

SWARTHMORE BOROUGH COUNCIL
Historic Preservation Task Force Minutes
May 3, 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*
Melanie Rodbart, *Secretary*
Christopher Kenney
Don Semler
Janna Garland
Hannah Sisk
Susan Wright
Jamie Shindell (virtual/partial)

Committee Members Absent (3/12)

David Virgil
Ryan McKenna
Doug Harnsberger

1. Administrative

a. Roll Call and Introductions were made.

b. Minutes

Wright made a motion to approve the meeting minutes. Garland seconded the motion. All were in favor.

2. Discussion of Old Business

a. Task force objectives outlined in the Resolution

- i. Previously, questions relative to the scale, materials, and the design of Town Center were assembled and provided to all TF members. Specifically, when the TF discusses the identification of historic resources, what questions should we be asking to meet that standard? This has been tabled for now. **Resolved.**
- ii. Cueto printed a large map of TC to facilitate an internal Visioning Session of the historic district boundaries. A few buildings outside of TC were brought in (Methodist Church, Train Station, and train tracks). The group discussed contributing and non-contributing buildings as it relates to the standards for evaluating buildings per the National Register. A draft of the district boundary is appended to the minutes.
- iii. The group discussed the phasing of the historic district and agreed that one of the recommendations will be to nominate a historic district for the entire borough, but since the research has mostly been completed for TC that it would go first. A National Historic District makes sense because we already have an eligible business district and can update the evaluation for eligibility with less effort.
- iv. Cueto said that we are hung up on historic terms because of the legal implications, but that what is most appealing to people is the character of TC. Cueto said maybe it is not historic after all and is not opposed to coming back to council to say that we looked at the criteria, reviewed FHI findings, and we have a feeling that certain buildings should be preserved due to massing/scale. Rodbart said that we should follow the National Register evaluation guidelines because many of the structures and landscapes meet the standards and we do not need to make up a different procedure when the existing one is aimed to help us achieve our goals.
- v. Eyring said that to apply the common criteria such as location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association when evaluating the district.

Action: TF to build upon the historic district map.

b. Discussion of educating the task force

- i. Cueto said she will be speaking with local developer, Jason Kilpatrick, and reporting back.
- ii. Media Borough – At a previous meeting, Rodbart reported that she will contact Rebecca Ross of the DCPD, but this is no longer a need. **Resolved.**

Action: Cueto to provide feedback from Kilpatrick.

c. Technical Advisory Committee (TAC)

- i. Kenney said FHI Studio presented their findings of the TC Zoning study to council on May 1. The written presentation is available on borough website. Kenney said the findings were comprehensive and interesting and FHI provided a layer of interpretation and details that were not apparent in written findings.
- ii. Zoning Recommendations: Expand boundary of TC to include the parking lot north of the train tracks. The new district standard for TC is 2.5 stories, overlay zone 1 is 4 stories (Dartmouth/Myers block, Park Ave – Paulsons, 110 Park, part of S Chester Rd, and 101 S Chester Rd), and overlay zone 2 is 5 stories (parking north of tracks). *Post meeting note provided by Semler: Septa owns the Septa lot (it was traded to them for other bits of property when the underpass was built in the 1930s). However, all the Cunningham block (septa, college fields, and SRS are zoned in variations of "Institutional" in three large N/S parcels.*
- iii. The overlay districts required ONE of the following: affordable housing, green design, OR investments to improve or rehabilitate a Historic Structure. A question arose about set-asides for affordability and that McKenna could answer at next meeting.
- iv. In general, the zoning overlays were aligned with preservation goals. There was no desire to demolish the town for development. Significant majority lists preservation as an important issue in TC.
- v. Recommended the creation of a HARB that would provide council with guidance on land application applications. HARB is a big deal due to structure, staffing, legal requirements.
- vi. Goals: development of retail and preservation, but top finding is walkable town center/TOD, while preserving the character of town. Borough should encourage improvements to existing buildings as well as development.
- vii. Certain buildings should be preserved and support for new development, which echoes the results of the HPTF survey.
- viii. Garland said she was excited by 5 story development north of tracks; there is a wish for a connection between college and town and maybe that would be a way to introduce new development and encourage transit to development.
- ix. Shindell said that development on both sides of the track can benefit both sides. It can increase availability of parking below/above ground, reduce parking at Myers Ave and provide new development/density there. A developer would need to construct the up/overs, tunneling, etc. to cross over the track.
- x. Kenney said that the introduction of 5 story height across the tracks introduces a new discussion w/SEPTA and college. It is hard to view the recommendations without a massing study to see viewsheds/view corridors and changes in elevation. Eyring agreed that Myers Ave needs to be studied more.
- xi. Kenney said there are historic yields for construction, and that TC does not need 5 stories to attract a developer.
- xii. Garland said that the Public Realm project proposed to create one way traffic on Dartmouth and Park to help with parking, safety, and create a pedestrian corridor.
- xiii. Next steps:
 - a. Office Hours will be in September and members of TF will attend as a group (Shindell, Semler, Cueto).
 - b. There may be changes to zoning code, and there did not seem like much appetite for an updated comprehensive plan despite it being over 10 years old.
 - c. TF will share the historic district map overlay with them and identify the buildings that have a strong significance.
 - d. Kenney said that we need to advocate for bulk/massing recommendations from FHI, as well as creating National Historic District and a document that has teeth legally.

