

**West Seneca Historical Commission
Meeting Minutes for January 3, 2024**

Meeting was called to order at 6:30 P.M. by Chairperson Paul Lang

Fire Safety Notifications

Roll Call:

Paul Lang – Present
Ray Ball – Present
Fran D’Amico – Present
Dave Schultz – Absent
Michael Scuita – Present, as a guest, pending application approval

Reading / Approval of Meeting Minutes from December 6, 2023 waived by Mr. Ball, seconded by Ms. D’Amico.

Old Business: None

Public Comments on New Business: None

New Business:

1. Chairperson’s Report: Review of Board membership / Participants, current status of survey / grant, and discussion of goals for 2024.

Paul Lang is now the Chairperson.

Mr. Ball is to be re-appointed this week.

Ms. D’Amico clarified that she will be staying on.

Jody Welz has been introduced as the new recording secretary.

It is understood that Mr. Shultz will also be staying on.

Ms. D’Amico mentioned that some type of reminder would be nice regarding the meetings. Mr. Lang stated he could do that. Meetings are scheduled for the 1st Wednesday of each month.

During the transition, Mr. Ball has provided Mr. Lang with background information regarding what has been taking place to help him get up to speed, specifically regarding the status of the survey.

There is nothing that can be acted on as there is nothing listed currently.

Mr. Lang has reached out to Preservation Studios and stated there is no signed proposal, so they have not actively started yet.

Tom Yots (Preservation Studios) said that they would honor the proposed number from 2023, but the committee needs to figure out what the mechanisms are to get them actively engaged.

Mr. Lang will first be reaching out to Linda McKay. He has also reached out to New York State SHPO and has been in contact with Jennifer Walkowski, who used to be the survey coordinator for this region. Mr. Lang was notified there will be a new coordinator, which has not been appointed yet, as Ms. Walkowski will be reassigned. Ms. Walkowski has given Mr. Lang the contact for the new coordinator for the state but he has not had a chance to follow up yet.

Mr. Lang will be in contact with Ms. McKay to seek assistance with some wording and coming up with the first steps for the new legislation. Mr. Lang stated that it seems as though the Town had approved the standard CLG language and then walked away, which left them wondering what the next steps were.

Mr. Ball stated that in speaking with Supervisor Dickson he also wanted the legislation and suggested that this should be acted upon in the very near future.

2. Review of proposed legislation requiring Historic Commission's approval for property demolition and significant modification permits.

It was Mr. Ball's understanding that early this year they were to look at the existing legislation in Buffalo and a few other towns and adapt it.

Mr. Ball questioned some of the Buffalo items and wondered whether it would be pointless to review them as no one has been trained yet or if the training mattered in this instance.

Mr. Lang stated he believes the legislation is easy enough to pull out as they are focusing more on the demolitions. The criteria for demolitions are straight forward but requires some interpretation. The first criteria for a property to be eligible is that it must be 50 years old or older.

3. Review of draft nomination applications and demolition application

Mr. Ball stated there is no city code yet. Mr. Lang responded that he believes this is the reason Supervisor Dickson is requiring legislation. Mr. Lang stated that the City of Buffalo started with the same CLG documents that the town currently has. Buffalo has amended sections to give them the ability to interject themselves into these reviews. Mr. Lang stated that section 337-15 needs to be updated and added to their legislation. This application is asking to submit photos of what the building looks like inside and out. A building just being old does not necessarily meet the criteria. Some of the training can be used, but by the time the legislation is written, proposed, adopted and everything is integrated and circulated, Mr. Lang believes that they will have the knowledge and skill set that everyone will need. Mr. Lang is trying to do this as a dual track so that nothing gets delayed, and it gives the commission something to act on in the meantime. The proposal for Preservation Studio could take another month to get straightened out as well as another two months of survey work. The town does not even have a district. The National register goes to the State Board twice a year, which Mr. Lang believes is May or June and September. He is hoping to catch the Spring nominations, so they do not have to wait for the Fall.

Mr. Ball stated that without the code an emergency declaration can't even be created. Mr. Lang stated that they will need to have a discussion with the Town regarding the fee amounts in comparison to other building or renovation permits that the Town issues. For example, the City

of Buffalo charges \$500 for an application review. There is a lot more overhead in the City of Buffalo, but Mr. Lang will need some input. Ms. D'Amico stated the \$500 charge was talked about previously. Everyone agrees that the amount is a bit much for an application fee and feels a smaller fee would be better. Mr. Ball stated that it was talked about charging a \$250 application fee that would be refundable if the application was approved. This would help to keep people from trying to apply for anything.

Mr. Lang is hoping to have a draft written up for the February meeting to look over. He will speak with the Town Attorney to get things written up so that they can present it to the Town Board.

Mr. Lang's goal for 2024 is to advance the survey and have it complete or at least have some sort of movement, the adoption and implementation of the demolition review process, and securing grants for future work.

