

TOWNSHIP OF LOWER MAKEFIELD  
AD HOC PROPERTY COMMITTEE  
MINUTES – DECEMBER 8, 2021

The regular meeting of the Ad Hoc Property Committee of the Township of Lower Makefield was held remotely on December 8, 2021. Mr. Steadman called the meeting to order at 7:30 p.m.

Those present:

Ad Hoc Property Committee: Dennis Steadman, Chair  
Bette Sovinee, Secretary  
Sarah Daubert, Member  
John Mohan, Member  
James Nycz, Member  
Jim Scott, Member

Others: James McCartney, Supervisor Liaison  
Frederic K. Weiss, Supervisor Liaison

Absent: Fred Childs, Ad Hoc Property Committee Vice Chair

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Ms. Sovinee moved, Mr. Nycz seconded and it was unanimously carried to approve the Minutes of September 28, 2021 as written.

Ms. Sovinee moved, Mr. Nycz seconded and it was unanimously carried to approve the Minutes of November 18, 2021 as written.

UPDATES AND DISCUSSION

Mr. Steadman stated the Committee was tasked with dealing with complicated issues dealing with important assets of Lower Makefield Township. He stated the Board of Supervisors has asked the Committee to explore alternative uses, do a financial analysis, and make recommendations. He stated the Committee is not a decision-making Committee, and it will make recommendations to the Township. In order for the Committee to be able to do its work, we need to be able to discuss wide-ranging alternatives on many topics. He stated that during their meetings

ideas may be put forward or eliminated, and the public should not view what is discussed as a final decision. He stated the Committee will eventually make recommendations to the Board of Supervisors but in the interim they need to be able to discuss wide-ranging alternatives in this open and public forum.

Historical Sub-Committee: James Nycz

Mr. Nycz stated there had been discussion about getting a document about the history, the significance, and possible avenues for historic preservation for all of the properties including proposing names for some of the properties. He stated the Historic Commission is meeting on December 13, and between then and Christmas, they will hold a working meeting to go over how the document will be created and what they will put into it. He stated they hope to have that completed document for the Ad Hoc Property Committee by the new year.

Mr. Nycz asked if any of the Committee members have a specific request as to what they would like the Historic Commission to look into, that they send him an e-mail before December 13 or after if something comes up after that date. Mr. Nycz stated Mr. Steadman has already asked specifically about the names.

Ms. Sovinee stated in reviewing the Minutes, it seemed that the Caretaker's House was the oldest property at 1696 or earlier according to Dr. Heinz. Ms. Sovinee stated the 1837 expansion of the Janney-Brown House was also cited, but she would to understand if there was a single farmhouse there prior to 1837. She stated she was told initially that there was a one-room farmhouse there, and the hearth was from 1730. She stated she would like clarification so that there is a sequence. Ms. Sovinee stated she believes that the Satterthwaite House came in at 1820 although she is not sure.

Mr. Nycz asked if those dates are from Dr. Heinz's presentation or from the documents in the Google drive. Ms. Sovinee stated she was trying to put a sequence together from Dr. Heinz's presentation. She asked that Mr. Nycz see if he could get the chronology cleared up. Mr. Nycz agreed that is one of the biggest issues they need to cover. He stated when he was first doing research from the documents in the Google drive, there were discrepancies as to the dates; and he will discuss this with Dr. Heinz to get that settled. He stated different reports from decades apart have

different dates. Mr. Steadman stated with regard to the original dates, he knows that some of those dates are documented and known and others are estimates. He stated he assumes there will be a lot of footnotes when putting together the report which could indicate that it is a “strong belief” that a structure was built a certain date or that the date is definitely known. He stated those annotations would be helpful as he feels what they are looking for is what is known today as best as we can determine recognizing that some of this will be a work in progress potentially for some time.

Mr. Nycz stated he will make it clear what dates have been verified and how they were verified; and if they are estimating it, they will make that clear as well.

Mr. Steadman stated they appreciate the Historic Commission looking into this as it is important input.

#### Potential New Uses Sub-Committee: Ms. Sovinee

Ms. Sovinee stated she took the information that Mr. Mohan provided and included that in the document as well as added some other comments that were made by the Committee. She showed the slide entitled “ Overall Recommendation” where some of them now have a narrative. Ms. Sovinee stated she sent this to the Committee members and asked that she be advised of anything additional they would like added. Mr. Steadman stated this is living draft, and there are certain sections that will need additional input and editing.

Ms. Sovinee stated with regard to the Caretaker’s House, they added “open as a historic tour” since it may be the oldest house in Lower Makefield. Ms. Sovinee stated according to the Minutes Dr. Heinz had suggested that it might be the oldest remaining structure in Bucks County. Ms. Sovinee asked that Mr. Nycz look into that statement further.

Ms. Sovinee noted there had been discussion about the corn crib as to whether it should stay or could it be moved. She stated it is a charming, historic building that adds to the character of the farmstead.

Ms. Sovinee asked if anyone has additional input or would they like more time to consider this document.

Mr. Steadman asked each Committee member to go through the document and provide any edits/new ideas to Ms. Sovinee before the January meeting.

