

*Minutes of the Boonton Historic Preservation Commission
Date: September 2, 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

Adriane Eoga

Tamra Katcher

Mike Wade – *Board of Alderman Representative*

Faith Frankel – *Recording Secretary*

Absent:

Ashleigh Tharpe

Mike Wade

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Approval of minutes for the July 1, 2020 meeting was tabled until the next meeting. It was noted that the August meeting was canceled due to the power and internet outages.

APPLICATIONS FOR REVIEW

1. Artsy, 504 Main Street: This application was circulated to the commission and approved via email prior to the current meeting.

2. Pergaminos Bakery, 720 Main Street: The Pergaminos Bakery application is a sign-for-sign replacement, on the thin strip above the 2 windows. This would have been presented at the August commission meeting, which was canceled. The commission approved the application via email prior to the current meeting.

3. Signage for Egg’s City Restaurant, 605 Main Street

Mr. Jesus Mendez represents a family-owned business that owns a Mexican restaurant (El Mejjicano) in Denville.

They felt that this was a perfect site for a breakfast spot. The shop sells breakfast items, eggs, and burritos. He said the maroon background seen in the picture is inaccurate; he plans to keep the yellow in the background and not change to maroon. The revised sign has a lighter red, lighter yellow, and they tamed all the colors down.

Commissioners felt the colors were still too loud and “cartoonish” to fit in the town’s historic character. Mr. Mendez noted that the trim will be yellow, not maroon as seen in the submission. He said it they can change it to an appearance that would be suitable for the town.

ER: We can send you a collection of examples of what we think is good signage that existed on Main Street. They are more traditional in appearance. I agree with Patti, your logo is your representation of your business, but if the overall sign can be toned down to look more traditional, following the examples that I will send to you, I don’t think

will be a problem. I don't want you to have to wait 60 days to put up your sign, but if you can send us a rendition whenever it's ready, I'll share it with the commission by email, and we'll move forward from there.

ER: Any signage including temporary signs, or signs advertising your business, we have to approve by ordinance. You can submit additional signs with the revised sign. JS suggested that the words "breakfast/lunch" and hours be add to the revised sign.

ER: Good luck, and to Ricardo [Aguayos, owner], and we look forward to seeing your revised renderings.

DISCUSSION

The town administrator had been invited to attend this meeting to discuss the graffiti seen in town and the issue of a code enforcement officer, but has not responded. The problem is that some business owners are compliant, and others are not, which is unfair to everyone. ER reported that in regard to the graffiti sign, the mayor was in negotiation with the building owner. The pickets were either replaced or turned around. It seems they got the clear message that what they did was not appropriate for the town, and they complied.

PB asked if a meeting with some commission members would be legal. TK suggested that invitations be sent to the mayor and Neil to meet with two commissioners, and they report back to the full commission.

PB is willing to do a zoom meeting with you [ER] and Neil, just to bring some answers back to the commission; I think we deserve that as a group that volunteers to try to do what's right, and the frustration that we have driving up and down Main Street and still seeing violations. TK said we can represent that it's not fair to the business owners that are doing the right thing while the others are just doing whatever they want, and getting away with not even a violation or someone talking to them.

ER: This was expressed to both Neil and the Mayor. The Mayor got back to me and was very sympathetic. Maybe we should include the Mayor in this discussion as well. I know he has some plans for the town that go beyond the purchase of the Darress Theatre, and that may include some of what we do as well. And expand some of our jurisdiction.

PB: Nothing is easier than sitting in your living room signing in to a Zoom meeting. It's also frustrating to me that our alderman is not here. I know the first Wednesday sneaks up on you but maybe sending out a reminder two days in advance might help for the alderman. If the commission wants to invite the mayor and the administrator to the next meeting and remind them a week or so before so they don't forget. I'd like everyone to have the opportunity to ask questions. What do the other commissioners think?

JS agrees with PB. TK agreed but suggested it might be difficult schedule-wise; it might be easier to coordinate 3 individuals; that way you would have more flexibility and allow yourselves more opportunity to meet. Whereas, if they're not available for the October meeting, then we're looking at the November meeting, and it keeps getting pushed off. That would be my only concern with waiting for our next commission meeting.

ER suggested, and the commissioners agreed, to first invite Neil and the Mayor to our October meeting; then, if that is not feasible, ER and PB would arrange to meet with the two of them prior to the October meeting and report back to everyone.

BOARD OF ALDERMAN REPORT

ER noted that Mike Wade is absent; commissioners discussed sending out reminders further in advance. The commission noted that MW was going to talk to the Alderman regarding BHPC commenting on all applications that are before the planning board whether they are in a historic district or not. They don't have to take our comments but they should know what our comments are. I would like to have known what the feeling on the Board of Alderman was about expanding our review.

JS will add MW to the BHPC Google Group using the email MWade@Boonton.org ER agreed to send him a reminder in advance.

ADDITIONAL DISCUSSION TOPICS

Museum in the Streets

JS showed photos of Boothbay, Maine's "Museum in the Streets" – well-designed signage around the town describing the town's history and heritage. This is supported by an international organization that assists towns with

doing this. Towns can ask for funding for “Museum in the Streets” of their own. The organization can also assist with designs and sites. We could petition the town for funds, or solicit donations or individuals who might partially fund it, to implement this in conjunction with the plans for upgrading the historic district. Commission members agreed that this might work for Boonton, perhaps partnering with the Historical Society or in coordination with plans/budget for upgrading sidewalks, lights, etc. in town.

