

SWARTHMORE BOROUGH COUNCIL
Historic Preservation Task Force Minutes
February 1, 2023
Borough Hall Community Room

Claudia Cueto, Historic Preservation Task Force (TF) Chair, called the meeting to order at 7:00pm.

Committee Members Present (9/12)

Claudia Cueto, *Chair*
Shaun Eyring, *Vice-Chair*
Doug Harnsberger
Melanie Rodbart, *Secretary*
Don Semler
Jamie Shindell
Hannah Sisk
David Virgil
Susan Wright

Committee Members Absent (3/12)

Ryan McKenna
Janna Garland
Christopher Kenney

1. Administrative

a. Roll Call and Introductions were made.

b. Minutes

Shindell made a motion to approve the meeting minutes. Virgil seconded the motion. All were in favor.

2. Presentation

Cathy Cavalier, *President of Newtown Square Historical Society and member of the Historic Commission*, presented the path to form their Historic Commission and Ordinance to restrict demolition of Historic Resources. Cavalier was involved with the preparation of two ordinances (2005 and 2021).

A recording of the presentation is available [here](https://youtu.be/e1QF9KZD20s) and summarized as follows:

1. Newtown Square is a Class II township in Delaware County, and according to *Wikipedia*, it has a population of about 20k and a land area of 10 square miles. Established in 1681 by Welsh Quakers, it was a farming community with blacksmith and wheelwright shops with roads connecting to Philadelphia. An outpost and headquarters were visited here during the Revolutionary War, along with a number of mills during the 19th century. In 1860 when the railroad was laying track out of Philadelphia in all directions, service was not provided to Newtown. As a result, other towns with stations grew and prospered, and the mills of Newtown closed and businesses declined. In the early 20th century, the automobile dispersed urban populations over the countryside and a boom in Newtown was experienced after WWII. Some farms and large estates remain, but for the most part the township was developed into a suburban community. There are five sites listed on the National Register of Historic Places, dated from 1715-1860.
2. Cavalier's goal in 2019 was to resurrect the Historic Preservation Ordinance that was drafted, but not adopted, in 2005 and formalize it. There was community outrage after the rapid development of the Ellis school and DuPont properties which resulted in the demolition of many historic buildings. The political climate was against preservation and in favor of development, but that had changed since 2005 and there was overwhelming support to enact the ordinance.

3. The Ordinance was adopted in 2022 and identifies the historic properties in the Township by adopting an inventory; it encourages historic preservation by establishing a Historic Commission, educating the community, assisting owners of historic properties with nominations to the National Registry of Historic Places, and making ownership of historic structures affordable; encourages adaptive reuse, discourages demolition, averts demolition by neglect, provides oversight over certain exterior alterations, provides professional input from the Commission, and has a limited effect upon owners of historic properties.
4. Phase 1: First step is to find an official to champion preservation to advocate at the township level. Conducted public outreach: Letters were sent to the 90 homeowners of designated historic resources, inviting them to come to a public meeting. Only 10 out of 90-100 owners came to one of the 3 meetings. Some that came out were upset their property was not included on the list and they wanted to be. They created storyboards and provided photographs and historic information about each historic place. As new ones come up, they were added to the collection. Owners were receptive to the preservation of landscape and non-tangible aspects, such as scale and spatial organization, because there is a lot of natural open space in Newtown.
5. Phase 2: Solicitor sent the draft ordinance to the County Planning Commission. Delco Planning Comm supported it and made recommendations to add incentives.
6. Phase 3: Finalizing the ordinance to be voted on. The Newtown Square PC was a stumbling block, as were the developers. Getting homeowners on board was not a challenge. Ellis Preserve were very upset, because they mainly did not understand the ordinance and its implications. After negotiating, incentives and demolition were ultimately removed from the ordinance. The ordinance provided delays and options, but in the end they can demolish. The Ordinance was watered down but Cavalier knew an ordinance needed to be enacted and then it could change, so she allowed it to happen despite opposition from supporters.
7. Ordinance includes the Five Class I National Register structures.
8. Cavalier recommends being flexible and amend the ordinance later; include the property survey and map to list ALL the properties specifically; and include incentives (tax breaks, plaques for owners, permission to allow uses such as Bed & Breakfast, etc.).
9. Current work: The Commission is now tasked with adding the other properties from the 1984 Historic Sites Survey and amending the ordinance to stop demolition at the local level. There is some consensus to celebrate St. Alban's Circle as a town center.

