

# Chester Heights Planning Commission

April 27, 2023

## Meeting Minutes

The meeting was opened at 7:00 PM at the Borough offices on Baltimore Pike.

Mr. Chris Leiser  
Mr. John Lesky  
Mr. Dave Clark  
Mr. Mark Carroll  
Mr. Thayer Schroeder

Mr. Matt Houtman – Borough Engineer  
Councilwoman Marta Driscoll  
Councilwoman Susan Clarke

Attendees:  
Numerous Chester Heights residents

The meeting was opened at 7:00 PM.

### 1) Meeting Agenda

Historical Preservation Ordinance Article XXIV

The Planning Commission was charged by the Borough Council to review a new Historical Preservation Ordinance and submit its findings/comments/opinions.

Before discussion started, Borough resident Greg Chestnut objected to holding this particular meeting due to Sunshine Law provision regarding the posting of the meeting agenda 24 hours prior to the meeting. Having no evidence that an agenda was indeed posted (or not posted), Chairman Leiser decided to continue the meeting to the following Thursday May 4, 2023.

The meeting was continued at 7:15 PM.

May 4, 2023 – Continuation of the April 27, 2023 Planning Commission meeting

The meeting was opened at 7:00 PM at the Borough offices on Baltimore Pike.

Mr. Chris Leiser  
Mr. John Lesky  
Mr. Gregg Homan  
Mr. Mark Carroll  
Mr. Thayer Schroeder  
Ms. Melinda Kerry

Councilwoman Marta Driscoll  
Councilwoman Susan Clarke  
Councilwoman Laura Lim  
Mayor Ginamarie Ellis

Attendees:

Numerous Chester Heights residents and a few area residents

Councilwoman Susan Clark (Chair of the Borough's Ordinance Committee, gave the Planning Commission an overview of the Borough's effort to address some obvious gaps in our Ordinances. In case in particular, some Borough residents had approached Borough Council in terms of historical preservation or lack thereof. The Borough Solicitor took an existing Ordinance of a neighboring municipality and edited/amended it to try to meet the needs of Chester Heights.

- Several Commissioner had issues with how the proposed Ordinance was worded, especially how it seemed to mandate potential limitations/hardships on historic property owners. These homeowners would not have the opportunity to "opt out" based on the current wording. And there were little tangible aspects that would entice them to "buy in". As a group, the Commission felt that some incentives would greatly help the Ordinance.
- Another issue several Commissioners had involved the Historical Commission the Ordinance would create. Since none to the Planning Commission members are subject matter experts on historical preservation, the Commission felt it might better to establish the Historical Commission first, and then let that Commission aid in the writing of the Historical Preservation Ordinance. A Planning Commission review of that version of the Ordinance seemed like a more logical flow.
- There were a few technical features of the proposed Ordinance that the Planning Commission had question on. The Ordinance seemed very vague of the difference between Class II and Class III propertied. We felt Class III may be better served being removed. This opinion was shared by Beverlee Barnes the Delaware County Planning Department's Preservation Manager. Her comment letter dated 3/6/23 was reviewed in some detail. Another technical aspect that was discussed was blighted properties and how they are handled. It seemed that if a property owner wished, they could simply fence off a portion or all of a historical property and let decay if they didn't want to abide by some of the requirements of the proposed Ordinance. This led us back to incentives.
- One of the audience members mentioned Delaware County's "Plan for 2035". As a group we did not know of this document and how it might impact historical preservation in the Borough.
- With the proposed Ordinance a list of possible historic properties in the Borough actions was attached. The owner of one of these properties was in attendance. He expressed that if the proposed Ordinance indeed had some reasons for actions e.g. incentives, he'd be more inclined to be in favor of it.

- The Planning Commission felt it might be wise to conduct a survey of the owner of the tentative historic properties list to see what their opinions on preservation are.

The Planning Commission, as a whole, is very much in favor of historic preservation but feels the proposed Ordinance as currently written needs some tweaks to make it more property owner friendly lest it become a forced mandate and not a true benefit to the both the property owners and the Borough. As such, the Planning Commission recommends sending the proposed Ordinance back to the Ordinance Committee for some tweaks/edits.

A motion to adjourn was made and seconded. The meeting was adjourned at 8:55.

Prepared by Chris Leiser