

**WEST WHITELAND TOWNSHIP
HISTORICAL COMMISSION
MINUTES
June 12, 2023**

MEMBERS PRESENT: Chairman Joe McCormick, Joshua Anderson, Lee Ann Embrey, Jonathan Martin

TOWNSHIP STAFF: John Weller, Planning & Zoning Director
Pam Gural-Bear, Township Manager

Theresa Santalucia, Board of Supervisors Liaison

Phil Yocum, Historic Consultant, Commonwealth Heritage Group

I. Call to Order – Joe McCormick called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

II. Review of Meeting Minutes

MOTION: To approve the minutes for March 13, 2023.

ACTION: Passed 3-1 (McCormick/Anderson, with Mr. Martin opposing)

MOTION: To approve the minutes for May 8, 2023.

ACTION: Passed 4-0 (Martin/Anderson)

Mr. Martin noted that the May 8 minutes reference that Staff will review the Façade Agreement for the Thomas Mill to determine responsibilities of the Township and the property owner.

III. Public Comment

Larry Misiura was in attendance and said he submitted documents to the Township Codes Department three weeks ago and was told that his project at 1 Whitewoods La. would be reviewed by the Historical Commission at tonight's meeting. Mr. Misiura previously appeared before the Commission on May 8, 2023, proposing removal of the chimney and enclosure of the back porch on the historic Glen Loch train station (historic site no. 023.01). At that time the Commission suggested additional renovations and directed Mr. Misiura to submit complete documents to the Codes Department. Mr. Misiura did so and asked if the Commission could review the documents this evening. Staff advised that the documents had not yet been received from the Codes Department. Jon Martin said he would not be comfortable making any kind of recommendation without providing our consultant with sufficient time to review the plans, and to do so would be a disservice to the Applicant. The Commission did not want to make Mr. Misiura wait four weeks until the July meeting and agreed to convene for a special meeting on Thursday, June 15, at 6:30 p.m. to review his plan.

IV. PLANS

1. Collegium Charter School Athletic Fields

**Address: 501-559 Clover Mill Rd.
Designated HR: 117.01 Dr. George Coates Estate, 117.02 Masonry Foundation Wall, 117.03 Outbuildings, 117.04 Pool and Pool House, 117.05 Bridge
Request: Application to consolidate two lots into one, to construct athletic fields and parking areas, and to renovate the Coates House.**

The Applicant was represented by attorney Skip Brion and Bill Duffy, Director of Operations for Collegium. Mr. Brion described the project and advised that since the School wants to have the fields ready for use by this fall, they are only seeking approval of Phase I at this time; Phase II will be the renovation of the historic Coates house for use as a Staff residence and offices. Mr. Brion noted that the house needs repair, most obviously along the rear foundation wall. Such repairs will be done in kind, the existing driveway will be widened, and the pool and pool house will be demolished. The Applicant is still evaluating options for the outbuildings and may use them for changing rooms and/or storage.

Mr. Yocum said the proposed plan was a good use for the property, promoting the long-term survival of the structures. He suggested putting a fence around the ruins. Mr. Duffy said they plan to do this and also add interpretive signage.

Mr. Yocum determined the plan will have no adverse effect on the historic structures.

MOTION: To recommend that the Board of Supervisors approve the Collegium Charter School plan to consolidate 2 lots into 1 lot and construction of the Phase I improvements, to consist of construction of athletic fields and parking area and widening of the existing driveway.

ACTION: Passed 4-0 (Martin/Embrey)

**2. Bush Auto Project
Address: 390 W. Lincoln Hwy.
Designated HR: 110.01 Oaklands Farm Tenant House, 110.03 Oaklands Spring House/Schoolhouse
Request: Conditional use application to establish satellite facility for car dealership for vehicle sales, storage and display; office use; and parking.**

Ryan Jennings, attorney for the Applicant, and Robert Wise of Richard Grubb & Associates were in attendance to follow up on comments made at the April meeting regarding the status of the Spring House and Tenant House.

Mr. Wise advised that the Spring House is in really rough shape: at his request, a mason and a carpenter visited the site and advised against entering the building, believing it to be structurally deficient. The roof is sound, but there are major cracks in the walls, and all four corners of the building are failing.

The only way to fully restore the building is to dismantle it entirely and reconstruct it. However, this is cost-prohibitive (est. \$150,000 to \$200,000) and would also diminish its historic integrity as well; Mr. Yocum observed that it would "not be the same building." A second option is to secure and fence the building and leave it "as is," but this would not prevent or slow further

deterioration. A third option is to reduce the walls to a safe height and leave it as a standing ruin. Mr. Jennings said the Applicant is willing to stabilize the structure with carpentry and masonry work; he added that they were not looking for a motion or specific recommendation from the Commission at this time, just discussion and feedback.

