

Township of West Orange

Historic Preservation Commission

Special Meeting Minutes – July 21, 2021

- 1) Notice of the date, time, and location of this meeting was given to the Township Clerk, was advertised in the *West Orange Chronicle*, and has been posted on the Township Bulletin Board and the Township Website in accordance with the requirements of the New Jersey Open Public Records Meetings Act.
- 2) The meeting, held via Zoom, was called to order at 7:05 P.M. Commissioners Feeney, Feitlowitz, Ficarotta, Forseth, McConnell, Irvis, and Wosh were present. Commissioner Drill was absent. Council liaison Tammy Williams attended, as did Kevin Malanga and Rev. Dr. Miguel Hernandez, members of the public.
- 3) The next virtual Commission meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, August 11 @ 7 P.M.
- 4) The July 14 Commission meeting was canceled owing to the lack of a quorum.
- 5) The primary purpose of this meeting was to conduct a public presentation of the draft designation reports for the following properties: Holy Trinity Episcopal Church at 315 Main Street; Williams/McManus/Lehmann House at 122 Main Street; Hedges Block at 56 Main Street; State Diner at 567 South Valley Road; and George V. Hecker Carriage House at 36 Ridge Road. Chairperson Feeney noted that the Commission carefully considered a number of potential designations over the past two years, all of which testified to the rich architectural and cultural history that exists within the Township. Hunter Research of Trenton NJ had been contracted to prepare extensive draft reports on each of the five properties under review, and the purpose of this meeting was to receive public input concerning the draft reports. Patrick Harshbarger of Hunter Research carefully walked everyone through the five reports, noting the significance of each property and how each particular site met the criteria for historic designation. All draft copies had both been posted to the HPC website and made available for the public at the West Orange Public Library.
- 6) Kevin Malanga commented on the remarkable history revealed in the reports, and expressed his support for the designations. Dr. Hernandez, who has been the priest in charge of Holy Trinity since 2014, expressed his pleasure that Holy Trinity had been thought worthy of designation. He also commented that many early parishioners had been associated with the Edison factory in West Orange and noted the robust construction of the church, which likely used Edison concrete.

- 7) Councilperson Williams asked about the effect of designation on both exterior and interior renovations, and questioned whether the new owners of the Hedges Block had been notified about the designation in order to obtain their input. Commissioner Feitlowitz noted that the HPC would review any future proposed changes to the exterior of the building. Chairperson Feeney mentioned that the commission makes its recommendations based on the historical and architectural significance of the buildings, and that although input from the owners always is welcome they do not have final say over the designation. Commissioner Wosh spoke about the importance of preserving, or at least documenting, the nineteenth-century graffiti that had been uncovered on the interior hallway of the Hedges building. Councilperson Williams mentioned that Joseph Fagan, the Township Historian, also is interested photographing this material and hopefully will follow through on such a project.
- 8) Commissioner Feitlowitz commended especially Commissioner Ficarotta for persistently encouraging the Commission to recognize three important buildings that represented Main Street at different points of its development. He also commended Patrick Harshbarger and Hunter Research for generating thorough reports that placed all proposed designations within their important historical contexts.
- 9) Kevin Malanga called the Commission's attention to the deteriorating condition of the George V. Hecker Carriage House and the failure of the owner to maintain the property. Patrick Harshbarger noted that landmarking is the most significant step that the HPC can take to help preserve the structure, and that the commission might also advise public officials about structural threats to the property.
- 10) Commissioner Feitlowitz discussed the history of the Ridge neighborhood, in which the Hecker Carriage House is located, and suggested possibilities for bringing that history more to the attention of West Orange residents. Councilperson Williams suggested including more information on the HPC website and using that as an outreach tool
- 11) Chairperson Feeney called for a vote to change the draft reports to final reports. Commissioner Feitlowitz moved and Commissioner Forseth seconded. The commission voted unanimously to finalize the reports. Commissioner Forseth then moved and Commissioner McConnell seconded a motion to transmit the reports to the Planning Board. The commission unanimously approved this motion. The Planning Board will have ninety days to consider the designation and to move the process forward by reporting to the Township Council.
- 12) The commission moved to elect officers for the next year. Commissioners unanimously elected Brian Feeney as Chair and Marty Feitlowitz as Vice-Chair, with Feeney and Feitlowitz abstaining.
- 13) Commissioner Feeney noted that the August 11 meeting will likely be canceled since it appears unlikely that there will be a quorum.

14) The meeting adjourned at 8:43.