



**CITY OF DELAWARE CITY**

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**CITY OF DELAWARE CITY  
REGULAR MEETING OF THE  
HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION  
Tuesday, November 6, 2018  
MINUTES**

**CALL TO ORDER**

Commissioner Turley called the meeting of the Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) to order at 7:00 p.m. Roll call was taken and also in attendance were Commissioners Wood, Palmer, Hanna and City Manager Houck. A quorum was present.

**ACTION UPON THE MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING**

Motion to accept the minutes of September 4, 2018 as written was made by Commissioner Wood and seconded by Commissioner Palmer. Minutes were accepted as written.

**REVIEW COMPREHENSIVE PLAN 2.4 HISTORIC PRESERVATION**

Commissioner Turley told the Commissioners about the meetings he had attended with the Planning Commission, Fort DuPont's HPC and Delaware City Main Street which has given him a picture of where everything is going. Commissioner Turley believes Delaware City is at a crossroads stemming from the Fort DuPont's redevelopment and the trends in town properties for renting vs. ownership. He does understand economic forces are at play and the demographics are affected by renters since they are not obligated to do the census which can skew the numbers.

Also in play is the direct impact on the business plan based on appearance of some buildings. Main Street's objective is to help build and encourage business development and assist merchants to grow.

Commissioner Turley draws the analogy that PC, HPC, Ft. DuPont Redevelopment, and Mayor & Council are pieces of the pie working for the benefit of the town's growth. However small a piece HPC is, it does have an important contribution to make. At the PC meeting, he was able to present his input which they supported. After discussion here any changes suggested of substance will go back to PC for consideration again. They are responsible for making the final decisions and presentation to Mayor & Council.

### **Discussion of the 2018 Draft Goals & Strategies**

#### **GOAL: to promote revitalization through the preservation, restoration and adaptive reuse of structures that contributes to the City's historic character**

Commissioner Turley says we are trying to do these things and gave a summary of the seminar in Dover on historic preservation around the state. Big questions are how to fund it.

1. Federal money pretty much dried up
2. State by State grants
3. State tax credits available but very complicated to access.
4. Private grant money available but the downfall is short notice and being on the right email list.

#### **GOAL - A planned phasing towards combined HPC (Fort DuPont section of Delaware City and original Delaware City)**

Commissioner Wood believes this is important. A discussion followed with both Commissioner Turley and City Manager Houck sharing their thoughts and attempts to bring this suggestion up at the meetings with Fort DuPont. Working together may take some time but it could be possible.

One of the problematic areas is the Fort Corporation is private where Delaware City is not. To date, Commissioners Turley and Lee are the two crossovers on both sides in advisory positions. It is seen as a benefit to join the skills and interests for the overall good of the town. Commissioner Palmer agrees. However, that suggestion has not been embraced by the Fort.

The Fort Corporation's plan is to have high-end new construction of a residential area and restored historic buildings for commercial/rental use. It is thought with that scenario that some potential buyers would consider the storefronts in town as a more economical investment. City Manager Houck reminded the Commissioners most of the storefronts here are already privately owned.

Commissioner Wood questioned didn't the annexation mean Delaware City owns the Fort. City Manager clarified that they are in the city but the Fort is owned by the Fort DuPont Redevelopment Commission and the State of Delaware. They have private water utility; maintain their own roads. However, Delaware City will receive tax revenue when homes are sold.

Fort DuPont has the resources and expertise available for their HPC. It was noted that the most successful HPC's are in communities with large populations. The discussion continued comparing Delaware City's HPC with the Fort's. Delaware City's HPC has some mandatory rule in the C-1 district and advisory elsewhere. At the Fort the commission has decided to make their rules mandatory and everyone subject to them. Discussion continued about how the Fort was structuring their HPC and some of the regulations sound similar to an HOA. City Manager will ask to City Solicitor to attend the next meeting.

