

West Seneca Historical Commission June 5, 2024 Meeting Minutes

The meeting was called to order at 6:34 P.M. by Chairperson Paul Lang.

Fire Safety Notifications were stated.

Roll Call:

Paul Lang – Present

Ray Ball – Present

Fran D’Amico – Present

Michael Siuta – Present

2 students were also present

Motion by Mr. Ball, seconded by Ms. D’Amico, to waive the reading of the May 1, 2024 meeting minutes.

OLD BUSINESS:

1. Status of 2544 Clinton Street Update – SEQRA Response Discussion

The Commission cannot move forward on any projects because the Demolition Ordinance, Demolition application and Landmark application are being held up at the town level. Having these documents would have given the Historical Preservation Commission the ability to establish their credibility and identity. This would have been a great example to help show how the local Commission can do something productive and act in the community’s best interest, from the heritage point of view, and still assist in advanced development. Not having all these documents is the main reason behind wanting to separate the Landmark application from the rest of the package. Not separating things would hold things up and make the Commission wait until Fall to be able to act on anything.

The Commission does not have to go along with SHPO’s determination as the commission deals with local landmarks and what holds a special meaning to the Town of West Seneca.

Mr. Siuta questioned when the Town received the paperwork from the Commission – the draft was submitted in March, the finalized work has been in their hands for a couple months.

The Commission is concerned if they separate the Landmark application from the Demolition Application the Town will push it to the back burner and forget about it. As things sit right now, they can’t act on or do anything. Mr. Lang had hoped that after the May meeting things would be approved and they would be able to move forward. His hope was to use 2544 Clinton as a test piece. The Commission is held at a standstill with this not being approved or adopted. At this time they cannot have a type of formal action regarding the property at 2544 Clinton, but they can give their comments.

Mr. Ball stated there have been questions regarding 2544 Clinton Street and was going to refer the resident to Mr. Lang, as he has more knowledge of what is going on.

As per the last meeting, the Commission was happy with the general direction of the plans for the property at 2544 Clinton Street. It was perceived they were to be preserving the main house and for the most part respecting the viewshed, along with the stone fence.

Looking at the site plan print out:

The architect (LaBella) is moving forward with this project. They have submitted the application to appear before the Zoning Board, it will then be going before the Town Board for the special permit once they get the special variance permits that they need.

Mr. Ball stated, according to the plans he has seen, he doesn't see anything that the Zoning Board will object to. However, the very first building to the East of the old (main) building is the only building that he would question, as far as placement. Having this building in this location blocks the view of the main building. Mr. Lang does not think the Commission can make the design suggestion but would write a letter of response stating that the Commission believes the property would be eligible for local Landmark listing under certain criteria and within that criteria would explain the concerns of the view set from the primary drive and express concerns regarding the four-unit townhouse interrupting the viewshed. The parking spots that are planned to be right in front of the main building is also a concern. It is not an ideal situation as it would also block the view of the main building. Mr. Lang suggests, based on his experience, the Commission could voice their concerns as to why this layout/plan does not work and let them come up with a solution.

It was questioned if it is the Commission's job to protect an archeological site – it could. Lithic (Stone Age) materials were found on this property. A study done in 2023 used metal detecting and quarrying, which was not useful, and then did trenching, which found old spoons, utensils, arrowhead, sharpening flints and a few other objects, but no stoneware. It was recommended that a higher-level study (Phase 1-B) be done. This could be a reason the developers are avoiding certain areas of the property. Avoiding flooding issues could also be a reason. It appears that the archeological site is just inside the floodplain, according to the drawing. Having found these items so close to the floodplain, more items could have been washed away, or these items may have floated downstream to this area. This area could have been a settlement at one point. Mr. Ball stated that he has never seen anything regarding an archeological site qualifying as a landmark. Mr. Lang will contact SHPO and Julian to get clarification on this. There is concern if this specific area is disturbed and turns out to be Native American what type of repercussion this will bring the town.

Both reports provided suggest doing a 1B level study. Phase 1B archaeological surveys typically involve reconnaissance level fieldwork to determine whether archaeological sites or other cultural resources are present in each project area. Phase 1B architectural surveys typically involve reconnaissance level fieldwork to determine whether buildings, structures, monuments and other elements of the built environment in a project area are potentially significant cultural resources eligible for the National Register of Historic Places. How would that be funded – possibly something students at the University of Buffalo could do. At times the due diligence is on the developer.

Other than the impact on the primary viewshed, the developer is planning to maintain the stone wall and widen the driveway. The Commission is ok with the widening of the driveway as long as nothing needs to be done to the stone wall or the gate. It was questioned if the interior of the main building being reconfigured was an issue with the Commission – no one objected. Is anyone concerned with the loss of the barns – no one objected. The parking lot, the building blocking the viewshed of the main house, and the potential for an issue with the archeological site are the main concerns of the Commission. The Commission is offering cooperation if the builders would like to seek a solution, they would be amendable to.

Mr. Lang was going to use the property at 2544 Clinton Street to show how beneficial the Landmark application would have been. Having the Landmark application would have shown the criteria, why it's important, and why certain statements are made. The Landmark application will be approved sooner or later. Mr. Lang stated 2544 Clinton Street, even after the build is completed, could still be Landmarked by the Commission. It is more for the visual impact that it has on the community.

