

HISTORIC AREA REVIEW COMMITTEE

New Castle Town Hall
2nd and Delaware Streets
October 15, 2014

Members Present: Leila Hamroun, Facilitator
Mike Connolly
Joe Day
Doug Lovett
Jim Meek
Steve Pedrick

Ms. Hamroun opened the meeting at 7 p.m. Purpose of the meetings is to review the HAC process in place since 1990 and identify how to adjust and improve that process for the applicants and reviewers. She plans to engage the National Park Service early and use resources wisely. All meetings will be public meetings. She anticipates the review to be completed in about six months.

Committee members introduced themselves.

Leila Hamroun – Architect member of HAC. Affiliated with _____.

Joseph Day – City resident, has experience with HAC via application for his house. Overall he considers the experience to be favorable, but there are things that can be improved upon. He is a Land Use Administrator with New Castle County. He manages support staff, the permit section and customer service section.

Mike Connolly – City resident, Director of the New Castle Historical Society. He is interested in updating the guidelines, overall process, contemporary and new architecture in the historic district, substitute materials, and demolition by neglect.

Jim Meek – City resident, Trustee of the New Castle Common. He does not speak for the Trustees on this committee. He has experience with HAC and found the process to be easy and clear, mostly because of the litany (contains information about acceptable materials that can be used in the historic district) that was handed out. There is topics he thinks should be included, noting demolition by neglect and what legal powers HAC should have to enforce rulings.

Doug Lovett – Is not a City resident, owns several mixed-use properties on Delaware Street. He has extensive experience renovating buildings, including historic buildings. He is interested in maintaining historic character while exploring alternatives to materials that can be expensive to replace. He is concerned with demolition by neglect.

A canvas of the audience revealed several people who have applied to HAC, some understood the process while others did not, some have read the HAC guidelines and understood them and some attendees were aware of the litany that HAC uses.

Dorsey Fiske, former HAC member, said the litany is helpful but could be clarified. She cautioned against using composite materials saying they “cheapen” the town and decrease property values. The HAC process needs improvements, enforcement is an issue, and there should be term limits for members.

Janet Wurtzel has appeared before HAC. She suggested the library and New Castle Historical Society could explore the roots of houses in the City. She supports the use of substitute materials and wants more clear information. She would like to know about different architectural styles and periods. Many homes in the City are “worker” homes.

Glenn Rowe suggested a process that addresses standard types of requests on a more timely manner rather than monthly face-to-face meetings. Some rules do more damage than good. He supports looking at substitute materials.

Steve Pedrick is a historic restoration contractor who works and lives in the City. There is a lot of inconsistencies in the City. He cited contractors in the City not doing things properly and he questions some of their qualifications.

Mr. Meeks enjoys history. He believes it is important for contractors to know what should and should not be done. It is important to understand the periods of houses. Not everything in the historic district is historic.

Ms. Hamrout acknowledges we need to determine how to address new construction with previous construction and keep moving forward.

Ms. Fiske suggested that every real estate agent working in the City should hand out pertinent information to potential buyers. At one time HAC discussed a form letter for violators. After a period time a fine would be assessed for inaction. The City code inspector is empowered to enforce HAC.

Concerning alternative materials, Mr. Lovett said one of the biggest problems is they are not durable. Manufacturers will not guarantee doors and windows for more than one year. Some siding is of poor quality.