

*Minutes of the Boonton Historic Preservation Commission  
Date: July 1, 2020  
This meeting was held via GoToMeeting*

**CALL TO ORDER:**

The meeting was called to order at 7:35 pm.

**OPEN PUBLIC MEETINGS STATEMENT**

**PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

**ROLL CALL:**

Present

Elliott Ruga - *Chair*

Jeff Smith – *Vice Chair*

Patricia Bujtas

Adrienne Eoga

Tamra Katcher

Mike Wade – *Board of Alderman Representative*

Faith Frankel – *Recording Secretary*

Absent:

Ashleigh Tharpe

**APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

Minutes of June 3, 2020 were approved.

**APPLICATIONS FOR REVIEW**

None

**DISCUSSION** – Ordinance Review and Recommendations

ER: At present there is not a formal process seeking the recommendations of BHPC concerning development proposals. Should all development proposals be given to BHPC for review and recommendations, with those within the historic districts requiring BHPC approval?

TK: The town planner's review might include a decision regarding whether the plan is consistent with the historic nature of Boonton. We have discussed standards in the past but we don't have them right now.

ER: We have no standards for approval other than those of the Secretary of the Interior and the Design Guidebook we did in consultation with Boonton Main Street. There are no design standards incorporated into the Master Plan, so that could be a recommendation.

It would be ideal to have one of us sit on the planning board, to introduce us as a committee looking at the town as a whole, rather than just the historic district; our town's historic character worth preserving extends beyond the outline of the historic district. There might be something of historical character worth commenting on. It may inform their negotiations with the developer.

MW: There are elements of the Master Plan that are not incorporated into ordinances or Planning Board requirements. With a BHPC member sitting on the board, they could suggest what would or would not work in terms of historic context.

PB: Marianne has been sending us the agendas of the Planning Board meetings for the last year or two. If there's something on those agendas that is important to us, maybe we could come to a consensus as a group, and then one of

us could go to the meeting and discuss it. But comments are usually allowed after it's all said and done. The agenda would have to change so a member of the HPC could comment before the discussion happens.

ER: We've met with Chairman Phelps (of the Planning Board) before; he does not see us as an adversary but as a partner, and I think he'd be willing to do that. But it may require a memorandum of understanding so we're officially incorporated into the process.

TK: I don't know if legally one of us can appear on behalf of the commission like that, or if you would have to appear as a private individual. If we're going to do some sort of review, it would need to be part of our regular meetings. We have to have a quorum and vote on whatever we would recommend.

ER: Up to now, the most impactful thing we've done re: development projects is the renovation to the Boonton Opera House. If there is a development application in the Historic District, we're supposed to submit a written report to the planning board. I'm suggesting we just expand that to any development in town, with the caveat that if it's outside the Historic District, that this is a recommendation and not a statutory review.

JS: There has been talk about putting a gas station at the corner near Curly's. That might be an example where it's not in the district but right outside of the district. It's the gateway to our town; there are a lot of historic houses and other historic buildings there on Washington Street. If the developer comes up with a very modern design that is not historically appropriate, we might want to lean on the Planning Board a bit to force them to make some concessions to make it look a little more appropriate. They might not have to listen to us but that might be a good example of something coming up that we could have some input in.

TK: They've already been denied by the Planning Board and they've appealed it. I don't know the status of the appeal.

ER: Our recommendation could be used as part of the leverage to use to be approved. But right now we have no input on the rest of the town. This is an opportunity to hear what we have to say, and we could get better practiced as a commission in commenting on developments throughout the town.

TK: Maybe we could have a seat on the Planning Board that's designated for a member of the BHPC, which doesn't have to be the same person at every meeting. The only caveat to that is, if there's a continued hearing, the same person would have to go back and listen to the continuance. If that's possible, that would solve this problem without having to change the ordinances. But I don't know if it's statutorily available. That would be an end run around changing the ordinance but would still accomplish the same goal.

ER: We'd be directly there in the process as it's occurring. How would we pursue that?

TK: Either Marianne or the town attorney; either he or someone from his firm sits with the Planning Board. Doug Phelps has been on the board for quite some time; he might know the enabling statute for it. [Members agreed that TK will talk to Marianne about this].

ER: I will review the Municipal Land Use Law to see if there is a possibility of exploring this further. Is there anything Mike should bring up with the Alderman?