Discussion by TF members:

1. Swarthmore Borough is different in that we have a dense Town Center, college, and eclectic mix of residential neighborhoods throughout the borough, generally newer than Newtown's building stock. *For the record, Swarthmore has one National Historic Landmark (1724, 1825 Benjamin West birthplace) and one National Register building (1736 Ogden House on Cedar Lane), two eligible National Historic Districts (1876, 1930 Swarthmore Commercial District and 1866 College Historic District), one eligible National building (1930 Swarthmore Apartments), and one eligible structure (1895 West Chester Railroad: Crum Creek Viaduct).* Swarthmore has the aforementioned 6 historic resources, while Newtown has a dozen listed. Newtown does not have a Town Center or historic district. Their historic resources are primarily houses and buildings that are spread out throughout the township and dozens of properties from 1700-1850.
2. Swarthmore's Town Center may not have historic buildings recognized on their own, but it is the collective whole of the small scale of 20th century fabric that makes it valuable.
3. Recognizable criteria are required to review each building so it is not just one person making a decision, there is a standard protocol. We need to view the cohesiveness of the whole – building, site, objects, districts, landscape.
4. It is critical to find balance, determine the breaking point when buildings, did we lose something that is uniquely identifiable. If too many buildings are demolished, "the smile starts missing its teeth". Edges of the district are important, transition between the commercial and residential need to be defined.
5. The take away is to enact an ordinance and have it be a living document that can be amended later. Key is to have inventory part of it and define the properties at the onset.

3. Discussion of Old Business

a. Task force objectives outlined in the Resolution

- i. Questions relative to the scale, materials, design of Town Center were assembled and provided to all TF members. Specifically, when the task force discusses the identification of historic resources, what questions should we be asking to meet that standard?
- ii. A field trip to review the TC was scheduled for February 12 at 10am. This preliminary walk through is meant to review the town center properties, map, and landscape so that we can begin to document the properties.
- iii. Harnsberger stated that there is a new form to be used for the evaluation and this is what we should use when documenting the properties.

Action: TF to review questions and begin to answer them at future meeting. Garland to provide parcel map with property names/addresses and Harnsberger to provide forms from PHMC prior to Feb 12.

b. Discussion of educating the task force

- i. Delaware County Planning Commission – Cueto will reach out again w/Beverlee Barnes and will follow-up.
- ii. Narberth – Cueto provided a recap of the field trip to Narberth’s commercial area on 1/21. The tour was hosted by Kathleen Abplanalp from the Lower Merion Conservancy. There is not a single building on its own that would be considered worthy of preservation, but as a collection it is significant. It’s the fabric, the sum of the parts, that represented a pattern of development. There is a consistency of design and ABAB rhythm. The 3 new construction developments were in scale and did not tower over adjacent buildings.
- iii. Media Borough – Rodbart contacted Solicitor Bob Scott, he provided the contact info for Rebecca Ross of the DCPD. Rodbart to follow-up.
- iv. Newtown Square – Sisk coordinated the presentation this evening with NS Historic Society President, Cathy Cavalier.
- v. Pittsford, NY – TF decided that the two previous presentations informed the group to begin the work required with Swarthmore’s TC and suspended future presentations. A presentation from Pittsford, NY is not necessary.

