

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF  
THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS OF THE MERION CIVIC ASSOCIATION  
March 25, 2014

The regular meeting of the Board of Directors of the Merion Civic Association was held on Tuesday, March 25, 2014, beginning at 7:30 p.m. at the Merion Tribute House with President Scott Kalner presiding.

Directors present were Anderson, Browne, Copeland, Feuer, Greenberg, Hill, Kalner, Lam, Murphy, Quinn, Ross, Rutzel and Seiden.

Directors absent and excused were Eisenberg, Ettelson, Flaks, Fratis, Gordon, Lavoritano, Marmon, Potok, Quinn, and Sinai.

Other Merion residents present included Bill Katz, Ellis Weinberger, John Cannan and Susan Guthrie.

The meeting was called to order at 7:30 p.m. by President Kalner. A motion was made and seconded and the February 25, 2014 minutes were approved unanimously.

**Treasurer's Report** – In the absence of Robert Marmon, Dave Rutzel presented the Treasurer's report for February 2014. A motion was made and seconded and the Treasurer's Report was approved unanimously.

**Guest Speaker:**

President Kalner introduced JulieAnn Murphy of the Lower Merion Conservancy to give an update on the Historic District process for Merion. She reported that the Conservancy will first complete the application for an historic district in Ardmore before beginning its outreach effort on the Merion historic district, since the other district has more easily defined boundaries and there is greater consensus to the designation by the homeowners in the neighborhood. The Conservancy has been working on the narrative and the definition of the boundaries for Merion and has been reviewing those elements internally with its advisory committee. Neighborhood surveys done in 2009 and 2010-14 will be reviewed and revised by June 2014, including any architectural survey of the neighborhood that needs to be done. The Conservancy will be developing a strategy for obtaining the additional petition signatures from Merion residents required by the Township for the owners whose properties lie within the proposed district's boundaries. The narrative that will determine the boundaries of the area to be designated will be completed in final draft form by August. The next step will be the presentation of the work to the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission (PHMC), which must certify the work that has been done; representatives of that agency will review the narrative and then follow up with a tour of the area with JulieAnn Murphy. Once PHMC has approved the district, the Township must draft an ordinance and conduct public hearings after which the Board Commissioners will take final action. Ms. Murphy stated that the PHMC committee on local historic districts meets 4 times a year and she is hoping to meet with them in December of 2014.

Ms. Murphy is interested in knowing how the Merion Civic Association would like to be involved in the process and is interested in meeting with neighbors to help garner support for the historic district designation. About the Township's informal policy requires the support of 70% of the property owners within boundaries of the proposed district. In the earlier petition drives,

approximately 50% of the property owners had already signified their support of the designation; Ms. Murphy expects to be able to achieve the required threshold of neighborhood support. If it becomes evident that there is less than the required level of support, a change in boundaries may need to be considered or, if adequate acceptance cannot be achieved, the plan to have an historic district in Merion may have to be dropped.

The focus of the developing narrative is the development of Merion from the 1890's-1930's which is suggesting that the boundaries of the district will be drawn around the large properties and homes primarily along Latch's Lane and Highland Avenue to the east of the railroad tracks, but the district's limits have not been finalized. Director George Ross suggested that there are good examples of period architecture on both sides of the railroad tracks and stated that he sees the railroad tracks as a unifying element rather than as a boundary. Ms. Murphy pointed out that the development west of the tracks was more related to the construction of the railway line and is part of a different story; many of the houses on Latch's Lane and Highland Avenue predate the rise of regular commuter rail service to the area. President Kalner reminded those in attendance that 70% approval from residents must be obtained for designation, which becomes more difficult to achieve if the proposed area is enlarged, and the "story" of the district's narrative becomes less focused. Director Graham Copeland asked for a list of property characteristics that would be regulated by historic district status. President Kalner who also serves as the chairman of the Historical Architectural Review Board (HARB), the advisory committee that makes recommendations to the Board of Commissioners on proposed building changes in historic districts, said that the review is limited to what can be seen from the public way and the review does not include facades not visible from the street or anything within the interior of the building. Materials, but not colors, used in construction or renovation are reviewed. The HARB advises on items such as window replacement and roofing but it generally does not mandate that materials must be replaced in-kind. The aim of the district oversight is to preserve the look and feel of the community.

