

TOWNSHIP OF LOWER MERION
Building and Planning Committee
Issue Briefing

Topic: Historic Resource Inventory Amendments

Prepared By: Robert Duncan, Assistant Township Manager

Date: September 8, 2017

I. Action To Be Considered By The Board:

No action is required by the Board of Commissioners (BOC) but staff is looking for direction before proceeding with the formal process of preparing an ordinance and notifying property owners that the Township is seeking to have properties listed on the Historic Resource Inventory (HRI) or upgraded to Class 1 historic designation.

II. Why This Issue Requires Board Consideration:

Board direction is being requested prior to notification of property owners that the Township will pursue a Determination of Eligibility (DOE) for the National Register of Historic Places and Class 1 designation for these properties.

III. Current Policy Or Practice (If Applicable):

Additions and upgrades to the HRI requires the BOC to adopt an ordinance. Before starting this formal approval process, staff is seeking direction from the Board. Since the original preservation ordinance was adopted in 2000, HRI upgrades are usually voluntarily pursued by property owners, however the Township can act to designate properties that are not currently listed on the inventory or elevate the status of historic resources already listed. The Historical Commission has the authority to recommend amendments to the HRI, which must be formally approved by the Board of Commissioners.

IV. Other Relevant Background Information:

The BOC held a meeting with the Historical Commission (HC) and the Historical Architectural Review Board (HARB) to discuss potential property upgrades and additions to the HRI. The BOC requested that the HC and HARB complete a study and bring back a group of properties they recommend for HRI upgrades. In 2015-16, the Township hired a consultant, Preservation Design Partnership (PDP), to conduct surveys of the 34 specific properties selected by the HC and HARB using funds awarded by a Certified Local Government grant from the Pennsylvania Historical & Museum Commission (PHMC).

PDP found that most of the properties surveyed would likely qualify for further local protection via listings on the inventory or upgrades to present classification. Of the 34 properties surveyed, 27 were found to likely be eligible for Class 1 status. Of these, 14 do not currently have DOEs from PHMC, a required step for a Township classification upgrade. A property with a DOE designation does not provide protection from demolition or inappropriate exterior improvements. These protections only occur if the Township adds the property to the HRI. A DOE designation is required for the Township to consider upgrading any property as a Class 1 historic resource.

On September 7, 2017, the Historical Commission held a special meeting to determine which of the 34 historic resources surveyed to recommend for listing or classification upgrades. The Commission voted to advance 13 of these 34 resources, which will require receiving DOEs for 8 resources (2 of which are scattered historic objects which were not recommended for Class 1 status by the consultant). Other properties recommended for upgrades have obtained DOEs in the past. If PHMC determines that any of the currently undesignated properties submitted do not meet their qualifications for DOEs, Class 2 status might still be pursued.

The properties recommended for advancement are:

Resource Name	Address	Ward	Current Status	Consultant's Recommendation
Milestones *	Lancaster, Montgomery, Old Gulph Rds.	Various	None	Local Designation
Merion Road Signs *	Approx. 42 Intersections in Merion	12, 13	None	Upgrade to Class 2
Egyptian/Bala Theatre *	163 Bala Avenue, Bala Cynwyd	9	Class 2	Upgrade to Class 1
The Gerhard Building	130 S. Bryn Mawr Avenue, Bryn Mawr	10	None	Upgrade to Class 1
Merion Train Station Complex *	204 Civic Circle, Merion Station	12	None	Upgrade to Class 1
Gladwyne Jewish Mem. Cemetery *	Greaves Lane, Gladwyne	2	None	Upgrade to Class 1
The Barnes	300 N. Latches Lane, Merion Station	12	None	Upgrade to Class 1
Erdman Hall, Bryn Mawr College *	101 N. Merion Avenue, Bryn Mawr	11	None	Upgrade to Class 1
Ashbridge Complex	1301 W. Montgomery Ave., Bryn Mawr	6	Class 2	Upgrade to Class 1
Clothier Residence *	1860 W. Montgomery Avenue, Villanova	6	Class 2	Upgrade to Class 1
WCAU TV Studios *	10 Monument Road, Bala Cynwyd	9	Class 2	Upgrade to Class 1
St. Charles Borromeo Complex	100 Wynnewood Road, Wynnewood	7	None	Upgrade to Class 1
Wynnewood Train Station/Sheds	75 E. Wynnewood Road, Wynnewood	7	None	Upgrade to Class 1

* = DOE needs to be obtained for Class 1 designation

The consultant's surveys contain all of the information needed for PHMC to evaluate properties for eligibility, so the only further staff administrative work at this time would be to submit the surveys to PHMC.

The Township received CLG grant funds to advance the protection of these properties and advancing them for further review fulfills the next step of this process. Expansion of the Historic Resource Inventory is also a recommendation of the 2016 Comprehensive Plan; recommendation LH1 reads: "Engage in affirmative measures designed to add properties eligible for Class I status to the local Historic Resource Inventory." Recommendation LH3 reads: "Routinely update the

Historic Resource Inventory (HRI) to ensure that it adequately protects the community's valued historic resources." In addition, recommendation LH4 reads: "Broaden the scope of the HRI to include resources, such as objects and historic sites, which contribute to the Township's heritage." The recommended inclusion of two sets of significant historic objects (milestones and Merion street signs) will be the first time that the addition of historic objects will be considered since the adoption of the Historic Objects ordinance in March, 2016.

If the BOC authorizes staff to proceed with these HRI upgrades and if DOE designations are obtained from PHMC, an additional special HC meeting will be held, prior to which the owners of all properties being considered at that stage will be sent letters within the proper notification period as required by Township Code. The HC's recommendation from that meeting will again be forwarded to the Building & Planning Committee and Board of Commissioners for their consideration of an ordinance to adopt the list in whole or part.

V. Impact On Township Finances:

The Pennsylvania Historical & Museum Commission does not charge for Determination of Eligibility evaluations. The only expenses would be for printing and postage (if non-digital submission is required) and a minimal amount of staff time.

VI. Staff Recommendation:

Staff recommends starting the formal approval process to upgrade 12 of these 13 properties, including the submission of 8 properties for PHMC's review to advance the historic resource designation process. There is one property the staff is not recommending for upgrade. In 2014, the Township entered into an agreement with Main Line Health relating to preservation of the Gerhard Building at Bryn Mawr Hospital. Main Line Health agreed not to submit any permits for demolition and the Township agreed not to consider listing the Gerhard Building on the HRI. This agreement remains in effect until 2019. Staff recommends that the Township honor this agreement and not proceed to consider listing the Gerhard Building while this agreement is in effect.