

HISTORICAL COMMISSION EAST BRADFORD TOWNSHIP April 1, 2014

A special meeting of the East Bradford Township Historical Commission was held on April 1, 2014 in the Township Building, 666 Copeland School Road, West Chester, Chester County, Pa., 19380-1822.

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Mary Sue Boyle
Erik Freeland
Peggy Scholl
Jean Renshaw

MEMBERS ABSENT:

Rich Gallagher
Ann Armstrong
Rick Kirijan

STAFF/PROFESSIONALS PRESENT: Brenden Beaumont

GUESTS PRESENT: P. Andrew Schaum (President & CEO Children’s Country Week Association - Paradise Farm Camps); Eleanor Thompson and Marie Boisvert (to discuss Oral History Project)

CALL TO ORDER: The meeting was called to order at 7:10 p.m. by Mary Sue Boyle.

MINUTES: Erik Freeland made a motion to approve the March 18, 2014 minutes; Mary Sue Boyle seconded the motion which passed unanimously.

NEW BUSINESS:

None

OLD BUSINESS:

HR#6 - Caleb Mercer Barn (not House) 1250 Valley Creek Road (owned by CCWA)

Pursuant to the Historical Commission’s March 18 request, Mr. Schaum provided eleven photographs of the existing walls marked to show CCWA’s meaning of selective demolition. Mr. Schaum provided clarification on the height of the walls to remain standing after the selective demolition. The wall that is built into the dirt bank (opposite the forebay) will be reduced to the outside grade (which is 7 to 8’ above the floor level inside the barn). Any walls that currently are approximately 7’ above grade will stay at that height. The west gable wall will be reduced to 7’ above grade as recommended by the stone mason because there is a “step-out” above the 7’ height. On the south wall (leading under the forebay), the buttresses will be preserved, but the section of the wall between the doors will be removed so that the demolition contractor can get equipment in to remove the old timbers that have fallen. Mary Sue Boyle requested that the wall be rebuilt after that process has been completed. Mr. Schaum stated that he would prefer to wait for CCWA’s architect’s input on that. Salvaged beams shall be retained by CCWA for future projects for the camp.

The Historical Commission’s discussion of factors to be considered under Section 115-125C(4) of the East Bradford Code is summarized in the chart below:

E. Bradford Code Factors	Historical Commission Findings
<p>115-125C(4)(a) The effect of demolition on the historical significance and architectural integrity of the resource in question, neighboring identified historic resources, and the integrity of their respective historical landscape settings</p>	<p>Complete demolition of the barn would have a drastic impact on the Historic Resource, neighboring historic resources and the integrity of the historic landscape settings. One facade of the barn is visible from Valley Creek Road. The Caleb Mercer Farm is a contributing resource in the Paradise Valley Historic District.</p> <p>The proposed selective demolition would have less of an impact because (1) a footprint of the barn which is approximately 8’ high would be retained and restored, (2) the footprint would be visible from Valley Creek Road, and (3) children would learn about the barn via use of the remaining structure as an educational forum.</p>

E. Bradford Code Factors	Historical Commission Findings
115-125C(4)(b) Has the applicant demonstrated that it has considered and/or pursued all alternatives to demolition?	Yes. Because the barn is currently a safety risk, the alternatives are (1) retaining and stabilizing the entire barn -- which is not feasible for the reasons discussed in (g) below; (2) completely demolishing the barn -- which would not be recommended by the Historical Commission, and (3) retaining some portion of the barn. The demolition permit requested is for "selective demolition," which retains a footprint approximately 8' high.
115-125C(4)(c) Economic feasibility of adaptive reuse of the resource proposed for demolition	As explained in (e) below, the barn is a safety risk. Given the barn's current condition, there could be no adaptive reuse of the entire barn without stabilizing the resource to eliminate the safety risk. Please refer to (g) below regarding the costs of stabilizing entire the barn.
115-125C(4)(d) Alternatives to demolition of the resource	As discussed in (b) above, the unstable condition of the barn limits alternatives to demolition.
115-125C(4)(e) Does the resource in its current condition present a threat to public safety?	Yes. Two structural engineers have advised the applicant that the barn is unsafe. Photographs presented at the Historical Commission's March 18, 2014 meeting show the risk of collapse.
115-125C(4)(f) Has the resource been intentionally neglected?	The barn has been listed on the Historical Commission's "neglect list" for several years. In 2009 the applicant engaged 18th Century Restorations, Inc. to do stabilization work (the cost was in excess of \$10,000). Unfortunately, this work was not effective.
115-125C(4)(g) Would the required retention of the resource represent an unreasonable economic hardship?	Yes. Estimated costs for retaining and stabilizing the entire barn to eliminate the safety risk are \$300,000 - \$500,000. CCWA informs us that it does not have the funds to do this. CCWA also points out that it has opted not to try to raise funds from third parties to retain and stabilize the entire barn; CCWA's mission statement as a youth development organization is to "encourage children to open their eyes to the wonders of the outdoors and the possibilities of their own potential."

Based on this discussion, the Historical Commission members generally agreed that approval of selective demolition would be recommended to the Board of Supervisors, and a lengthy discussion ensued as to whether the recommended approval should be subject to conditions (which is permissible under Section 115-125D(4) of the East Bradford Code).

The first condition discussed goes to restoration of the remaining walls after the selective demolition. Each Historical Commission member present agreed that retention and restoration of the 7-8' walls was critical to the decision to recommend approval of the selective demolition permit. However, the permit application merely states "Future restoration of remaining walls" without providing any details. While the Historical Commission understands that some leeway must be provided, Jean Renshaw suggested that the recommended conditions include capping and pointing the stone walls.

The second condition discussed goes to the period in which the restoration must be completed. Mary Sue Boyle expressed concern that if the stone walls were not capped and pointed before the winter, the harsh weather could cause considerable damage to the unprotected stone walls.

Following additional discussion, Mary Sue Boyle made a motion that the following recommendation be made to the Board of Supervisors:

The Historical Commission recommends that the Board of Supervisors approve the permit application subject to the condition that the applicant agree to (1) cap each stone wall as shown in an attachment to the permit application, (2) repoint each stone wall (with the possible exception of the sections currently covered with concrete), and (3) take commercially reasonable efforts to complete conditions (1) and (2) no later than October 1, 2014.

Erik Freeland seconded the motion which passed unanimously.

Oral History Project

Because of the length of the selective demolition discussion, discussion of the Oral History Project will be delayed until the April 15 regular meeting.

The next regular meeting of the East Bradford Historical Commission is Tuesday, April 15 at 7:00 p.m.

ADJOURNMENT: With no further business, Mary Sue Boyle adjourned the meeting at 9:30 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Jean Renshaw