

**HISTORIC DISTRICT &
HISTORIC PROPERTY
COMMISSION**

Allison Sanders, Chair
Lisa Pojano, Vice-Chair
Gilbert Weatherly, Clerk
Jeffrey Bendremer
Lori Fusco

Alternates
Pam Brown
Peter Gaboriault
Alice Schroeder



**TOWN HALL
238 Danbury Road
Wilton, Connecticut 06897**

**Historic District Commission Meeting Minutes
Tuesday, February 2, 2021
Electronic Meeting: 7:30 pm**

Special Notice About Procedures for the Electronic Meeting

To view a livestream of the meeting click on the link or paste into your browser:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/82631205745?pwd=bjUrM0Q3VGI5V3pva29JWIZTMnBBUT09>

To submit public comment, please send an email to lisa.pojano@wiltonct.org, including “public comment” in the subject line. It will be read and reviewed during “Public Comment” on the agenda.

MINUTES

I. Call to order: 7:35 pm

a. Attendance: Commissioners Sanders, Pojano, Weatherly, Brendremer and Fusco present. Alternate Brown attending.

b. Minutes: After discussion Chair moves that the Jan. 5, 2021 minutes be approved, Brendremer seconds and the vote to approve is unanimous.

II. GIS Overlay of Historic Districts Update: Lisa Pojano stated that due to the snow storm she was unable to do the research at Town Hall and will be prepared for the next meeting.

III. Lane Bridge Replacement, Update: Discussion on the design of the replacement bridge.

IV. P&ZSP#471 Nissan Dealership storage lot expansion update: Discussion on the outcome of P&Z decisions.

V. Annual Report of HDC for SHPO: Chair shared the report she submitted and the text of the report is included at the end of the minutes.

VI. Certified Local Government (CLG) application: Chair was unable to obtain the application form and manual thus there was no action possible on this item.

VII. Public Comment: None

VIII. Adjournment: 8:24 pm

Next Meeting March 2, 2021

Submitted by Gil Weatherly, Clerk

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2020 Annual Report

2020 Commissioners:

Allison Gray Sanders, Chair (continuing) Lisa Pojano, Vice-Chair (continuing)
Gilbert Weatherly, Clerk (continuing) Jeffrey Bendremer joined September 8,
2020 Lori Fusco (continuing)

Alternates:

Pam Brown (continuing) Peter Gaboriault (continuing) Alice Schroeder joined
September 22, 2020

Meetings Held:

Regular: January 7; February 4; June 2; July 7; September 1; October 6;
November 4; December 1

Special: February 10; June 11; September 25; November 9 **Meetings cancelled**
due to COVID-19: March 17, April 7; May 6

Notes on 2020:

The year was, of course, dominated by COVID19. A number of scheduled HDC meetings were not held, though by June we were on conference call or Zoom.

The Tools for Historic Preservation report by Emily Innes of Harriman was submitted. It is attached.

The Commission pursuing the goals set by the POCD, with action taken on three: CLG status; GIS overlay with historic house information; and town funding for signage and information.

A positive change for the town and the HDC was the establishment of an Architectural Review Board (ARB). It is the same advisory group, reporting to P&Z, which reviews applications for the Village districts (Wilton Center, Cannondale and Georgetown). The group is attentive to historic design and was firm in upholding the need for Secretary of the Interior Standards for those projects such as 200 Danbury Road (see below). While their position is advisory, their recommendations have considerable weight with applicants and the P&Z Commission.

COA Requests: None

Demolition Delay Applications: 433 Belden Hill Road

200 Danbury Road 40 Branchbrook Road 2 Lennon Lane

None delayed.

The owners of 2 Lennon Lane demolished approximately 95% of their home before requesting a demolition permit. Upon review, the HDC allowed the demolition but submitted a statement to the Building Department that read in part: "The HDC is extremely concerned that the owners of

2 Lennon Lane did not obtain a demolition permit in a timely fashion. This prevented the HDC from properly evaluating the property prior to demolition. We do not condone property owners demolishing structures within our purview without proper permitting and urge you impose a penalty."

The Building Department imposed a fine of \$500.

Other Work of the Commission:

Funding Request to the Town: HDC again requested funding for historic district markers, a mailing, and historic markers for town owned buildings. These funds were not supplied to the Commission, though they are a POCD goal.

Historic Preservation Tools Project: Consultant Emily Innes of Harriman completed her research project and submitted it to the Commission. It was provided to P&Z with a request that the HDC

have an opportunity to present it to the group. However, P & Z is embarking on a POCD goal, to review zoning on Rt. 7 commercial corridor, and HDC has been asked to wait until they extend an invitation to present.

