

Vestal Historic Preservation Commission
Meeting Minutes - Monday, December 13, 2021

Call to order: 5:51pm

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

Old Business

2. Vestal Museum/Depot Move – Kathleen LaFrank replaced by James Carter at SHPO overseeing grant for Depot move; grant funded from state environmental protection fund; Commission's goal for years has been to get Depot on national register, and long-standing understanding with SHPO that if Depot were relocated it would be eligible; more recently, Commission has received some conflicting information from SHPO about whether would be eligible and whether the location in the grant (or other proposed locations from the town engineer) would be suitable.
 - a. Most recent communication from James Carter indicates that the National Park Service tentatively agreed that the proposed location on the north side of the trail, ~230 ft down from Coal Co building, would be acceptable
 - b. However, SHPO also raised new concerns about the proposed basement (see proposed plans) that would be added to the building at new site (though basement not likely to be visible from the trail itself b/c built into the slope)
 - i. Most people would not encounter it, except that the museum director intends to use the basement as a gallery, which would encourage people to go around the back of the building
 - ii. Also potential issue with railing on the back side, required because of height above the ground, which was not there originally
 - c. Placing the building along the Rail Trail will inherently require some kind of foundation, because situated on a slope
 - d. Justifications for basement:
 - i. Front, where most visitors will go, will be roughly flush to the trail; plan is to dig foundation into the slope; as slope falls away it will necessarily reveal whatever foundation is there
 1. Current plan shows a slight ramp up along the front for ADA access, and even this could be avoided by going around the building rather than across the front
 - ii. Inside of the building remains essentially intact (station master's desk, ticket window)
 - iii. Building is already sitting on a foundation and will need to sit on something in new location; location on the slope has already been approved in the original grant
 - iv. Will need ADA compliant access to building
 - v. Building now has a bathroom and this could be moved to the basement where HVAC could be located
 - e. Commission is willing to forgo its long-term goal of listing on the national register nomination if the Town cannot comply with the basement issue; but years of work

have gone into that process, and national register listing might open avenue for further grants/publicity/status for the town

- f. Next steps: Commission will compile the above justifications and share them with James Carter at SHPO
 - i. Per SHPO, Town Engineer needs to develop plans for new location so that SHPO regional staff can make new assessment for potential national register listing; Commission will forward SHPO concerns about basement, egress to Engineer
3. Rivercrest – VHPC previously denied Certificates of Appropriateness to tear down 12 houses in Rivercrest, but houses were allowed to decay and Town board of appeals overrode decision and allowed houses to be removed; to this point, the canal has prevented development because it is eligible for national register on its own (original plan had been to fill in canal for parking); new proposal is to remove further five houses, develop park with footpaths over a preserved canal, and turn it over to the town
 - a. Land currently has an environmental protection easement which prevents large-scale development
 - b. Commission asked SHPO whether Rivercrest would still constitute historical district with 12 homes missing; SHPO now says that district lacks integrity to constitute state district – but the canal is still national register eligible on its own
 - i. Canal is listed as a national register eligible cultural resource on SHPO CRIS website
 - c. NorthStar Group LLC has submitted 5 new Certificates of Appropriateness for demolition of houses; discussion:
 - i. Commission indicated to contractor that proposed bridge supports that would be placed in the canal would be problematic – both because it would damage the structure of the canal and because digging in for footings might pose an archeological issue (this would be SHPO’s decision)
 1. Commission told contractor that they would need to begin consultation with SHPO via online system; so far SHPO has not received request for consultation
 - ii. MOTION (MLS, MH seconded): call for vote to approve CoAs for demolishing five homes at Rivercrest site
 1. 5 yea, 0 nay, 0 abst (MOTION PASSES)
 - iii. Next steps: Commission will send to Town Supervisor, copying Code, Engineering, and SHPO, notification that CoAs have been approved; will notify contractor that 4 further checks should be sent (only 1 was included for all 5 CoAs, rather than 1 for each), along with strong statement that this approval is for the houses and does not imply full approval to go ahead with the park project – no work affecting the canal may go ahead until NorthStar seeks a consultation with SHPO
4. Rounds House – most recent update from property owner is that contractor could not schedule repairs for lack of labor;

Meeting adjourned: 7:07pm