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THORNBURY TOWNSHIP (CHESTER COUNTY)
HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION
March 15, 2016

Present: Randell Spackman (chair), Michele Thackrah, Kris Walker, Dick Webster,
Judy Lizza, township manager

1. Approval of Minutes

The minutes of February 10, 2016, were approved as distributed.

2. Squire Cheyney House and Barn

At about 4:30 P.M., the commission met at the Squire Cheyney House with Suzanna Barucco, Martin Rosenblum, and Amy Ricci of the Preservation Alliance for Greater Philadelphia, which holds the preservation easement on the property. After introducing the group to the house and stating in general its concerns, the commission removed to the township building for its meeting, leaving the Preservation Alliance group at the house to evaluate the situation.

It is the commission's conclusion that the preservation easement has been violated. The most egregious violation is the garage's placement, which clearly violates the foot prints allowed by the easement document. The garage's present location reverses the house's historical orientation, turning the front into the back. This mistake fundamentally changes the historical appearance, radically altering the historic facades that were meant to face the adjacent Squire Cheyney Farm Park and its historic springhouse. The change also invites future homeowners to put in the historical front (now back) of the house, facing the Park, many amenities of present-day backyards: play equipment, grills, pools, etc. The Squire Cheyney House, the original farmhouse, would no longer serve as the historical context and visual backdrop for the Squire Cheyney Farm Park, but be just another suburban backyard.

The Alliance representatives acknowledged that the garage's placement is a compromise, that the original placement was so bad that it was unacceptable, that it, as well as other denied proposals, would have "suburbanized" the house's appearance. The compromise may have been seen as a design improvement, but it was a violation of the easement agreement. This egregious error might have been prevented had Alliance easement personnel visited the house and its environs and had seen what the garage's proposed (now present) location would have done to the strategic vision. But the Alliance representatives admitted that the Alliance had never paid a site visit.

The commission also pointed out to the Alliance representatives landscape changes around the barn. The stone wall that ran diagonally at the barn's southwest corner, helping to define the barnyard, has been removed. Also, the grade between the house and barn has been significantly infilled, significantly reducing the distance of the threshing floor from the ground. Both changes obscure the barn's historical function. It originally had a relatively high threshing floor to enable chaff to blow away and to allow horses to walk under the forebay and into the stables. It no longer does.

There are errors of lesser significance, such as the placement of the front porch's roof (on the house's south side, the original front). It attaches at least a foot below the stone ledge that was intended originally for a pent roof. Mr. Rosenblum noted that the roof's placement does not agree with drawings approved by the Alliance. This shortcoming evidently rests with the homeowner and contractor.

The commission is especially distressed that the Alliance never consulted the Township at any point about proposed (or completed) changes and additions to the site. The present dilemma has come to light only after the commission raised questions to the Alliance in November 2015.

The commission will ask the Alliance for a written response within 30 days and expects to meet again with the Alliance group at a mutually agreeable time.

3. New Business: Proposed Historic Farm Day

Kris Walker proposed that the Township hold a Thornbury Township Historic Farm Day at the Squire Cheyney Farm Park. The event would resemble a fair and could include presentations on modern garden farming by Randell Spackman of Thornbury Farm and Pete Flynn of Pete's Produce. It could include someone portraying Squire Cheyney to highlight changes in gardening and diet since 1800 and perhaps have a fundraising farm-to-table dinner or food stands.

Thornbury (Delaware County) Historical Society might like to join the event, and Willistown Township, which is active in the Chester County food bank might like to be involved as well. It would be a way to showcase and explain the Park and its springhouse. Also, if there are enough community-focused aspects, a variety of funders and local sponsors might contribute to the effort.

Richard J. Webster
Commission Secretary

Next Meeting: April 13, 2016, at 7 P.M.