TK: We should first figure out if we can do this. If we can't we will have to explore another route, like amending the ordinance.

ER: Even if we can't review them by statute, I like the idea that we get to review all development proposals in town. Since Marianne has been sending us the Planning Board agenda, in a way part of the process has begun; we just have to put a little more meat on it.

MW: You want to ensure that a new development is architecturally pleasing in the context of Boonton. Also, since you already receive the agenda in advance, if an item seems important to the BHPC, perhaps you could request the opportunity to discuss it.

PB: As TK said, any town resident can comment at a meeting, but to represent the BHPC, we would need a consensus. And there would have to be some way to discuss it to determine what our recommendations are.

ER: If an application submitted to the Planning Board is simultaneously submitted to us, we could review it at our next meeting. If we reach consensus on a recommendation, we could then pass it on to the planning board. It's not coming up with a new procedure; it's already supposed to happen with applications within the historic district. This

would just expand applicability, and our recommendation would be just that. Right now, the Planning Board does not have representation from us at all.

MW volunteered to bring up the suggestion at the next Board of Alderman meeting during the “other comments” portion at the end of the meeting.

TK: The ordinance does not require it. Even in the historic district, this is one of the issues that we discussed with Doug. It’s not a “shall,” it’s discretionary. We would need to change the ordinance to a “shall” and broaden it to any application.

ER: Correct. The only difference would be that any recommendation we make that is outside of the Historic District will not be an approval, but just a recommendation. Is MW on the Ordinance Committee?

MW: Yes. Basically, you’re asking that all projects brought before the Planning Board also be sent to you. ER: It “shall” be sent to us. MW: Is it all digital now?

TK: No, they have architectural plans and other types of plans that they come in with. They bring their architects, civil engineers, attorneys, etc. It’s quite an extensive package that needs to be submitted and needs to go through vetting by the town engineer and the town planner before it even gets to the Planning Board. They have to see that it’s a complete application but they also have to advise the Planning Board whether or not it’s consistent. For example, do they have too much concrete and not enough permeable surface, drainage, etc. All kind of issues come from an evaluation.

ER: Some towns are requiring that sets of those applications be submitted digitally, which makes it a lot easier for review. How do we hold a meeting like this with paper? With digital, we all get a copy.

TK: Either way, we have to figure out where we sit in that process. We have to get to that point, then figure it out.

ER asked Mike to bring it up with the board. MW said he would bring it up at the next meeting.

### **BOARD OF ALDERMAN REPORT**

MW reported that summer camp is cancelled. There will be a July 4 observance including observance of Memorial Day at Grace Lord Park on July 4. The tax bills were sent out and we approved the temporary budget, though we don’t know what funding will come from the state. We received a higher percentage of quarterly taxes on May 1 compared to last May. We believe that is because most people in town have mortgages which are automatically paid by the bank’s computers. The next payments are due August 1. Meetings will continue at twice per month, rather than the usual once per month in the summer.

We are trying to solve the parking problem on Essex Street at GL Park. The police department will paint parking stripes so people can get around the corner there. There was a problem with garbage in the area. The DPW is putting up new signs.

PB asked MW if there is any news about the town purchasing the abandoned house near GL Park so the park could have parking and restroom facilities. MW said that was on the agenda but got moved back because of the issues with the coronavirus.

PB also asked why Town Hall has not been opened yet for people to purchase stickers for large items to be picked up. PB also asked why the DPW has been allowed to be on a one week on, one week off work schedule but with full pay.

MW said the town is paying them. They were furloughed in March because of fear of the virus. The town is self-insured - pays their own unemployment and has their own system, so it was almost a wash - you either pay them directly or pay them unemployment. Apparently it was easier to just pay the DPW workers. All the DPW workers and town hall employees are now back to work.

There was some discussion about two local bank branches that are closing, and the possibility of other businesses moving in, suggesting that there may be new applications to the BHPC. The point was raised that real estate in Boonton seems to be a seller's market, with prices being bid up and homes selling rapidly.

PB mentioned that the town put out a proposal to hire a new property maintenance inspector. ER said there has been no enforcement whatsoever.

There was discussion about closing Main Street to traffic every Friday in July so the restaurants could put tables outside. PB mentioned it is an expensive prospect. PB mentioned that Boonton Main Street did a great job raising money for the project.

**ADJOURN**

The meeting was adjourned at 8:30 pm.