

Village Character Forum, May 15, 2010

Cold Spring Special Board for a Comprehensive Plan

Focus Groups :: Historic District

- 1) Ways to Improve Historic Review Process
- 2) How to balance small town historic character with today's living standards
 - a. Cars/parking
 - b. Lighting
 - c. Energy & environmental conservation
- 3) Design Standards:
 - a. Ways to Improve
 - b. Possible introduction of examples of architectural patterns
- 4) Other

FOCUS GROUP #1

Participants: Chuck Hustis, Janet Rust, Dennis Nairr, Terry Lahey, Parge Sgro, and **Mr. X**

Perceptions of Historic Review Board (HRB) & Experience with HRB

Positive – plans easily approved

Negative – chafe at “opinion” of different individuals

Negative – subject to “wishes” of HRB personnel, home owner compelled to renovate the tastes of the HRB

There has been change: Process has been revised of late.

Positive – those experienced with the HRB like the detailed outline included in the Historic District Manual

Anecdotes

Windows desired by HRB owner were “improvements” according to HBR

Conflict between Energy Conservation & Historic ‘litmus’ test

Re-Roof issue: aesthetics versus construction value

Praise for replacing porch with ‘restoration’ to original design

House colors are no longer an issue – this is a positive change to the Historic District code

Siding is “forbidden” – people take issue with this.

“If a house is not already in the Historic District, then why should it be made to be subject to the HRB?”

Do the Historic District Standards have a value?

Resounding “Yes!”

Participant: The standards retain the historic aesthetic of the Village, which would otherwise be lost.

Participant: By maintaining these standards, the Village remains an appealing destination.

Participant: BUT there is a high financial cost to maintaining the historic aesthetic.

Anecdote

There was a new building. The Zoning Board (ZB) and HRB required conformity with surrounding structures. But people chafe at being told what to do.

Is it possible to maintain character without standards?

Multiple Participants: Residents of Mountain Avenue say “Yes! People want to do right by their homes and their neighborhoods – but without prodding....”

Parrot Street: Mixed Architecture

How to deal with newly built homes? Or renovated homes on Parrot?

Participant: Proposal that the neighborhood is slit into ‘historic’ and ‘newer’ structures.

Participant: Proposal that replacement structures be restricted by historic standards.

Anecdote

On Parsonage, the newer Victorian that was recently built was built anew, not a renovation

Mountain Avenue: Not Victorian by of interest to local history (Mekeel Plan Houses)

Multiple participants: Residents recognize that the adjacent school campus enjoys exemption from Historic District or HRB

Participant: Montessori on 301 is also exempt from HD and HRB

Participant: “Mekeel Houses are all over town, not just on Mountain Avenue.”

Is there value in restricting rebuilding?

Participant: Possibly. Proposal to assess Historic District and HRB jurisdiction house-by-house.

Participant: “Keep it the way it is” versus “Change”

Participant: “Move forward!”

Parking Space Requirements

Participant: “Defies common sense!”

Participant: There’s a cost: Trees must be cut. This is strongly felt to be NEGATIVE – the removal of trees to accommodate parking spaces.

Participants discuss the recent/current Village Board consideration for ‘payment in lieu of parking’ – Participants generally favor the parking waiver proposal.

Reference to Consultant’s note about Mountain Avenue, Parrot Street, Parsonage Street

M/P/P represent a variety of designs but gives of example of what is happening elsewhere (outside the village).

Participants wonder why M/P/P were left out of Historic District to begin with...

History of Historic District & HRB

Collective memory of participants reconstructs history of Historic District and HRB:

Participant: HRB was established in 1973 in order to ‘keep Cold Spring the way it was’

Participant: Springbrook residences were built in 1975 (outside Historic District)

Participant: Forge Gate residences were built in 1980 (within Historic District, but *ALLOWED*)

Participants propose promotion of Cold Spring as a destination of historic interest – signage, literature, maps, tours, walks... all of historic interest.