It was suggested to work with the Fort to have a 5-year conversion to a joint HPC believing involvement there would help pull positive effects here. City Manager Houck said if you desire some type of engagement with the Fort's HPC, she will communicate that to them to see how we can benefit from each other. Commissioner Turley said attendance at the Fort's HPC has dramatically dropped off since guidelines have been completed so perhaps it's a good time to pursue the collaboration of the two through the development of relationships from the leadership here and the Fort.

City Manager Houck believes the bullet points on this goal are good for now but a 5-year timeline is a better projection for completion than a 3-year. She would like to take this to City Solicitor Walton since he is well versed in all their rules created for their development. If he gives her reasons it can't happen she will bring it back to be work on again.

The discussion returned to how to help the residents in town restore their homes. City Manager Houck suggested developing a fund they could make application to. It was also noted that HPC should make itself known and available to the residents to guide them towards ways and means for restoration. This should be a goal added to the Comp Plan. Also, it would be an advantage to set up a booth with information from HPC as to how they can help homeowners (an internalized grant fund). Commissioner Wood suggested a booklet of the historic homes be available with the info about HPC and historic house tour re-established.

Main Street being the genesis for the tours was brought up. Commissioner Turley said that has been discussed and they plan on looking at what other communities have done. The holdup is staffing.

**GOAL – Proactively address the deterioration of historic properties not located in the commercial zone that are being used as commercial/income producing properties (rentals) to address the deterioration that is occurring.**

Commissioner Turley sees this as a 2-step process:

1. Address landlords who are not maintaining the homes to keep them in good condition
2. Add more homes in the age period of post WW II.

City Manager Houck reminds the Commissioners the ordinance addressing rental property inspections was not enforced by Council. It met with opposition because of its content. It had been based on Newark's ordinance which for obvious reasons does not work in Delaware City. Modifications were made and brought back to Council but was still not supported. A few Council Members are reviewing this ordinance and it may come back to Council for another vote. City Manager Houck believes it's good and should be implemented.

City Manager Houck believes the language should be kept in the Comp Plan and the Planning Commission does as well. City Manager Houck explains having hired a full time code enforcer based on this ordinance but now without it we have a part time code enforcer.

Commissioner Turley asked the Commissioners if they think the notion is valid to go from mandatory only in commercial zone to include all homes built up to a certain period of time. An issue that also comes up is materials. It is costly to duplicate materials in restoration so can the newer versions become acceptable?

City Manager Houck believes it would be advisable to take it slowly in implementing the more inclusive rules and prove them to be successful/beneficial then move further.

Commissioner Palmer is concerned about historic homes that are bank owned sitting and deteriorating. City Manager Houck shows the Commissioners the book on vacant homes and how this issue is being addressed. Two letters were sent addressing specifically the concerns of both vacant homes and the historic vacant homes.

The Commissioners discussed the problems with bank owned properties and how they procrastinate in selling the homes. Commissioner Turley suggested an ordinance be passed pushing banks to sell these properties by instituting sizeable fines (\$20,000 to \$40,000) on them for failure to do so. He believes no money will be ever collected but it will be a significant irritation to the banks to get them to sell the properties.

City Manager Houck suggested an ordinance that says bank owned properties may not accrue the benefit of the PMI after a certain period of time. It may vary

state to state. Also suggested was to have our legislatures get involved in dealing with the banks. City Manager said she will discuss this with City Solicitor Walton. It may be unpopular with many people but it would be a value to the town. City Manager Houck also suggested including in the ordinance that the banks should disclose offers and efforts to market properties. City Manager Houck will call other towns to see what they do. City Manager will take this to PC after the answers from City Solicitor Walton are received.

City Manager Houck brings up the façade revolving loan fund for businesses to repair the fronts of the buildings. It has a total of \$70,000 in it and cannot be used for anything else. She called the State for how a business goes about applying for the money. It's a low interest loan that the owner can pay back over time. The program is now defunct but Delaware City has the money. City Manager Houck wonders if this fund could be redefined to use for historic repairs on homes.

Commissioner Palmer asked had City Manager Houck looked into state funds for historical repair. City Manager Houck answers she hasn't really had the time but City Secretary has and many of them are matching funds.