Action: Cueto to follow-up w/Delco PC. Rodbart to follow up with Scott for Media contact. Rodbart to notify Allison Manaker that presentation w/Pittsford is not being pursued.

c. Steering Committee/Technical Advisory Group

- i. At the last meeting, Cueto said that Kristen Seymore, Borough Council member, has requested an appointment of one member from the HPTF to the Steering Committee or Technical Advisory Group to assist FHI Studio. Cueto said she wants to be proactive and reach out to Seymore to contact FHI.
- ii. Semler made a motion to nominate Jamie Shindell as the representative. Cueto seconded the motion. All were in favor.

Action: Cueto to notify Seymore of Shindell’s appointment as the HPTF representative.

d. Public Outreach

- i. Cueto sent a brief statement of the status of the TF which was printed in the January 27 issue of the Swarthmorean.
- ii. At the previous meeting, TF discussed asking an open-ended question to the public “**What do you like about Town Center?**” in the Swarthmorean and in the Town Center newsletter to gain knowledge about what residents and visitors enjoy about TC (filtered by zip code). Since the meeting, the question evolved into 6 questions (appended to the minutes) which were reviewed and discussed.
- iii. Email address – It was decided that a Gmail account would not be created for the HPTF relative to the survey since STC administered the TF survey monkey for public outreach.

Action: Garland to distribute survey to TC newsletter and social media. TF members to encourage others to participate in the survey. Garland to provide survey responses to TF.

4. Discussion of New Business

a. Goals of Task Force

- i. Shindell and Eyring stated the following goals of the TF:
 - a. Formalize the Historic District for TC
 - b. Provide demolition restrictions
 - c. Identify development areas with a map
 - d. Recommend form-based zoning and eventually provide design guidelines, consideration of a HARB
- ii. Cueto said in order to prepare an ordinance that prevents “historic” buildings from being demolished we need to take the following steps:
 - a. Identify buildings that are worth preserving
 - b. Create a preservation plan for the historic district
 - c. Identify density, scale, height for entire district
 - d. Create a planning map so that it is clear what is contributing and non-contributing so that development areas are defined.
- iii. Schedule: Cueto was tasked with preparing a schedule of the upcoming months so we can work backwards with deliverables and deadlines. Activities includes: preliminary walk-through of TC, document the TC buildings, hold a TF charette to identify buildings worth preserving, summarizing findings, hold a public charette to educate and obtain feedback, preliminary recommendations/deliverable, and final deliverable.

Action: Cueto to provide schedule of meetings and deliverables.

Public Comment

Adjournment At 8:50pm, Cueto made a motion to adjourn the meeting, Semler seconded the motion. All were in favor.

Next Meeting March 1, 2023, Community Room. 7PM. Call in information will be provided from Teams if required.

Note: Due to the school district closing for spring break, the April 5 meeting has been postponed to April 12. Elise O'Rourke has confirmed the meeting date and it was published in the *Swarthmorean*.

These minutes were prepared by Melanie Rodbart, Secretary.

Swarthmore Borough Historic Preservation Task Force Survey

Please answer the survey only one time. The Task Force appreciates your input and honesty!

1. Please list your zip code where you live:

2. What is your age?

- Under 25
- 25 to 34
- 35 to 44
- 45 to 54
- 55 to 64
- 65 and over
- Prefer not to answer

3. Do you believe that that there are certain buildings (or sections) of our Borough's Town Center that you would characterize as uniquely Swarthmore, and warrant protection from demolition?

- Yes
- No
- Uncertain / prefer not to answer
- If yes, please indicate which buildings you feel would warrant protection from demolition? List up to three (3).

4. Would you support redevelopment/demolition of certain buildings within Town Center if it would revitalize and encourage retail, restaurant, and residential development?

- Yes
- No
- Uncertain / prefer not to answer

5. Would you support revising the current zoning code to meet preservation goals?

- Yes
- No
- Uncertain / prefer not to answer

6. What are your favorite attributes of Town Center?

Done

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