

Public Input Meeting
Historic District Zoning Ordinance Amendment #49

Thursday, October 3, 2019

6:05 pm -7:05 pm

Kali Casper, Assistant Planning Director with the Town of Blacksburg, provided an overview of the Historic District, background information on surveys, types of historic review and the changes that Town Council has asked staff to address with this Zoning Ordinance Amendment. Maeve Gould, liaison to the Historic or Design Review Board (HDRB), was also in attendance.

- An attendee asked if the list of contributing structures is changed, will the owners be notified and will they have a say in whether their property gets added.
- A business owner asked if signs that are already existing are prohibited by new regulations, will they no longer be allowed and required to be eliminated.
- An attendee commented that they have seen the list of structures to be added and many are not historic. The attendee stated that Blacksburg does not have a robust Historic Ordinance. The citizen commented that we do not have a demolition by neglect clause, while we are requiring good owners to pay tens of thousands of dollars to maintain chimneys for example. They stated that student behavior has gotten worse over time and the litter in the district is a problem. Also the lack of sidewalks is a safety issue that the citizen noted and is not conducive to a Historic District. They feel that it is not worth restoring a historic structure for a business if the business cannot continue due to the partying. The attendee stated that it is not worth the investment as much as there is a desire to have an art gallery or Bed & Breakfast in the district. The ADA access needed for commercial buildings was cited as a challenge. The citizen commented that all decisions by HDRB should be voluntary. The attendee stated that until the police start enforcing laws, we do not have a viable historic district. The citizen asserted that the way to go after this is to go after the owners. They feel that police are not solving these public nuisance problems. Another issue the attendee noted is traffic, especially with the new Midtown Redevelopment project happening soon. The attendee stated that when people move out of these historic buildings, they are going to turn into rentals. They said that property values lower dramatically for those on the contributing structures list because it reduces options and opportunities. The citizen commented that this amendment will probably reduce investment in the district, rather than improve it. They feel that the Historic Board needs to start listening to the district residents, and a majority of the Board members should own contributing structures in the district.
- An attendee commented that behavioral issues in the district are a problem and that we need more parking in Town. They would prefer that houses be torn down for parking to keep the businesses going rather than the addition of another party house.
- A business owner commented that Roanoke Street should have been turned into a commercial area a long time ago. They stated that there are some good examples of restoration in the district. The business owner asked how many residential structures in the Historic District are owner occupied? They asked how can we save the district? The attendee commented that it is a beautiful district and has the

potential to be really nice. They feel that the proximity to the university makes it very desirable for student housing. They would like the Town to enforce litter and drunk in public laws.

- A citizen asked if the Town is wanting suggestions about the list of contributing structures to be added and asked what the parameters are for being added.
- A business owner asked if it is typical for a Historic District to tell citizens what is historic and should be added, or is this just something Blacksburg does? The business owner commented that their building is on the list of recommended structures.
- An attendee asked if the Town can put an owner's building on the list without their consent and whether the Town can force someone not to let it go to disrepair.
- A citizen expressed surprise that more people were not in attendance at this meeting and asked if everyone in the district was notified of the meeting.
- Another citizen asked if the list provided is the complete list that the Town is recommending to add to the district currently and whether the district boundary is proposed to be changed.