JS noted that people may have more interest when the downtown improvement budget is established; also, the commission should be mindful that similar plans by different committees might overlap and would need to be coordinated. The Museum in the Streets website lists the towns that do this. PB said Boonton has as many or more historical sites as other towns, and endorsed discussing this with the Historical Society; some of their members have experience with grants. TK said the Board of Aldermen’s budget for improvements might include a line item to cover the project. PB mentioned that visitors to the town show great interest in reading the Plane Street plaque. JS added that once the downtown improvement is started, Boonton would be more of a destination.

ER said people are taking and keeping the brochures (a guide to the Boonton Heritage Trail) that are in boxes at either end of the Boonton Heritage Trail, a project of the Boonton Trails Committee. BTC will be installing a kiosk in Grace Lord Park at the beginning of the trail. It’s been delivered to DPW and once done, there will be a ribbon cutting. So there is a parallel plan, with interpretation along the trail, which includes Main Street. The built-up side of the trail is Main Street and the gravel part of the trail is Grace Lord Park, past the Iron Works, through the canal, the falls, the Arch Bridge and the dam. But that doesn’t include the homes and historic places outside of the actual trail, and we do have some of those. In a month and a half, almost 1000 of those brochures have been taken, and we don’t find them in the garbage or on the streets, so people are taking them home. He will send a copy of the brochure to the commissioners. PB: What is the next step? JS: We look at what has been done already and make sure there’s not too much overlapping between Museum in the Streets and the historic trail. We wouldn’t want to duplicate sites or compete. ER: Maybe eventually an interactive map or app could be developed.

Discussions with Mayor About Future Plans for Boonton

PB asked if ER learned anything more from his discussions with the Mayor about plans for Darress Theatre. ER: I had shared with Neil and the Mayor my concerns and those of Pat Cox about the graffiti at the Smoke Shop site. The Mayor called me; they are aware it is a problem and are handling it delicately for the moment. He also talked about the Darress Theatre. They purchased it not to go into the business of Performing Arts but because they want control over who is going to purchase it and what they will do with it. They want it to be a performing arts center. They don’t feel it competes with the theater in Morristown because that’s a 3,000-seat theater. This is an 800-seat theater, so it would be different types of entertainment. It would be an anchor for Boonton and a reason to expand parking opportunities. The Mayor has other plans but didn’t elaborate; so it’s important that he lets us know what else he has in mind. I think he’s thinking about the Heritage Trail, the trestle over the Rockaway River, possibly condensing the DPW and giving that over as part of parkland for the town.

PB: The Mayor would be welcome at our next meeting to elaborate on his thoughts going forward. His intentions are to be more than a one-term mayor, and if he has the energy and the enthusiasm I’d be happy to hear about that.

ER: He took a first step but it sounds like we’re talking about a 10-year or greater plan. So why not involve us to support him in that? I’ll invite the mayor and Neil to our October meeting, and if that doesn’t work out, we’ll arrange a two-on-two with Patti and me, and we’ll report to everybody what was discussed on both enforcement and the mayor’s big picture. Also, we’ll be getting a new sign from “Egg’s City” which I’ll pass on to you.

Jeff Smith report on Planning Board discussion of Redevelopment Plan

JS attended the Planning Board meeting where they listed all the properties in the redevelopment area including their condition, etc. They talked about the Shelter House, which is part of the Station, which is in this redevelopment zone but the remainder of the Station, which is on the other side of the tracks, is not. The report says that building has many condition problems, suggesting that it is in need of redevelopment. JS expressed our concerns to the Planning Board, that we consider the Shelter House as part of the Station, which is on the State Historic Register, and if anything is done as a result of this Redevelopment Study, that building must be preserved. The planners that did the

study said Yes, we understand that this building is part of the Station, and that it would not be knocked down if that entire area was to be redeveloped.

ER: They may not have considered that if you hadn't spoken up. It is important that you were there. One side of that Redevelopment Zone is inside the Historic District. I hope they have every intention to include us so that we review any proposals. JS: They did say that as well. This is just the first step in a process. The Planning Board made a resolution to accept this study which will then be passed on to the Aldermen, then further action will be taken. This isn't a plan of action, just a study of current conditions. ER: It's a process that they go through, with the hope that if they follow the process they'll come up with the right thing.

Other neglected properties

ER: The two properties between the DPW and GL Park that include that eyesore of a warehouse and those couple of industries off Plane Street have been either under contract or sold to a developer. The buyer approached Boonton Historic Society to say they would like to make a donation to establish good faith with the town. The Historic Society will accept the money but said it comes with no favors, that this is a historic town, and that the true good faith you want to establish lies in doing something that is appropriate, considers our needs, and that you work well with us. That is another reason BHPC should offer to comment on any proposal for major development in the town.

JS: What about the Iron Works superintendent's house? Is it currently vacant? ER: It's vacant and is exposed and getting water damage, and looks like it's heading for a teardown because of neglect.

JS: Is there anything we can do about this as a town to identify the property owner and do something about this? That and the Gate House, which is on one of those properties that just got sold. ER: The owner of the Estin House is the Berman family, and a few years ago they offered to give it to the Canal Society, but the CS was never able to arrange to get access, and they stopped talking to each other. It looks vacant; I don't know what can be done. Someone would have to pay to stabilize the building. It seems beyond the scope of anything feasible. Any ideas would be welcome. JS: Can we talk to the Canal Society about it? ER: Joe [Macasek, President of The Canal Society of New Jersey?] told me they don't have the money, but I will mention it to Joe again. JS agreed to look at the property again.

ADJOURN

The meeting was adjourned at 8:36 pm.