**President's Report** – President Kalner began his report with reference to the Merion/Cynwyd Business District as discussed at the Comprehensive Plan Committee the previous night. Major issues discussed were the need for shared and accessible parking; wider sidewalks; problems created by zoning differences within the business district; a transitional section on the north side of Montgomery Avenue which has different types of institutions (Bell Telephone building, the Bala Women's Club, the Methodist church). Also discussed was limiting ground floor spaces for retail uses, with other services and residential in the floors above, which could encourage taller buildings to bolster the activated ground floors. The Township, the business district and the associated civic associations will collaborate in considering changes and making recommendations. Les Greenberg distributed a plan of the existing zoning in the district and stated that by mid- to late September a draft of the comprehensive plan needs to be finalized and sent to the Commissioners for their action..

President Kalner has been in contact with and will meet with Bishop Senior at the St. Charles Borromeo Seminary and an announcement from the Seminary regarding development options is expected in mid- to late April. The Seminary is planning to sell some of its artwork to help finance the development of the renovations in addition to lacking space to display the paintings. It is hoped that the Eakins pieces in particular can be kept in the Philadelphia area.

The beer tasting fundraising event has been scheduled for Friday, June 13 at the Tribute House. Everyone's help and ideas are needed to make the event a success.

President Kalner noted that Tami Shark told him that she has taken a job out of town and will be relocating out of neighborhood, she must resign her position as a Director.

### **Commissioner's Report:**

Commissioner Brian Gordon was absent and a summary of his report was given by Helen Guy, as follows: Township Manager candidate, Ernie McNeely, is closer to being confirmed once the Lower Merion Board of Commissioners Administrative and HR Committees establish considered a draft contract by April 2. The contract would be effective for a period ending early January, 2016. Mr. McNeely is the manager of West Chester borough and has succeeded in transforming that community in recent years.

The approval of a high-end condominium at the YMCA site in Ardmore has exposed the need to revise the ordinance by which elevations of buildings are measured, relative to the adjacent grade. The current ordinance effectively can allow buildings to be almost a half story taller than the adjacent residential buildings if the site is set on a slope.

A productive discussion took place with St. Joe's legal counsel, Merion neighbors' legal counsel and Township staff regarding student parking along Raynham Road and a determination of a need for additional parking spaces on campus.

There is a proposal to add a parking lot next to the Urban Outfitters store in Suburban Square on the property of the former bridal gown shop which fronts on Montgomery Avenue. The developer is working with neighbors to make the lot fit within its local environment.

### **Committee/Representative Reports:**

**Federation of Civic Associations** -- Kevin Murphy reported that Chris Leswing attended the Federation meeting and spoke about how the Civic Associations can work together on topics of common interest.

**Narberth and Union Fire Companies** -- Kevin Murphy reported that the two fire companies were bombarded with calls in the last month, mounting into the hundreds, which is an unusually high level of activity, some of which is attributable to the frequent and heavy snow storms this past winter, car accidents, gas leaks and fallen tree limbs. There is always a need for volunteers as well as donations.

**Community Action, Zoning and PR** -- Les Greenberg began his report by announcing that Merion Mercy Academy is planning an addition for enlarging its gym and cafeteria.

In reference to the YMCA condo development height Les stated that the mean grade should not be the determinant of the maximum allowable height of the building, noting that he had raised this issue with the Commissioners. Thirty-one units are proposed at a cost of \$1 million and above. The proposed height at the front of the complex is 35 ft, and 69 ft at the rear. That 69 foot height is considered to be too high and would likely not be favored by the neighboring residential property owners.

The Cricket Avenue lot to be developed by Dranoff will be coming before HARB for discussion as part of the Township's effort to show forward progress which would strengthen its case to get State funding.

SEPTA is planning to contribute funding to the construction of the Ardmore rail station. The station will be built on the ground floor of the parking garage that is planned for the current surface SEPTA parking lot.

**Old Business** – None

**New Business** – Michael Seiden reported that he has added meetings details to the website. Kevin Murphy reported that Community Watch wants to train joggers and dog walkers to be extra eyes and ears in the neighborhood to help report unusual activity in the neighborhood related to the many burglaries in recent months.

Michael Seiden reminded all to check the website for the storm debris pick-up schedule in the coming days.

Scott Feuer announced the train station planting date is Saturday, May 3 at 9:30 a.m. The Barnes plant sale is scheduled for the same day.

There being no more new business, a motion was made and seconded and the meeting was adjourned at 8:55 p.m. The next meeting of the Board of Directors will be held at the Merion Tribute House on Tuesday, April 22, 2014 at 7:30 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,  
Helen Guy, Secretary