

City of Takoma Park
Takoma Junction Task Force
Committee of the Whole Meeting Minutes
Thursday, January 20, 2011

The City of Takoma Park Takoma Junction Task Force, Committee of the Whole, met on Thursday, January 20, 2011, in the Historic Takoma Building, 7329 Carroll Avenue, Takoma Park.

Members Present: Hailu Aichehi, Lorig Charkoudian, Kay Daniels-Cohen, James DiLuigi, Seth Grimes, Andy Kelemen, Howard Kohn, Linette Lander, Barbara Muhlbacher, Katrina Oprisko, Lorraine Pearsall, Susan Robb, Jennifer Sisane, Jeffrey Trunzo

Members Absent: Billy Coulter, Steve Dubb, Megan Gallagher, Roger Schlegel, Ellen Zavian

Staff Present: None

Others Present: Scott Whipple, Historic Preservation Supervisor for the Montgomery County Office of Historic Preservation; Diane Kohn, Historic Takoma

1. Welcome and Call to Order

As discussed at the TF meeting of January 11, Scott Whipple, Historic Preservation Supervisor for the Montgomery County Office of Historic Preservation, was the invited speaker for this special “Committee-of-the-Whole” session. The purpose of this additional meeting is to familiarize TF members with the Historic Preservation district overlapping Takoma Junction, provide a learning opportunity for TF members to increase their knowledge about historic preservation, explain operational aspects of the Office of Historic Preservation, and establish lines of communication between the TF and the historic preservation entities relevant to Takoma Junction.

This meeting is not a regular TF meeting and was not open to the public. No official TF actions were taken, no motions entertained, and no voting occurred. The meeting was called to order at 7:35 p.m. Members were asked to formulate questions about what issues they would like to see addressed in advance. This information was compiled by Seth Grimes, shared with Scott Whipple, and distributed to the TF.

Mr. Whipple provided two maps of the historic district which were circulated at the meeting. The National Register designated district is highlighted in pink. The Montgomery County Master Plan for Historic Preservation district is highlighted in red.

Seth Grimes called the meeting to order and welcomed and thanked all attending, and Lorraine Pearsall introduced Mr. Whipple and thanked him for his willingness to meet with the TF members to provide insight and guidance on relevant historic preservation issues.

2. Discussion

Scott Whipple expressed his thanks for being invited to meet with the TF, and stated that his office strives to be as accessible and consultative as possible. He strongly encouraged all questions and stated that he would do his best to provide the TF with the best answer and benefit of his experiences from handling many historic preservation issues from every historic district. He said that every historic district is unique, meaning that what is acceptable to one historic district may not be acceptable to another. The evolution of historic districts is such that the context of every one is unique. In addition, he emphasized that he could not render a decision on any issue proposed in a question at this meeting, but could outline the process for obtaining a decision, as well as provide insights on the factors which are evaluated to reach decisions. He further explained that his bias is that designation as a historic district is a very positive aspect for a community, affording a level of protection and review for alterations that does not exist in non-historic designated areas.

Discussion points, questions, examples, and relevant statements are summarized as substantive points as follows:

- Takoma Junction is comprised of both National Register and Montgomery County designated historic areas
- The National Register district is outlined in the map provided with pink highlights
- The Montgomery County district is outlined in the map provided with the red highlights
- The National Register and Montgomery County designated districts are not identical, they cover slightly different territory
- National Register is a partly honorific designation, recognition that Federal and State authorities have inventoried the area. It can be interpreted as having less of a regulatory basis.
- Takoma Junction met the criteria for National Register and was designated in 1976
- Eligibility for Federal tax credits for income-producing property
- Eligibility for State tax credits for residential property
- There is “no regulation of private undertakings.” Unless they are State or Federal undertakings

- Section 106 outlines the compliance process. Federal undertakings or State highway impacts on National Register listed or eligible properties must comply. The concept of “mitigation of adverse effects” must be applied.
- Montgomery County Master Plan for Historic Preservation added sections of Takoma Park in 1992.
- Alterations, exterior changes, including settings, require the Historic Area Work Permit (HAWP)
- Section 24A is the County historic preservation ordinance
- Exterior changes require HAWP
- There are concepts to apply with regard to administering the law
- Reversibility. An example is paint colors because the structure is still present, it has not been altered, and therefore it can be reversed. A handicapped access ramp which is installed over stairs which remain in place to be uncovered when the ramp is no longer need could be another example.
- Repairs vs. replacement. Broken porch floor boards may be repaired. A new porch of a different design is not a repair. Window replacement is a common example of where repair options need to be evaluated before replacement can be permitted.
- De minimis, or insignificant alterations. Examples could include adding a bench to a streetscape, repaving work, updating or adding crosswalks.
- Historic preservation is different than Home Owner Associations (HOAs), which may choose to regulate even reversible alterations or what could be considered insignificant by the historic preservation standards
- The State and County historic preservation offices strive to be as consultative as possible
- Alterations, in general, are undesirable in historic districts
- Tastee Diner example in Silver Spring; rationale was that diners were manufactured to be inherently moveable. Therefore a relocation of the diner was possible given that a suitable accommodation and site was available.
- The regulations are largely silent on specifics. The National Park Service, Secretary of the U.S. Department of the Interior, publishes applicable guidances.
- A question was raised about the relevance of relative risk. Specifically, if a designated historic building lacked structural integrity, would that be a factor in determining

whether or not it could be relocated? Potential for a successful outcome would be a factor to consider when determining the relative feasibility.