Mr. Lang questioned if there are other districts or areas that need recommendations or consultations with SHPO. The Historical Society may be aware of other clusters or sections of buildings that should be looked at. Mr. Ball stated that once they move out of the Ebenezer's the clusters become few, however there are structures and locations throughout the town on an individual basis. Mr. Lang responded that this may make things easier. An example would be Burchfield, which is not Ebenezer. It is possible to go back to the self-nomination that they started with. Mr. Lang stated that once some of the bigger things are moving, it will be easier to include the smaller individual nominations.

Many of the examples are being looked at from the City of Buffalo, which is much bigger. Mr. Ball commented that he is unsure that all towns work in the same way and suggests looking at neighboring towns to compare. Mr. Lang stated that the smaller municipalities are harder to go through as they move much slower. This is a deterrent to utilize some of their programs. Because of this, the commission is hoping to get more of the Town's support of being development friendly and encourage people to utilize programs that are available because of the financial benefits that come along with them.

Mr. Lang questioned everyone's agreement on the goal of survey, demolition, etc. as far as first quarter and second quarter, then moving on to working on landmark applications in the late summer to fall. Everyone agreed.

Mr. Ball stated that it is not to be forgotten that the legislation needs to be two-fold and somewhere along the line the commission needs to be in the permit process. They have the goal of identifying criteria set for properties, but the Town also needs to change the Town code to require permission or acknowledgement of the Historical Commission going forward. Two separate pieces of legislation need to be written. Without this, there is nothing that will require the commissions input at all. Suggests that an email be sent by Supervisor Dickson that nothing can move forward without the approval of the Historical Commission. Mr. Ball had met with Supervisor Dickson, over the summer, and he stated would need to get in touch with the Town Attorney and get back with him. Mr. Ball is still waiting for a response.

Ms. D'Amico questioned if Julian Adams could help with writing the legislation. Mr. Lang stated that he might be able to help and pull some examples. He also thinks that involving SHPO more frequently might help get more support.

Mr. Ball thinks that the commission needs to take note more of what surrounding or smaller towns are doing versus the City of Buffalo regarding whatever they have in place that would interject their acknowledgement of permits. Ms. D'Amico questioned if they had any contacts at the East Aurora or Orchard Park Commissions. Mr. Lang will look at the Town of Orchard Park codes and see if he can find anything helpful regarding legislation for both applications and demolition.

Mr. Lang questioned if they knew of any buildings that are classified as endangered that they should have a watch list for. The building next to Consumers on Union Road is being considered for demolition as Consumers wants to expand. The apartments going in on Schultz and Transit, but unknown what is planned to be leveled. The houses have already been leveled on Seneca Street for Ebenezer Landing. Ms. D'Amico questioned if anyone knew what the plan was for the church on Orchard Park Road.

Mr. Lang suggested that the Historical Society compile a list of properties that are in jeopardy. This will help to back the budget for next year and prove why the Historical Commission is important for the community's continued growth. Mr. Ball stated that this points to our need for communication and contact with Engineering. Without this contact, they have no idea of what is being proposed. Having this "watch" list compiled would be helpful to have Planning and Zoning board be able to let the Historical Commission know if anything is planned.

Mr. Lang stated that once the legislation is figured out and the Commission can act it will be easier to nominate the properties, which will then be instantly available for tax writing purposes.

Mr. Ball questioned how or what would be a good way to get the public involved. It was mentioned before that a website, Facebook or Town page that may be helpful in getting the public to be able to interact or ask questions. It was also mentioned that utilizing the West Seneca Bee may be helpful in getting the public to nominate structures for review and consideration. One example would be Metzger's Pub, which would meet the criteria. Whoever is going to renovate it could be getting 25% of their money back, if it was listed as historical.

It was reiterated that they first complete the Ebenezer survey and complete the wording for the legislation. Mr. Lang will also reach out to the Town of Orchard Park Historical Commission.

Ms. D'Amico questioned if there is a list compiled of the Ebenezer buildings.

Mr. Lang stated that the Town can technically nominate the whole cluster of buildings at Town Hall with the band shell. The hockey rink and town pool do not quite make the time frame, but if a district was made, the rink and pool would fall into the district. Town Hall would meet the time frame.

Issues of the Public: None

Communications by Board Members:

Mr. Ball stated that Councilmember Kims was present at the December meeting and was a great help in mediating. The Commission felt a lot of support from her and mentioned that Councilmember Kims was optimistic for the Commission.

Mr. Lang stated that he would like to force the Town Board to support the program. He would like to be able to give them an abundance of evidence to act on and support or have them say that they are not interested in supporting.

The goal for next month is for Mr. Lang to have a conversation with the Town of Orchard Park's Historical Commission and pull some excerpts from their Town codes. He will also look at the other local locations from the list. Mr. Lang is also going to try to get in touch with the Town Attorney and see if he can get a draft of the legislation. He will also follow up with Linda McKay and Jennifer Walkowski as well as talk to the person in charge or the survey coordinator for the state.

Adjournment: Proposed by Ray Ball, seconded by Fran D'Amico at 7:30 P.M.