

State of the HPC 2019

Read by Kelly: Good evening Mayor and Members of the Town Council and thank you for having us here tonight to provide an update on the "state of historic preservation in Westfield." 2019 was a very productive year for the Commission. In addition to hearing several Certificate of Appropriateness applications, we had the pleasure of welcoming 4 properties to our list of local historic landmarks. Two of these properties, the Reeve House and Triangle Park, are town-owned and we are truly thankful and excited at the direction that this administration has been taking and look forward to more town properties being designated in the future. The other two, one that happened at the very beginning of 2019, and the other at the end, are private homes owned by long-time residents who have put years of love and care into their homes and would like to see them preserved for future generations.

As the HPC representative of the Steering Committee, I attended the Master Plan meetings throughout the year and was thrilled, but not surprised, to see that the majority of residents surveyed, 80 %, hold historic preservation as an important factor of preserving Westfield's charm. Additionally, this coincides with a survey conducted of Millennials by the National Trust for Historic Preservation, that states "97% of those surveyed feel that it's important to preserve, buildings, architecture, neighborhood and communities." We look forward, in 2020, to updating our Preservation Plan so we can continue to implement the Master Plan and preserve Westfield.

The Commission has also been working on revising and updating our Historic Preservation Town Ordinance. Robert Wendel and I have been meeting with the Town Attorney and Town Planner to make sure the ordinance is compliant with the State's MLUL Laws. We have completed our revisions and have passed them along to Code Review. We look forward to the ordinance being approved as it can then be submitted to the State's Historic Office and will allow us to become a Certified Local Government which will enable us to apply for grants.

As part of the Homeowners Relations Committee, Robert Wendel, Maria Boyes, Linda Habgood and I have had meetings with residents who live on West Dudley who are very interested in coming together for designation as well as individual homeowners. We are in the early stages of these conversations but will hopefully have some good news for you in our State of the HPC 2020!

Read by Maria: As part of our mission to increase communications and educate the public, we had 3 Speaker events in the Community Room in 2019. The first one, held in February, was a combined Meet and Greet with members of the HPC, followed by a "virtual walking tour" by local architect and Commission member, Greg Blasi, who is known for his walking tours. In April, we welcomed Dorothy Guzzo, Executive Director of the New Jersey Historic Trust, who spoke about the economic benefits of historic preservation, and particularly how it applies to downtown properties. And in June, we had the Devlin Awards presentation.

Commission member Jenny Jaruzelski does an outstanding job in chairing this committee which was revived only two years ago. This year, there were 10 awards for preservation and 1 Special Recognition Award given to The Brass Shop as a "partner in preservation." We were recently saddened to hear that the recipient, Margaret Giannone who founded the shop in the 70s, has passed away. She was considered a true "daughter of Westfield," and was from one of the last graduating classes of Westfield High School on Elm Street. A final award, which was revived in 2019 after 15 years, was the Student Art & Writing Contest, and was won by Shirzad Mustafa, a freshman at Westfield High School, who read his winning entry, a "Walk Down Boulevard," a poem which imagines the path taken by a housemaid at the turn of the century.

Our communications in the press was our best year ever with too many articles to count in all of the local media outlets including the Westfield Leader, Westfield Monthly, Westfield Living, NJ.com, Preservation NJ, and TAPinto Westfield. Many of these articles were also posted and shared on social media. We continued to use the HPC Facebook page with numerous posts for events, press and outreach. Thank you to Kim Forde for posting those. And in May, National Preservation Month, I worked with David Marcus of the Media Advisory Council and we interviewed Robert and Pam Newell talking about their recently designated home calling it "A Labor of Love."

Finally, the Commission was very grateful to have a budget this year. With it, we were able to hire a historic consultant who is in the final stages of revising our Design Guidelines, which will be available online. And after much research and consideration amongst members, and with input from residents, we were able to order plaques for many of our historically designated homes. We chose a standardized design, brass oval with the construction date in the center and the words "Designated Local Historic Landmark" at the top. I'd like to thank Alison Carey for her work in researching these plaques. And on that note, we plan to present these plaques to the homeowners at our next meeting, Monday Feb. 24th and we invite you all to attend. Additionally, we were able to purchase a few items to give out at our Speaker series and to commemorate Westfield's 300 anniversary this year.

As Chair, I am very proud of the work we've done this year and it would not have been possible without the dedicated and talented volunteers we have on the Commission, and of course the support of this administration.