Action: Shindell to coordinate response to TAC on behalf of TF over the summer. Map of historic district will be shared with TAC. Shindell, Semler, Cueto to attend FHI Office Hours in September. McKenna to speak to TF about set-asides for affordable housing in development projects.

d. Public Outreach

- i.* May is Historic Preservation Month: Semler prepared the introductory for publication in this week's Swarthmorean to promote and celebrate preservation and bust preservation myths. Three more articles will be prepared to be published through the rest of May. Shindell garnered an HP essay from a friend outside the PA area to be submitted to the paper next week.
- ii.* Q/A Panel: The TF will be hosting a Q/A Panel on Wednesday, May 10. An announcement was sent to the Swarthmorean and posted to social media outlets. The session is meant for everyone who wants to know more about HP at the federal, state, and local levels and how it might work for Swarthmore. This is also an opportunity for the community to provide the TF input including hopes, concerns, and suggestions. Kathleen Abplanalp from the Lower Merion Conservancy, and the HPTF Chair and Vice-Chair (Cueto and Eyring) will be panelists. Sisk will take notes and provide feedback at the next meeting, as well as a summary to be published in the Swarthmorean for the last week of May's preservation month.
- iii.* Farmer's Market: Shindell and Sisk will represent the TF at a table during the Farmer's Market this spring, beginning May 13.

Action: Rodbart to prepare myth busting content and articles to send to the Swarthmorean during May. Cueto and Eyring to host Q/A panel. Shindell to coordinate efforts at Farmers Market.

e. Goals of Task Force

- i.* Draft TOC: Prior to the meeting, Wright prepared a separate word file of the draft Table of Contents and will work with Rodbart to develop the content. TF Members will develop their documents in small groups.
- ii.* Grants: Prior to the meeting, Eyring prepared a draft of HP tools, incentives, and grants. The document outlines the federal tax benefits, federal grants, and certified local government program grants.
- iii.* Evaluation Approach: Prior to the meeting, Eyring prepared a draft of preliminary evaluation approach for TC based on the National Register Criteria. The document outlined the suggested approach for Swarthmore's evaluation, working period of significance, suggested criteria, and integrity considerations.

Action: TF members to continue drafting the content for their individual sections.

3. Discussion of New Business

There was no new business.

Adjournment At 8:59 pm, Cueto made a motion to adjourn the meeting, Semler seconded the motion. All were in favor.

Next Meeting June 7, 2023, Community Room. 7PM.

These minutes were prepared by Melanie Rodbart, Secretary.

PRECEDENTS:

- BRUXELLES
- U.I. RAILROAD TUNNELS

⑦ CRITERIA

- LOCATION
- DESIGN
- SETTING
- MATERIAL
- WORKMANSHIP
- FEELING
- ASSOCIATIONS

NRC

- 50 YRS
- EVENTS
- SIGNIFICANT UNES
- CHARACTER, ARCH, ART
- ARCHITECTURE
- NAT/STATE/LOCAL SIGNIF.
- PERIOD OF SIGNIFICANCE

①

COMMUNITY PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT.

SOCIAL HISTORY: WPA.

START 1876 → 1973 → 2023
50 YRS

