Brook stated Mr. Brook noted the structure was in poor condition and a safety hazard. He stated that he did not believe that the barn’s removal would impact the historic nature of the site and there is not current use for the building. Mr. Johns stated that site is a working farm and that rebuilding a structure for the farm is also part of rebuilding St. George’s Hundred.

Ordinance No. 20-015: To amend the New Castle County Code, Chapter 40 “Unified Development Code”, Article 15 “Historic Resources” (Section 40.15.010 “Applicability”) to Improve the Protection of Historic Resources and Properties Designated for Preservation as part of a Record Plan.

At a meeting held on June 2, 2020, the Historic Review Board considered the ordinance, public testimony provided at its May 19, 2020 public hearing, as well as the recommendation provided by the Department of Land Use.
On a motion made by Mr. Brook and seconded by Mr. Johns, the Historic Review Board voted to **OPPOSE** the proposed ordinance in order to provide the ordinance’s sponsor to work with the Department of Land Use on a comprehensive approach to achieve a similar goal, as the Board found that items one and two of the ordinance were too broad and could lead to unintended consequences. Discussion preceding the vote included the following:

Ms. Hatch gave a brief presentation on the ordinance and read the Department’s recommendation on the ordinance in the record. She reiterated the Department’s concerns with the ordinance as written and noted that the Department is working on comprehensive historic update regarding historic resource provisions, which proposes as similar concept. Ms. Hatch addressed a new division proposed in the comprehensive update and the proposed process that would be required to preserve historically significant structures on major land development plans.

Mr. Brook stated that the author of the proposed legislation should be thanked and the intent of the ordinance should be applauded. He stated that he agreed with the Department’s analysis of the proposed ordinance, and that a good lawyer would be able to find a loophole in the language as written. Ms. Norris directed the Board that their recommendation is regarding Ordinance 20-015 as written.

Mr. Zahralddin asked if the Board wanted to mark-up the ordinance and send comments to the ordinance sponsor. Ms. Norris stated that it was up to the Board to reject the ordinance, and that the Board can explain why the proposed ordinance is rejected. Mr. Zahralddin stated that he did not want to send the message that the ordinance is simply rejected; however, he wanted to be clear that the Board agrees with intent of the ordinance and ask the Council people to redraft the language. He stated that the Board should give a clear indication of issues with the ordinance.

Ms. Norris stated that the Board can provide an opinion on the ordinance and that the Land Use ordinance is separate from the ordinance at hand. She stated the Land Use had raised their concerns with the ordinance, but the Board is making a decision independent of the Department of Land Use. She stated the Board could also draft a suggestion and provide guidance on Ordinance 20-015 from their own independent analysis.

Mr. Johns asked if the Department wanted to mark-up the ordinance will be appearing before the Board at a later date. Ms. Hatch stated that the Department’s Comprehensive Historic Update ordinance regarding historic resources would be appearing before the Historic Review Board. She stated that the Department agrees with the intent of Ordinance 20-015, however have concerns with the way it is currently written but have incorporated the concept into the comprehensive update to address those concerns. Mr. Johns stated that sometimes when issues arise and codes are updated in a hurry to fix a problem, hurried ordinances have unexpected consequences. He stated that 20-015 could have unintended consequences, such as a forcing a rezoning on a property owner (such as a farmer looking to subdivide land to provide to his children), which can be an intensive process requiring three public hearings and appearance before County Council. He stated that it is much more difficult
than a minor land development plan which should be a very simple process. He noted that often times ordinances are passed to penalize big developers; however, end up penalizing average property owners. He stated that he is interested in looking at the Department’s ordinance which is coming up. Mr. Johns stated that in his professional experience, that there are often much more complicated reasons that result in the loss of historic structures rather than intentional demolition by neglect.

Ms. Anderson asked for clarification on the ordinance as written and the Department of Land Use’s concern. She asked about the Department’s concern regarding a perverse incentive to demolish an historic structure. Ms. Hatch clarified that the ordinance mandates Historic zoning without any sort of incentive or benefit, that the demolition of historic structures in order to avoid the rezoning process and noted the importance of incentives to preserve a structure. Ms. Anderson asked if the Department was addressing the maintenance plan concept and preservation of historic structures on land development plans. Ms. Hatch confirmed. Ms. Anderson asked if there is a concern that there is a gap where historic structures could be lost and that if there was a timeline as to when the new Article 15 would be instituted. Ms. Hatch stated that the Comprehensive Update would be introduced in the following week.

Mr. Brook stated that he believed the work on these types of ordinances be completed by professionals in the historic preservation and land use fields. He stated that Ordinance 20-015 is before the Board and his position is to oppose the ordinance as written and that something more comprehensive is better in addressing the issue. He thanked the ordinance’s sponsor for his effort.

Ms. Anderson stated that the Board’s decision should note the fact the Department of Land Use is working on a larger, comprehensive amendment. Ms. Zahralddin asked if the Board wished to highlight any aspects that may be important to the Board that the ordinance is missing. Ms. Norris stated the Board can highlight what they believe is missing in Ordinance 20-015. Mr. Zahralddin noted that Mr. Johns had stated that the ordinance was too broad, and if there were other conceptual aspects that the Board should bring up.

Ms. Hatch noted that Ordinance 20-015 is scheduled to for Planning Board in the following month. Ms. Silber stated that the Board agrees with the Department’s concerns with the ordinance as written and that the Board’s discussions have indicated as such. She stated that the Board’s decision should note the impending ordinance that Land Use had been working on. She stated that the Board agrees with the intent of the ordinance but has concerns regarding the open-endedness of Ordinance 20-015 as written.

