

HISTORIC AREA COMMISSION
Work Session
1 Municipal Drive
June 19, 2024

Present: Tera Hayward-Olivas, Chairperson
Lisa Doak
Michael Westman
Kevin Wade (*joined at 6:35 p.m.*)
Cynthia Batty, Planning Commission Liaison

Absent: Leila Hamroun, City Architect (*joined at 6:40 p.m.*)

Ms. Hayward-Olivas convened the meeting at 6:05 p.m. Roll call followed and a quorum to conduct business was declared.

Purpose of Meeting

- Review processes, identify issues and seek solutions to improve the process within the current framework.
- Identify ways to help residents understand that:
 - The Commission was created to protect and preserve the Historic District;
 - The process is objective based on best practices that are codified, and is not a subjective process based on personal opinion; and
 - The HAC process is standard operating procedure within historic districts across the country.

Ms. Hayward-Olivas noted that HAC requested funding through a Certified Local Government (CLG) Grant to create supplemental Guidelines and educational opportunities.

Updates to the HAC Page on the City Website

Ways to make the page more user-friendly and informative were discussed:

- Add the purpose and mission statement of the Historic Area Commission.
- Add a list/table showing when and where meetings are held, including the dates when applications and accompanying documents must be submitted (*15 days prior to the meeting date*).
- Provide concise and easy-to-understand information about the application process.
- Guide visitors to sections of the Design Guidelines and Standards as a resource that can answer many questions.
- Provide a list of Commission members along with appointment and term dates.
- Clarify terminology (*i.e., the difference between an application and a consultation*).

A discussion of how to make the online HAC Application more user-friendly ensued, including adding a cover sheet, making the online PDF application editable; and being able to save the completed online application as a word or PDF file.

Ms. Hamroun gave a brief overview of the HAC application and how it was most recently revised. Ms. Hamroun will send Ms. Batty a word version of the application.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ's) Page

Ms. Hayward-Olivas drafted a list of FAQ's for review by the Commissioners. Ms. Hayward-Olivas stated she would update the draft based on input from the Commissioners, and asked that the Commissioners review the FAQ's in further detail and send her their comments and suggestions.

A discussion of the Preservation Incentives and Resources data that Ms. Hayward-Olivas compiled ensued during which the Commissioners and Ms. Hamroun made a number of suggestions.

Ms. Doak noted that all suggested edits to the city website should be submitted to the City Administrator for review and implementation. In response to comments from Mr. Wade, Ms. Hayward-Olivas noted that all suggestions could be reviewed by the City Solicitor as well.

Drafting Welcome Letter for New Residents/Businesses in the Historic District

Ms. Batty reviewed welcome letters for New Homeowners and Renters, Businesses, and Real Estate Agents living and/or doing business in the Historic District.

Ms. Batty also suggested having existing homeowners and/or renters living in the Historic District sign a document stating that they understand that they are living in a Historic District and that they agree to comply with the Design Standards and Guidelines of the Historic District. A debate of compelling existing homeowners/renters to sign such a document ensued. Ms. Hayward-Olivas reminded the Commissioners that the Historic Area Commission is an objective body based on Guidelines that were adopted by Council and the Municipal Code.

A number of changes were recommended, including creating a welcome letter for New Builds and All Residents within the Historic District. During further discussion, Mr. Wade suggested that the City Solicitor be consulted. Ms. Hayward-Olivas stated that the goal is to provide information, educate, and give people sufficient information to decide if they want to live in New Castle. Mr. Westman suggested that the city website include a link to a website that would tell people if a property is within the Historic District.

The Commissioners and Ms. Hamroun will each conduct a more in-depth review of the proposed welcome letters and submit their comments and suggestions to Ms. Batty.

Concealment Methods of Gas Risers

Ms. Hayward-Olivas gave a brief update on concealment methods for the gas risers in the Historic District. She noted that there should be a standard for the concealment method in the Historic District based on the building style. A discussion of concealment methods ensued during which Mr. Wade stated he would contact the Delaware Association of Professional Engineers. It was noted that any remuneration for a professional engineer's services would need to be approved by the City Administrator.

Procedures for Managing HAC Meetings

Ms. Batty reviewed a Rules of Procedures document drafted by the Chair of the Planning Commission and opined that all Commissions and Boards should operate using a similar document. Ms. Hayward-Olivas noted that she had mentioned to the City Administrator that a Handbook for all Boards and Commissions on how to conduct a meeting would be very useful.

Ms. Hamroun recommended another Work Session be conducted to discuss application guidelines and Tier 1 and Tier 2 approvals.

Action Items

Ms. Batty recommended that action items be clearly listed in the Minutes.

Public Comment

Phil Gross – 1301 13th Street

- Mr. Gross suggested that wording in the proposed documents should be reviewed.
- Mr. Gross opined that Ms. Hamroun should be made a voting member of the Historic Area Commission.
- In response to a question from Mr. Gross regarding follow-up of HAC decisions, Ms. Hayward Olivas stated that HAC has no enforcement power, and the Building Official would inspect the work to ensure that a project has been done in compliance with what was approved by HAC.
- In response to a question from Mr. Gross regarding which HAC members discussed the procedures and drafting the Welcome Letters, Ms. Hayward-Olivas stated that drafting the procedures and welcome letters was discussed during a public HAC meeting and the decision was made to discuss the matter further in a Work Session.
- In response to a question from Mr. Gross, Ms. Hayward-Olivas stated that there was no discussion between herself and Ms. Batty outside a public meeting. Ms. Batty noted that two Commissioners are permitted to speak outside a public meeting

There being no further business to discuss, Ms. Hayward-Olivas called for a motion to adjourn.

A motion to adjourn was made by Ms. Hayward-Olivas. Mr. Wade seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously carried, and the meeting adjourned at 8:05 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kathleen R. Weirich
City Stenographer