Demolition Delay Ordinance Revision: Final suggested changes to the proposed

update of the Demo delay were submitted to First Selectwoman and Town Counsel in July. Commission was advised that funding would need to be allocated for legal review. No further action in 2020.

200 Danbury Road: Last year, the developer had submitted a plan to redevelop 200 Danbury Road including demolishing the HRI house. In a first, P&Z directed the developer to keep the

house to get the variances in height etc. In a follow-up statement, the HDC recommended Secretary of the Interior standards will apply, which they will be, and with supervision from the ARB. A win for preservation!

HDC page on Town Website: Link mapping; Address lists of structures in LHDs now have live links to HRI forms or similar documents which describe the property.

P&Z Subcommittee on Rt 7 Zoning Presentation: Anticipating an eventual presentation to P&Z Subcommittee, the HDC worked on a power point with baseline information so we can respond quickly when invited to present. In the last month, P&Z has gained approval from the Town to designate funding for a consultant to help with the Zoning Review project, so it will likely be a while before the HDC is called upon.

CLG: Per a POCD goal for HDC, we have begun to work on the application for Certified Local Government.

GIS Overlay of Local Historic Districts: Commission is working with P&Z Department to accomplish this POCD goal.

Statements:

200 Danbury Road

TO: Planning and Zoning Commission FROM: Historic District Commission DATE: March 18, 2020 RE: 200 Danbury Road

This is the first development in Wilton in which saving a historic building is an incentive to allow increased building height, density, and other considerations. P&Z should carefully consider the precedents set for future developments which also save antique buildings. The HDC is concerned that this project is out of scale for the site and context. It will loom over its own historic building, the Morehouse House, and the neighboring building at

196 Danbury Road (the c. 1840 Charles Comstock House), and over historic Sharp Hill Cemetery across the street.

HDC recommends considering the following: 1. Developer should show alternate schematic plan with antique building remaining in original location (similar to Inland Wetlands requirement to show alternative plans for

site development).

2. Renderings are shown in an idealized fashion, not in relation to reality. Applicant should supply views of the proposed project imposed on a photographic image of the adjacent sites to clearly show size and compatibility with the character of the neighborhood. In the case of 200 Danbury Road: Show how the size of the project relates to the buildings at

196 Danbury Road; The Morehouse House of 198 Danbury Road; Sharp Hill Cemetery. The view as you drive up Sharp Hill to the intersection with Rt 7 and relationship of entry off Sharp Hill Road to the litch gate at Sharp Hill Cemetery.

3. The antique building should be renovated and maintained at “Secretary of the Interior Rehabilitation Standards” . Suggest approval by independent architect.

4. Detailed drawings of the intended renovation of the antique structure must be shown, indicating how exterior features/elements are being maintained and preserved. Suggest approval by the ARB.

5. Stone walls must be actual stone, not landscape block, and must have a distinctly local New England character. To be approved by the ARB.

6. Walls adjacent to 196 Danbury Road are too high, and of inappropriate design and material as shown in current set.

7. Plant material size –as mature trees are part of the character of the current site, larger size trees, not saplings, must be planted.

8. In the case of moving the building, have the developer fund a professional archaeologist on-site during excavation and grading (likely one day), in order to observe if any historic artifacts can be salvaged and removed. Any such artifacts to be given to the Wilton Historical Society

Lover's Lane Bridge:

TO: Frank Smerliglio, Wilton Town Engineer, Priti Bhardwaj/DOT Co: Michael Wrinn/Planning & Zoning; Robert Sanders/ Wilton ARB; Mary Dunne/SHP0; Marena Wisnewski/SHP0; Stacey Vairo/Preservation CT; Priti Bhardwaj/CT DOT FROM: Historic District Commission

DATE: November 9, 2020 RE: DOT Project # 0161-0142 Replacement of Bridge # 04975 Lovers Lane, Wilton

This statement represents an initial response from the HDC pending additional review of documents, studies and design plans for the Lover's Lane Bridge. Requests: The HDC requests a clear chart or timeline that maps out when the different design phases are set to occur and when/how input from the HDC commission should occur.

Please provide a list of signatories and potential signatories for the Section 106 review and provide a list of the various consulting parties. Please advise as to when the HDC will see a schematic rendering of the proposed bridge design

Comments: The 1930s Lover's Lane bridge over Comstock Brook is located in an historic area which encompasses some of Wilton's best known and well-preserved structures, including the Wilton Congregational Church and the Wilton PlayShop, the mill dam and the historic Lover's Lane neighborhood. The area is designated as the Wilton Center National Register District. The National district includes Local Historic District #2, which is directly adjacent to the bridge. The scale and existing character of the area demands that the bridge have an appropriate size and aesthetic character in tune with its surroundings.

