

Minutes of the Boonton Historic Preservation Commission

Date: June 3, 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

Also present was a member of the public, Kate Ackerley, and Laura Courts, proprietor of the applicant Street Chic Boutique.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Minutes of the February and March 2020 meetings were approved.

APPLICATIONS FOR REVIEW

Street Chic Boutique – Applicant Laura Courts

The applicant seeks to replace her old sign in the window with a new circular sign.

She stated the sign has a clear background with white lettering. The window is 7

feet 6 inches square; the decal is a 30-inch diameter circle and covers 22.5% of the window. JS noted that most of the sign is clear and most of its area does not block the window. If it was solid we would have to calculate it, but since this is clear through the middle, and the intent of the ordinance is to not block the view of the inside of a store to the outside, the proposed sign should be fine. ER said the sign is within the permitted size guideline. TK agreed with JS. There were no objections to this approach. ER said it is a simple, nice sign for the window. PB moved to approve the application for the sign as presented. TK seconded and the application was approved. Ms. Courts asked if she needed to wait before having the sign installed. ER said he would tell Marianne Marcello that the BHPC approved the sign. Ms. Courts will have to get the physical permit from MM but ER sees no reason to delay the process for her to move forward with her business and wished her good luck.

DISCUSSION

ER said there will probably not be a lot of applications requiring BHPC review in the near future, so our time as a commission would be better spent making recommendations to the governing body to tighten up ordinances. Not to the full scope that he, Tamra, and Breann had undertaken, a review which was quite ambitious. But we need to ensure that our ordinances are such that we get more protected on Main Street in ways that are less traditional and more ordinance based. For example, we have the Rockaway Historic District but that is not necessarily protected by ordinance. We also should have the ability to comment on any application that goes before the planning board for development approval. Whether or not they will abide by our recommendations, at least they should know what historical resources may be at risk by a certain development going forward. That is what we're here for; when they see what's at risk, they may be more inclined to, by ordinance, protect what needs to be protected in Boonton. Right now an application is only forwarded to us for a renovation or a new development project if it's in the Main Street Historic District. But there's a lot more history in our town; we should be seen as an advisory body to alert the governing body that there are historical resources at risk, and it will be up to them whether or not to make a judgment and support us or not. But if we don't do anything there is no consideration. He asked the commission to think about this, and discuss it further in our July meeting.

PB asked if there is any recent development that ER is concerned about. ER noted that the planning board rejected the proposal for a Seven 11 on Washington Street. For the Packard Building redevelopment, they invited us to see what they're doing

but that was only through the good graces of the architect and the developer and the mayor at the time. But there should be a requirement that we are forwarded applications and given an opportunity to comment.

TK said the gas station application at the corner of Monroe and Washington is in litigation. They appealed the Planning Board denial. As a member of the Planning Board, TK had asked why they were going toward a more modern building but clearly, without an ordinance we didn't have any grounds to stand on. The Planning Board denied it for other reasons, but that is up on appeal. If they win, that is coming back and we will not have any control of it.

ER said we may have a supportive Board of Alderman to enact some ordinances that would more firmly protect the historical character. We have the Master Plan which identifies pockets of historical integrity of Boonton's history that it suggests that we better protect. So, we are not being arbitrary and capricious; it's established in the Master Plan and based on a survey of town residents who say that Boonton's history is its most significant defining feature. So the citizens are behind us.

MW noted that towns are requiring new building applicants to design the exterior to match the historical features of the town. He offered to discuss this with Cy [Mr. Wekilsky?] who heads the Ordinance Committee. You don't want to have a project approved that sticks out. You're not trying to not develop it. You just want it to blend in with the rest of the features of the town.

ER noted that we have historical designation for the one mile of Main Street from Division Street to Liberty Street. But Boonton has a lot more historical character outside of that area.

MW said he had noticed many beautiful features in a walk around the town. You want to protect it to a point to blend in with the rest of the town but not to an extreme. He offered to discuss it with Cy to see if it can be expanded. ER said a good guide is the recently adopted Master Plan which outlines three feasible Historic Districts that could be incorporated into ordinance.

TK said we have to be careful about whether our enabling ordinance limits us to only the Historic Districts or whether there's some way that we can become part of the process at any time that the Planning Board has something. Developing ordinances for new historic districts will not only take quite a bit of effort, but you would have to deal with the residents in those areas as well. So we have to

strategize as what is the best process toward that goal. Do we continue making historic districts, or how we can get that done?

PB suggested that BHPC should utilize the town attorney when it comes to doing the work of writing ordinances. That is part of our charter. We can put together a synopsis of what we'd like to accomplish and let our town attorney do the work for us.

TK said the last time we discussed this, she (TK) was appointed to the Ordinance Committee by Matt DiLauri. They wanted to know what the general ideas were, and they were going to figure it out from their perspective, then bring it to the town attorney from there, who oftentimes is part of the Ordinance Committee's meeting. So unless there's been a change with the new administration, the best bet is to work hand in hand with the Ordinance Committee, since they're the ones that have to present the revised ordinances to the Board of Aldermen.

PB agreed that the process should not be all undertaken by the BHPC since there is a mechanism in place, and we do not have to reinvent it.

ER asked how the town attorney is paid. PB said the BHPC has seldom used his services but he would be paid by the town, not out of the BHPC budget. ER suggested spending some time with him discussing these issues and seeking his support. He said he had worked with Fred (Mr. Semrau?) on Highlands issues with other towns where he is the town attorney. But before contacting him directly, we need the mayor to advise him to respond to our outreach.

PB: You would not want to do it on your own, without going through the mayor or the town administrator first.

ER asked MW to explore guidance on this process. MW recommends asking Neil to approve BHPC speaking with the town attorney.

TK suggested that BHPC should coordinate with Cy (who runs the Ordinance Committee) because he would bring the ideas to the board.

ER: Cy's committee is looking at townwide ordinances, and we would not want our issue to have to fit into the capacity they have to spend time with us, that we can have some flexibility to come up with some recommendations that we can then hand off to Cy, perhaps working with Fred.

BOARD OF ALDERMAN REPORT – Mike Wade

MW: Town Hall will be opening to the public on June 12 or 15. Camp is July 6 or 8. All town employees are back at full capacity now.

There was concern about tax revenues. This year we are ahead of last year's numbers by 4 or 5%. There are some properties that are delinquent; bills may not be paid for six to eight months.

The mayor made a proclamation thanking the Rescue Squad for their work in the past months.

In regard to Covid-19, the town nurse reported no new cases at the Firemen's Home and no new cases in town for the last two weeks. Most who were infected have survived. People can email the town nurse for up-to-date information. There is a downward trend; businesses are anxious to reopen.

ER asked JS about the trend in animal adoptions. JS said Northstar had twice as many adoptions in the first six months of this year as last year, with a backlog of great applicants who are anxious to get a dog. The available dogs are adopted before they can be put on the North Star website. People are lonely, isolated, have time, and feel this is a good time to train a dog. There is a concern about how the dogs will fare when their owners return to work.

PB asked about the process of Kate Ackerley deciding whether to join the BHPC, and to say a bit about herself. KA said she loves Boonton and wants to volunteer. She lives in Montville and is a tech writer at a pharmaceutical company. ER said Boonton residency is not a requirement. If she decides to join she would be officially appointed by Mayor Corcoran.

ADJOURN

The meeting was adjourned at 8:17 pm. The next meeting is scheduled for July 1; location is uncertain (Town Hall or GoToMeeting) at this time.