Mr. Johns moved that the motion be amended to state that the Board has concerns regarding the broad nature of the ordinance. Ms. Anderson seconded the amendment by Mr. Johns. Ms. Anderson moved that the motion be amended to state that items one and two of Ordinance 20-015 be listed in the motion, noting the historic zoning and maintenance plan is too broad, but the stabilization provision did not have any objection. Mr. Johns seconded the amendment.
At a meeting held on June 2, 2020, the Historic Review Board considered the draft ordinance, public testimony provided at its May 19, 2020 public hearing, as well as the recommendation provided by the Department of Land Use.

On a motion made by Ms. Anderson and seconded by Mr. Johns, the Historic Review Board voted unanimously (In Favor: Patel, Zahralddin, Anderson, Johns, Silber, Brook, Davis) to recommend APPROVAL of the ordinance language.

Discussion preceding the vote included the following:

Ms. Hatch gave a brief presentation of the ordinance, which had just been introduced (20-063), and outlined current Department practices of Historic Overlay properties. Ms. Hatch read the Department recommendation into the record.

Mr. Brook stated the he understood the position of the Department, but wondered if the existing property was sufficient noting that demolition by neglect does still occur. He stated that he understood that annual inspections of the properties may be excessive, but wasn’t sure if the Department’s practices were sufficient.

Ms. Anderson agreed with Mr. Brook and stated that there is still an issue with demolition by neglect. She stated that the Department should propose an alternative and that there is a problem of demolition by neglect. Ms. Hatch clarified that the Department is only charged with doing annual inspections of properties within an Historic Overlay district, and that the majority of properties that appear before the Board are not within an Historic Overlay District.

Mr. Johns stated that he disagreed with Mr. Brook and that the ordinance was only a few years old and that the Board has only received one report stating that five houses were in disarray and are now being addressed. He stated the only difference between the current requirements and proposed requirements is that reports must be generated with photos for properties that are in good condition. He stated that he understood receiving reports on the bad houses but did not see the purpose of receiving reports on good properties.

Mr. Johns made a motion to oppose the ordinance in accordance with the Department’s recommendation. Mr. Brook concurred with Mr. Johns’ statements, and seconded the motion. Ms. Anderson stated that she disagreed with Mr. Johns and that the properties should have annual inspections, noting that properties often change hands. She stated that having an annual inspection gives the Board a consistent look at the property and noted value of ongoing documentation. She stated that it may not need to be to a level requiring a lot of paperwork, but could be a simple inspection with photographs instead of paperwork.
Mr. Davis stated that he understood the Department’s position and agreed with Mr. Johns. He stated that he believed the current process does work and that the Board has seen inspection reports come in and action had been taken on issues that do arise. Mr. Johns stated that the current code does require routine inspections, but the proposed ordinance requires more extensive work to be completed.

Ms. Hatch stated that the current code does not require the Department to go out annually, but on an as needed basis, which could be as frequent as two months or bi-annually. Ms. Hatch noted that Councilwoman Durham had written in the Zoom chat that the current law was adopted in 2016 and that the ordinance does not require a photographic report of all properties, but only a summary.

Ms. Silber asked if the properties are ranked based on their condition when they are inspected. She stated perhaps the inspections should be ranked and based on their ranking, establish an inspection frequency based on the condition of the structure. She agreed that the system does work but also agreed that it is better to be proactive. She noted that perhaps the property owner could submit reports about the condition of the house in order to promote property owner involvement.

Ms. Hatch stated inspections had occurred in 2017, 2018, but not in 2019. Mr. Johns stated that he misunderstood the current ordinance and agreed that there should be a rule regarding how often the inspections should occur in the code in order to avoid things falling through the cracks. He stated that if all the properties were inspected in 2017 and 2018, it isn’t as onerous to inspect all the properties.

Mr. Brook stated he appreciated the efforts of the Councilwoman to undertake the proposed ordinance. He agreed with Ms. Silber’s suggestion of having property owners submit a report to the County regarding the condition of the property. Ms. Silber stated that it could be a piece of paper they submit or a survey that could be taken and see who responds. She stated that it could help identify proactive property owners and help identify properties that the Department may need to keep an eye on. She stated that there should be a practical way of addressing the concerns.

Ms. Anderson stated that the proposed ordinance prioritizes the frequency of inspections on properties that may be a concern. She stated properties that have issues can be inspected more often based on any code violations. She stated that the ordinance proposed requires that the inspector go out and take a picture and fill out information on the condition of the structure. She noted that photographic documentation should occur for all properties, but additional documentation be required for properties that have code violations.

The Board voted on the motion at hand (In Favor: Davis, Brook; In Opposition: Johns, Anderson, Silber, Patel, Zahralddin). The motion failed.

REPORT OF THE PRESERVATION PLANNER
Ms. Hatch noted that the Department of Land Use will be holding a public workshop on the Department’s Historic Resources Comprehensive Update on June 8, 2020.

REPORT OF THE CHAIRPERSON

None.

COMMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC

Councilwoman Durham thanked the Board for their consideration. She asked why the meeting was changed in time and noted the conflict in the Zoom account with Planning Board and stated the website still stated to tune into the meeting at 4:45. Ms. Hatch stated that the agenda on the website does note the meeting beginning at 4pm, that the time change was noted during the May 19, 2020 public hearing, the meeting was legally noticed in the News Journal, and that the agenda was posted in the vestibule in the Government Center in accordance with FOIA requirements.

ADJOURNMENT

The Board voted to adjourn the meeting at 6:43 p.m.

ATTEST:

__________________________    ____________________________
Richard E. Hall, AICP          John R. Davis
General Manager                Chairperson
Department of Land Use          Historic Review Board