Commissioner Turley plans to ask the people from CHAD of the IPA to come and speak to us. They speak with other HPC's throughout the State. Discussion on how to get the information to the residents was discussed.

**GOAL - Collaboration between local business owners, Delaware City Main Street Organization and Planning Commission for the pursuit of renovation funding for historic city buildings.**

Commissioner Turley says these two should be working and communicating with each other. PC & HPC helps keep the buildings looking nice so Main Street can encourage businesses to come into town. It is important to get more people involved in Main Street; for example retired people who still want to be involved are good candidates.

City Manager Houck says promoting Main Street takes a daily endeavor; working with other Chambers of Commerce, planning, meeting with people, strategizing and focused efforts. Something that may be hindering Main Street is not enough people involved. There have been some resignations recently and no meetings. One of the challenges is none of the business owners have gotten involved. This has left one person trying to keep it running. Main Street has brought in entertainment and activities and the results have been very positive.

Commissioner Hanna asked if it would be beneficial to ask Main Street's Mr. Konkus to attend PC meeting to ask what his thoughts, plans and goals are. Commissioner Turley suggests there should be a deliberate and structured integration of PC, Main Street and HPC and anyone else that includes leadership of the groups to meet once or twice a year to help the organizations support one

another. City Manager Houck asks if that should be a yearly or bi-yearly effort to have a workshop to discuss each commission's goals for the year and regular communications throughout the year. As this was discussed further it was decided quarterly communication of the commissions would be most effective because each season has its own special occasions. Conference software can facilitate this easier than meeting in person.

Other bullet points for this goal are:

- **Budget for startup help for businesses that locate in an historic building**
- **Research and visit towns that have been successful with an eye towards mimicking their efforts**
- **Support Part- or Full-time staffing within Main Street Delaware City organization that have Main Street and Historic Town experience to on this effort.**

Commissioner Turley relates the story Mr. Renol told about his son moving to a small town that he felt was not a good idea. The town started growing because one new business came in and that owner encouraged another, then another and now the town has grown because of a single business owner had an eye for complimentary businesses to come in which caused long term development to be successful. This is a good example for business owners here to take this lead and why they and Main Street should be talking.

- **Increase visibility of our town and what it has to offer**

Commissioner Wood said the businesses that come in town can't sustain themselves through the winter. City Manager believes we need to think more highly of ourselves then others will begin to see us that way. Example of moving in this direction is making some changes to Delaware City Day and bringing in juried vendors to draw in people with broader interests.

City Manager Houck offered the idea of using social media to get people to notice and want to come into Delaware City. Discussion of what could be put in the social media posts: feature an historic home, person of interest, event, etc. Commissioner Wood suggested a "small town contest" she had heard about that was successful in other towns.

Commissioner Palmer asked for more information on grants with matching funds. Discussion followed on how to make this information available to our residents. Commissioner Turley suggested using the reader board coming into town or some other venue to give a message that says go to *dcu.org* (Delaware City Unbelievable) or something short and memorable that once they get home they can look it up.

Commissioner Hanna suggested during Mayor & Council Meeting a representative from the Commissions give a report. This way the residents will begin to hear what each Commission can offer them.

City Manager brings up the City News as one source people were getting their information about what's going on based on the Comp Plan survey that was done in July.

In final remarks several things were suggested to help get information and opportunities for homeowners out to the residents.

- Inquire if the façade money could be invested to grow to begin a fund for homeowners to apply to help in renovating their historic homes.
- Republish/update the book on historic homes in Delaware City and make available for sale.
- Have HPC known as an entity that people can donate to for restoration projects.

Ideas of how to beautify Delaware City to enhance the curb appeal:

- Flags on the poles
- Flower containers
- Street paving in stages

The street paving brought up flooding issues along Clinton. City Manager Houck explained the paving would begin later in the month along Clinton and Washington and the flooding from outfall #2 is in the process of being addressed.

### **ADJOURNMENT**

There was no further business to conduct. Commissioner Hanna made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Commissioner Palmer seconded the motion. The meeting was adjourned at 8:48 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

*Bonnie Lynn Hanna*

City Secretary