FOCUS GROUP #2

Participants: Jean Pierre Siebel, Rita Seroski, Bruce Campbell, James Hartford, David Byrne, Leo Sacks

Perceptions of Historic Review Board (HRB) & Experience with HRB

Positive – not difficult, straight forward

Negative – home owners are easily confused by the opinions and recommendations of HRB; HRB does not review so much as it engages in *design*, Participants note that this is not what the role of HRB is intended to be; too much design input from HRB personnel

Neutral – The Historic District Manual is about “what you cannot do”

Participants favorably respond to idea of a book of architectural patterns as “what home owners are encouraged to consider” “what you can do”

Negative – the HRB process should promote solar power as an improvement and that does not violate the Historic District code; “Solar must be possible/promoted without being in violation!” Idea generally shared by participants.

MA: How would this be allowed?

Participant Responds: There are precedents. High Street & Northern Avenue was approved; Main and Kemble was approved. The successful argument is that solar elements do not destroy the integrity of the original & historic structure. Their application is reversible and does not damage the historic fabric of the original structure. The solar elements cover non-historic shingles, and thus are comparatively non-intrusive.

What is the value of Historic District Standards?

They preserve architecture.

They preserve appearance.

They preserve character.

How can the Historic District Standards be used to allow future growth and technological advances?

Condominium/Town houses on the river front are referred to as successful compliance with Historic District standards while building a residence suited to the contemporary lifestyle.

Participants argue that MODERNISM can defer to the Historic without diluting historic value and heritage.

How do you enforce and standardize without precluding FUNCTION?

Participant: The difficulty is in creating a code and process that is OBJECTIVE rather than SUBJECTIVE.

Participant: There must be clarity about what to preserve and there MUST BE CONSENSUS AMONG CITIZENS in setting those objective standards and guidelines.

Participant: But the existing guidelines do outline their role and purpose while setting out the standards. The existing guidelines do not disallow the modern.

Participant: The modern building at the Chapel Restoration is “modern” but enjoys a scale, size, dimensions and materials that are consistent with and defer to the original/principal structure.

Participant: Dora Shaw’s house on North Gate: white pill box, a “significant structure” without necessarily conforming to the ‘historic district’ aesthetic.

How to set standards that can accommodate technological and social change?

Participant: On Solar installations on a Victorian house: “home owners should not encounter problems even if the roofline is altered.”

Participant: Generally roof angels are a concern.

What to preserve?

Participant: Preservation of *scale* is the key to preserving the aesthetic.

Multiple Participants: It's generally recognized that there is a *reason* one moves to a historic community like the Village of Cold Spring, and in doing so you make a kind of commitment to the preservation of the historic character and aesthetic.

Participant: Should a GIANT "McMansion" be allowed?

Participants: Roundly, "NO!"

Participant: But how was Christmas Eve Fire House built?

Participants: Oh, that was built on 4 fused lots. 1 of which was in Nelsonville. The house was technically in Nelsonville, but the surrounding grounds were in Cold Spring.

Participant: There must be a way to preserve scale and the architectural pattern of the neighborhood, enforcing standards, but without expanding the powers and scope of the HRB.

What are the issues with enforcement?

Participant: The fines for non-compliance are too low to motivate compliance.

Participant: The code needs teeth.

Participant: The HRB doesn't review or enforce now, the HRB muddles it. The HRB is dysfunctional.

Participant: There is too much room for interpretation

Participant: Even the Village isn't complying

Participant: There need to be more resources dedicated to informing homeowners in the Village, and enforcement. Residents need to be informed of requirements when they purchase their homes.

Participant: All home owners must maintain the historic fabric of the Village.

Participant: Proposal that professionals bear the burden of compliance with HRB and Historic District Code.

Participants: No, that is an unusual liability for a professional to carry....

What are the issues with a Green Cold Spring?

There are many residents who promote a "green" code for restoration and renovation: Solar, lighting (more versus less → safety versus light pollution.

What are the consequences of Speed Bumps?

What is it about "renters" that is 'un neighborly' ??