The proposed development of 2544 Clinton Street includes plus or minus 88 units split between repurposing of the existing mansion on site to now include 13 units and 8 townhome buildings for a total of 75 units. It is not understood where the extra units are to be placed, as the provided plans only show 64 units – this site plan is not updated for what the developer is proposing. The date of the cover letter explaining this is May 22, 2024, which is not the date of the site plan. The site plan provided also does not show any elevation – do these buildings have additional floors. The commission considers this site plan incomplete without elevations shown to truly understand what the plan is for development.

To sum up the concerns of the Commission:

- Parking – in front of the main building
- The building to the East of the main building – obstructing the viewshed
- Adjacency to the archeological areas – it is still sensitive cultural fabric
- The 1B study was recommended by the consultants – will this be done

Mr. Lang will draft a letter to comment on the proposed site plan. Hoping to get this in before the next Planning Board meeting.

2. Review of 557 Main St. – Site Visit from May Summary

The Commission did look at 557 Main Street. They questioned the history and authenticity of the building. It is older, but they do not believe it to be an Ebenezer structure. This building was flagged in the original survey district. Interested to see what SHPO comes back with regarding their research of the property, but they believe it will not meet the criteria.

PUBLIC COMMENTS ON NEW BUSINESS

None

NEW BUSINESS

3. Chairperson’s Report: Board Membership + Advancement of Town Submissions

The updates that have been received from the town, while positive, do not allow the Commission to do anything at this time. Because of this the Commission is at a standstill. Nothing can be done in time for the next Board meeting.

Supervisor Dickson has signed the contract for Preservation Studios and things are moving in a positive direction, although very slowly. Mr. Lang has been in contact with Deputy Supervisor Greenan regarding where the Commission stands with the Demolition Ordinance, Demolition Application and Landmark Application. All these documents have been forwarded to the Town and Town Attorney. Mr. Lang has also been in contact with Mr. Schieber and Mr. Busse from Code Enforcement who have been very responsive regarding the permits. Amelia responded to Mr. Lang regarding communications with Town Attorney Trapp – he is reviewing portions of the code for modification regarding the Demolition Ordinance. This will be gone over, and changes completed during the summer months and will then have proposals put together for the Board's consideration. Things are moving forward, but not at a rapid pace. It is frustrating for the Commission as it puts them in a holding period. It was questioned what the commission wants to do at this point and time. Mr. Lang is thinking that it might be a good idea to break the Landmark application away from the thought process of the Demolition Ordinance and/or Demolition Application. The Demolition Ordinance is complicated, and an additional Code needs to be vetted and worked back into the whole process, however the Landmark Application is not. The landmark application is for the Commissions discretion and has been created by the Commission to help in their determination. It is not tied to anything, there is no specific Code that needs to be followed. The Commission agrees that the Landmark application should be separated and pushed forward to get the process moving. The only concern with moving forward with the landmark application is having this get pushed through and the remaining legislation is left to be ignored and pushed to the back burner. The Commission understands there is a process that needs to be followed but are extremely disappointed with the speed at which things are going. Come November when there are budgets needing to be made it will come back on them questioning what the commission has done to warrant the need of a budget. The Commission can't act on anything until the Demolition Ordinance and applications are approved.

Ms. D'Amico questioned if the Commission was going to separate the Landmark application from the others. She understands it may push things back a bit farther, but either all 3 things get pushed back or we have one going forward and they keep nudging the others. All agree anything moved forward is a good idea and are willing to split them. Mr. Lang will be in touch with Ms. Greenan and state that they would like to move forward with the Landmark application separated from the others. Pushing the Landmark application through and it being approved would allow the Commission to push forward with the 2544 Clinton Street Landmark application.

The two studies: Nov. 2022 & May 2023, recommended that a phase 1-B study of the archeologic area be done. Late in the meeting it was discovered that in the large cache of documents sent was a report of a 1-B study which was done in August 2023. There was only one printed copy of this long report, and the Commission looked it over to the best of their ability. The Summary interpreted that this site was a resource procurement site and lithic workshop. The report showed that five loci were studied. 22 lithic artifacts were distributed over these loci. Four loci were found to lack archaeological integrity and hence, not useful for

research purposes. Locus #5 was reported to have adequate integrity. The report noted that the developer wants to have a 50- foot buffer at locus 5.

The Commission will review the electronic files provided which includes the 1-B report. Assuming that the Landmark application can be broken off from the other applications the first order of business will be 2544 Clinton Street. Mr. Lang asks the Commission to make a short list of low hanging fruit and tier 1/in jeopardy places – what about the Roundhouse in West Seneca. It was suggested to ask Jim Pace for suggestions as well.

ISSUES OF THE PUBLIC

None

COMMUNICATIONS BY BOARD MEMBERS

It was suggested Mr. Lang attend the meeting at the Senior Center on July 17th and explain what the Commission is all about and how residents can help.

Some sort of outreach and/or I.D. is needed for the Commission members.

The July 3, 2023 meeting will need to be rescheduled. Date is not set at this time.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 7:48 P.M.

