

**Vestal Historic Preservation Commission**  
Meeting Minutes - Monday, November 15, 2021

**Call to order:** 5:38pm

1. Present: Nina Versaggi, Margaret Hadsell, Mary L Supa, Paul Deeley, Alex Jablonski

**Old Business**

2. Castle Gardens – an early 19th century home in the neighborhood was demolished in 1954 by the owner; the town owns the land along the Susquehanna River.
3. Coal House and Museum
  - a. Town has received a grant from SHPO to relocate Museum along N side of Rail Trail (b/c of Wetlands to S side); photos and map of proposed site included with agenda
  - b. Town engineer wants to move Museum closer to the Coal Co. building to be closer to utilities; but per Kathleen LaFrank of SHPO said it cannot be too close b/c it was never associated with Coal Co. building (which is out of situ b/c it is crossing the tracks)
    - i. Approved relocation site is ~420ft from the Coal Co. building; new proposed locations (on map) are 115ft and 230ft away
    - ii. Field team from SHPO recently came out to review new sites and indicated that both were unacceptable – and suggested that, according to their new review, even the old site was questionable (though it is still approved per the grant)
    - iii. Town engineer provided a justification for why a location closer to the Coal Co. building would be advantageous (less slope, closer to utilities, better access, etc.)
    - iv. SHPO will discuss further and get back to the Commission.
  - c. Discussion on what position VHPC should take:
    - i. Town already has the grant; should we step back and let the town negotiate with SHPO? under original plan, at worst they'd need to allocate more to extend utilities
      1. Approval and grant money don't come from the Commission, but we do want to stay involved so that the town does not act contrary to written agreement with state – this could result in town losing the grant or even its Certified Local Government status, which gives preference for future grants
    - ii. Why not build a tree blind, if the issue is that the buildings should not be visible in relation to each other?
    - iii. Town engineer is saying that the buildings (in original situation) used to be closer together, but placing them close now would create an “artificial environment” now that SHPO will not approve

## **New Business**

### 4. Rivercrest

- a. Matthews wants to take down **5** more houses in Rivercrest; town supervisor also wants homes down to create park along river (which Matthews would develop and give to town)
  - i. Supervisor is advocating for the park development
  - ii. Houses and land are owned by Matthews and in poor repair
- b. Rivercrest is a historic district and is still on SHPO's list of cultural resources; the district has not been recently re-evaluated (after previous removal of other houses)
- c. Proposed plans are not clear about why these 5 houses need to be removed to extend path
- d. This is the only historic district in Vestal; the state may decide that it no longer qualifies for a district
  - i. The canal within the district is National Register eligible on its own; it was never used and so is a good preserved example of a canal prism;
  - ii. if saving the properties is not possible, perhaps alternate mitigation (i.e. fund similar project elsewhere)
- e. What approach should VHPC take?
  - i. Contact SHPO and discuss further
  - ii. What is the priority here? Protect the canal. Perhaps get educational resources and signage added to the proposed park to highlight canal?
    1. Plans for bridge cut into the bank of the canal and call for supports into the prism
  - iii. Matthews needs to submit Certificates of Appropriateness (CoA) and the Commission will make a determination after we discuss status of district with SHPO
  - iv. Indicate to Matthews that they need to start formal consultation with SHPO
  - v. NV will compose letter to town supervisor and copy board

**Meeting adjourned: 7:00pm**