The Historic District Commission urges that the new design: Minimize the width of the

replacement bridge. The road is narrow, and the existing bridge is 16' in width. The HDC advocates a replacement width that is appropriate based on traffic studies which capture actual, not estimated, recent vehicle counts. The smaller the footprint of the bridge, the less damage to existing natural and historic structures impact on surrounding areas.

Minimize the visual impact of the replacement bridge. Use natural materials

as much as possible, including true stone facings which match the character and aesthetic of the stonework around and part of the existing bridge structure. Formed stone/cast concrete is unacceptable. Timber-beam guide rails along the roadway would be acceptable. Replacement of the existing stone walls with true stone walls of the same character is preferable.

Expand views of Comstock Brook with an aesthetically pleasing rail design which permits maximum views of the river.

Minimize the removal or destruction of existing mature trees and stone walls.

Minimize temporary bridge impact on 10 Lover' s Lane property by disturbing as little as possible, and by providing a sympathetic plan with native plants to restore the landscape.

Minimize the taking of land from 80 Ridgefield Road, which is in LHD #2.

Nissan Dealership Parking Storage Expansion – Impact on LHD #6

TO: Planning and Zoning Commission FROM: Historic District Commission DATE: December 1, 2020 RE: SP#471 application Bruce Bennett Nissan Dealership

Background The area which will be impacted by the SP#471 application is located in Georgetown Local Historic District #6 which was created in 2007, gaining the oversight of the Historic District Commission. This is a peaceful, tree-lined, residential parcel with well-preserved historic homes. Most of the homes and churches were built within a limited time frame, approximately 1850 – 1930, providing housing for mill workers, many of whom were immigrants, and their managers. The neighborhood still retains its small-town look and ambiance and feels like a unified community. Architectural styles represented include Victorian, Greek Revival, Colonial Revival, and Italianate. The neighborhood is also listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Statement Three aspects of the proposal for SP #471 are of concern to the HDC, all pertaining to the project' s location abutting Local Historic District #6. These are: compliance with the goals of the 2029 POCD; scale of the project; and potential damage to historic structures from construction.

1. The HDC disagrees with the Applicant' s “Statement of Compliance with Plan of Conservation and Development” which avers that Application #471 for

a Special Permit manages “the character and impacts of development along Route 7 and in Georgetown, and (ii) ensures that development along Route 7 provides adequate buffers and appropriate scale when adjacent to residential neighborhoods.” Providing parking, lighting, and access for up to 449 vehicles, this

supersized parking lot proposal is disturbingly out of scale relative to the neighboring residential Local Historic District #6/National Register District and is also much larger than adjoining local businesses. In fact, the buffers presented in the plan are not adequate to screen the proposed parking lot expansion. Rather than complying, this special permit application is contrary to the 2029 POCD’ s intention to protect and enhance the Georgetown Village Center.

2. Context sensitive design, which is called for in the POCD, must respect the existing scale and style of the neighborhood. Instead, the plan calls for literally blowing up the existing buffering landscape and forcing a residential historic neighborhood to be subjected to the sights, sounds and traffic of hundreds of cars and trucks daily. The traffic study by Hardesty & Hanover focused only on North Main Street and Danbury Road; the impacts to West Church Street/ LHD #6 were not explored, giving the impression that there will be no changes to current conditions. This is, at a minimum, misleading. The design offered is not at appropriate scale, nor in context.

3. POCD Goal 4 is to “Preserve Wilton’ s Rural Character, Historic Resources, and Cultural Landscapes. 4.1: Preserve Wilton’ s historically important structures and cultural heritage. From the HDC perspective, the construction of this project is putting the historic district structures in harm’ s way and may literally damage them. To create the expanded parking lot, the steep slope and its underlying ledge will require substantial blasting, soil removal, vegetation removal and tree removal. Because of the close quarters of the dealership to LHD#6, the impact of such activities will be undeniable.

Blasting at such close quarters may affect the integrity of historic structures including foundations, plaster walls, window and door frames, historic barns, and two historic churches both with stained glass windows, all of which is extremely concerning to the owners and the Historic District Commission. These potential damages were also noted by neighbors in their letters to P&Z.

The HDC objects to significant changes in the landscape as seen from LHD #6 towards the parking lot and dealership, including lowering the height of the ridge line. Keeping the existing ridge line intact is essential in maintaining the historic character of the area, and in blocking noise and light pollution, and for visual screening.

The HDC recommends that the applicant be required to engage a structural engineer with experience in antique buildings. During the construction process, including but not limited to the blasting phase, this professional will regularly and frequently assess impacts on structures in Local Historic District #6, such impacts to be reported to the Building Department, where this

information will be made available to the public.

The HDC recommends that the applicant provide a more robust landscape plan to mitigate impacts on Local Historic District #6.