- Further applications of the “reversibility” standard were explored. How does this principle translate into evaluation criteria? Would every wheelchair ramp that was needed be approved? No, it depends on issues such as available alternatives, usages, etc. There is no one answer that can be applied.
- Issues of permanent alterations vs. alterations which “preserve original fabrics” were discussed. Generally, paint and décor that do not involve removal of original materials are not germane to historic preservation. These types of issues may be very central to alterations managed by HOAs.
- Regarding process, idea generation steps often lead to development or alteration concepts. The historic preservation office can provide feedback on these concepts on a consultative basis. The next step can be a preliminary consultation on the more developed concept. After this point, applicants can submit their official application. This triggers a 45 day action deadline. Materials are due 3-weeks prior to meetings. Meetings are held the 2nd and 4th Wednesday of each month. It was noted that this is a very prompt response.
- It was remarked that the Department of Permitting Services takes 10-12 weeks typically to issue a building permit.
- Historic preservation office often needs to coordinate with sister agencies on issues such as life safety, utility work, zoning issues, master plans, consistency with ordinance, and other issues.
- How does the County proceed if an impasse is reached? Technical Briefs, Preservation Best Practices, Bulletins, and other guidance from the Department of the Interior are consulted.
- National Park Service has promulgated regulations which “measure” criteria to determine if an area should be designated historic
- How would development issues involving the City lot be administered? The City lot is within the historic district. New construction can be evaluated with greater latitude than alteration of existing buildings. Standards must be consistent with the Master Plan. The context of the building must be sensitive to the existing area with regard to design, height, setbacks, massing, etc. This does not mean that a building must be of an earlier era. It means it must fit within the context of what exists. A multi-story building would not be rejected immediately, because multi-story (2 story) structures exist in the Junction. A ten story building would be very hard to justify meeting the context requirement.

- Does the City wooded lot have historic area protections? It does, and it appears that it may have other constraints to development with regard to grade, engineering obstacles, and considerations important to adjoining residential neighbors.
- Montgomery County has published Design Guidelines. These are advice about a very broad range of issues frequently seen. Unusual or unique issues may not be covered in these design guidelines. Street configuration changes within an historic district are unusual events.
- Maryland Historical Trust (MHT) is the State historical office. Federal or State projects such as public works are reviewed at MHT. Anything which is taxpayer supported.
- “Minimal Impact” is another concept and principle applicable to project review
- Question was raised again about how issues not encountered previously are evaluated. Preservation Best Practices are consulted and all local criteria is applied.
- Historic designation is a “cultural construct.” The goal is to manage the resource for the future, not to turn back time to a previous era. New development will be of the present era, and in context and relevant to the periods of historic importance.
- How was the historic district considered in the Junction traffic circle concept? The concept was not an actual proposal; it was simply a design exercise that ignored relevant local issues. There is not an active proposal for any road alteration in the Junction. If it was begun, all relative issues, including the historic district, would have to be taken into consideration. Road outcomes are multi-year undertakings. This would be done at State expense. There would be a comprehensive study as well as public input.
- The 4F process determines if projects are feasible and prudent. Criteria include noise, water quality, animals, etc. It is an all encompassing process.
- Historic districts can be degraded with the incorporation of incompatible elements. This can be undesirable, because at some point the cultural context can be sufficiently diminished or completely lost, resulting in the possibility that future development could be approved that would be significantly less conforming to the remaining historic elements.
- The State office (MHT) reviews proposals using staff.
- The County office reviews proposals using a public process with appointed members
- Is there an appeals process? Yes. Aggrieved parties can apply for administrative review. This is not a judicial process. The Board of Zoning Appeals.

- Resources can be consulted at montgomeryplanning.org and nps.gov

In conclusion, Scott Whipple thanked the TF members for the discussion and challenges, and he expressed that he is committed to continuing to support the TF in a consultative manner. Scott was asked to join a future discussion to be scheduled with the State Highway Administration (SHA) to discuss traffic signal issues at the Junction. Scott agreed to join the SHA meeting. TF members expressed their gratitude to Scott for his time and efforts to provide the context for incorporating historic preservation into the TF considerations.

3. Informational Items

The meeting schedule dates and rooms are as follows:

Wednesday, January 26	Hydrangea Room
Tuesday, February 8	Hydrangea Room
Wednesday, February 23	Hydrangea Room
Tuesday, March 8	Azalea Room
Wednesday, March 23	Hydrangea Room

The TF website is www.takomajunction.org

4. Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 9:15 pm.

Respectfully Submitted,

Jeff Trunzo, Secretary

Roger Schlegel, Secretary