Mr. Yocum noted his impression that the foundation was being damaged by the adjacent stream and suggested that effective stabilization would require rebuilding the steam bank and/or placing infill earth around the building. Mr. Jennings responded that this would be extremely difficult due to permitting requirements and would require time and money that the Applicant is not willing to undertake. Mr. Weller agreed, noting that, since this part of this property is in the FEMA-designated floodplain, earthwork of this type would require extensive analysis in order to show compliance with our floodplain regulations.

Mr. McCormick asked what the Applicant would be willing to do and spend. Mr. Jennings said that no dollar amount has been identified but the Applicant is willing to stabilize the structure – shore it up – to preserve its historic integrity and will continue to communicate with the Commission. Mr. Wise cautioned against using the word “stabilization,” noting that there is no guarantee as to how long any stabilization would last. He preferred to say the Applicant will “repair and rehabilitate” the building from a masonry and carpentry standpoint.

Mr. McCormick asked if any work could be done in the floodplain without a permit. Mr. Weller responded that the critical question was whether the work would raise the base flood elevation; it is possible that just doing repair work to the structure may not need a floodplain permit.

Regarding the Tenant House, two options were presented: leave the ruins as is (estimated \$5,000-\$10,000) or cap-and-repair (\$30,000-\$50,000). Mr. Wise advised that there are no remaining architectural features of any historic interest, but the demolition contractor may be interested in salvaging the roof rafters and joists for re-use. Mr. Yocum was in favor of the cap and repair option. No decision has been made yet by the Applicant.

Mr. Jennings said the Commission members were welcome to visit the site and agreed to meet at 105 S. Whitford Rd. at 5:00 p.m. on Thursday, June 15. Mr. Wise will be there.

NEW BUSINESS:

1. Thomas Mill Report

Dale Frens reported on his visit and evaluation of the Thomas Mill, noting that the Mill was in remarkably good shape: the exterior shows some masonry deterioration, but the timber framing is in good condition. The unusual vertical oak shingles on the sides of the building are in great condition: a few have split but replacing them would likely cause more damage than leaving them as is. The 1840’s addition has some rot in the siding, and the window frames and one sill should be replaced with white oak; everything should be repainted. The metal roof shows no leaks but should be treated with a sealant.

Mr. Frens noted that the Mill building is more historically significant than the equipment inside. He recommended building a concrete buttress in the basement from the east doorway to the beginning of the hurst frame to stabilize the east wall. This recommendation was in the 2003 study, but it was never implemented. Also, racoons have been living in the Mill: the racoon scat

needs to be cleaned up and the openings sealed. Mr. McCormick asked about the iron wheel being in the water. Mr. Frens said this was not a concern, noting that it would be impossible to keep the area drained without a constantly running pump.

Mr. Jennings said the property owner is willing to do all of the work recommended and will collaborate with Mr. Frens to develop a bid proposal to get the work done. Mr. Martin said he appreciates the Applicant's efforts.

2. Table for West Whiteland Township Community Day

The Historical Commission will have a table at Community Day on Saturday, July 15, at Exton Park. Mr. Anderson and Ms. Embrey volunteered to man the table from 4:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. Mr. Anderson will compile a list of things to have at the table such as artifacts, pictures of past preservation awards, etc.

OLD BUSINESS

1. Zoning Ordinance Update: Article XVI Historic Preservation

This agenda item will be reviewed at a workshop to be held at 6:30 p.m. on July 10, prior to the start of the regularly scheduled meeting.

TOWNSHIP ANNOUNCEMENTS:

Mr. Weller advised that Ss. Philip & James will be appearing before the Commission with a request to replace all windows in the Rectory.

The Pennypacker House has been sold.

Chester County Town Tours & Village Walks will have an agricultural heritage theme this year. Grove United Methodist Church will be featured for its 250th anniversary on July 27, beginning at 5:30 p.m.

Mr. Weller advised that the recent work on the Woodcutter's Cottage was approved as part of the settlement of the Main Street at Exton development.

V. ADJOURNMENT:

Motion: To adjourn the meeting.

Vote: Passed, 4-0 (Anderson/McCormick)

The meeting was adjourned at 9:10 p.m.

Recording Secretary,

John Weller

Director of Planning and Zoning