Mr. Steadman stated with regard to the Slack House, Spirit Golf, the current Managers of Makefield Highlands, is working on a draft proposal; and he assumes there will be proposals from other companies as well. He stated he expects to get their first draft proposal, which he assumes will provide some important economic input, by the end of the year.

Bank Barns: Mr. Steadman

Mr. Steadman stated Mr. Childs has a particular interest in the bank barns, and he has been able to make connections with some groups focused on these kinds of barns. He stated there is a National Barn Association which has a video entitled, "Stamp Out Barn Loss." Mr. Steadman stated he has asked Mr. Childs to lead the effort on everything having to do with the bank barns.

Mr. Steadman stated the Committee has discussed various uses; and the current farming tenant, Charlann Farms, has expressed some interest in storing equipment and straw in at least one of the barns and using it as an active agricultural asset that could be amended onto their Agricultural Lease. Mr. Steadman stated that will require engineering assessments on the weight-bearing capabilities and the condition of the buildings before it could be put to that use.

Engineering Inspection Needs: Mr. Steadman

Mr. Steadman stated he has asked Mr. Ferguson, the Township Manager, to begin the process of looking into getting some early engineering reports that the Committee will need to make recommendations. Mr. Steadman stated some of the cost estimates and engineering reports needed are either non-existent or quite dated. Mr. Steadman noted specifically the two bank barns so that the Committee can consider what their options might be, and he has asked Mr. Ferguson to look into getting some estimates on their weight-bearing capacity and what might be involved in bringing them up to that kind of strength for use. He stated it has been some time since those have been looked at, and there is great space on the second floor which could be

used for a variety of things; but if the foundation and first floor structure cannot bear the weight, they would not want a tractor to be parking in there or having it filled with straw. He stated Mr. Ferguson is working on this.

Mr. Steadman stated information is also needed on the Slack House, as he does not believe there is any quantitative assessment of its condition and the kind of changes that would be necessary to bring that into a usable structure as it relates to the fundamental systems and strength.

Mr. Steadman stated they also need information on the Caretaker's Cottage since it may be the "crown jewel" of these historical sites from what was learned from Dr. Heinz, and he feels they need an assessment on what it would take to bring that up to par in terms of stability. Mr. Steadman stated it seems to be in good condition now, and it is being used; however, he feels they should have a formal look at it.

Mr. Steadman stated the Satterthwaite House also needs to have more of a formal assessment as he feels the last assessment is dated.

Mr. Steadman stated while there are other engineering assessments that will be needed those he mentioned would rank highest in terms of timing because they have major influences on potential uses of the buildings and the magnitude of repairs and expenditures that might be needed. He stated some of the repairs may be able to be done through volunteer efforts and Grants while others may require larger repairs than could be done by volunteers.

Mr. Steadman stated at this point Mr. Ferguson is just working on the cost estimates for these engineering assessments, and this will have to go to the Board of Supervisors for any spending approval.

Mr. Steadman stated he has also asked Mr. Ferguson to advise him what the Township needs may be for office space and storage beyond the equipment that is currently being stored. Mr. Steadman stated this will need to be factored in as far as the various alternatives being considered.

UPDATES

Ms. Sovinee stated that the cats have been re-located to new homes, and the Township has secured the “cat door” on the Patterson barn.

Dr. Weiss stated the Township is going to be securing all of the buildings and any securing any undermining being done by animals to the foundations so we are beginning the stabilization process. He stated he is looking forward to seeing a preliminary report from the Committee and recognizes the hard work being done by the Committee.

Mr. Steadman stated he is presuming that the Township does have some budgetary leeway to hire some experts/engineers to do the assessments being discussed that will be necessary as input for the Committee’s recommendations. He stated these would be needed before the Committee can make recommendations. Dr. Weiss stated while it will be up to the Chair of the Board of Supervisors, he believes that by the first quarter of 2022 the Board will be discussing how much money will be allocated to the restoration/renovation of these structures. He added that once that amount is known depending on the potential uses, particularly for the Slack House if Spirit Golf want to take that responsibility over, it will be determined how much can be done on the remaining structures.

Mr. McCartney stated he agrees with Dr. Weiss. He stated he agrees that they have to give the Committee an opportunity to see from an engineering standpoint what is going to be viable/feasible with the buildings. He stated it is hard to ask the Committee for a recommendation when they do not know what they are really dealing with structurally. Mr. Steadman agreed adding that there needs to be some money spent before it can be determined how much needs to be done and the cost of that. He stated the up-front investment in engineering assessment is necessary before any recommendation can be made.

Mr. McCartney asked about a prior assessment on Satterthwaite, and Dr. Weiss stated he believes a study was done two years ago on what needs to be done for the Satterthwaite House. Mr. Steadman stated he felt that study was much older than that, but he will go back and review that. Dr. Weiss stated Remington Vernick did a complete assessment on the Satterthwaite House needs and what it would cost to mitigate the hazardous materials, shore up the foundation, etc.

He stated they would have to update the costs because of the increased cost of materials. Dr. Weiss stated it will be up to the Board of Supervisors to decide how much money they want to invest in all of these properties.

Dr. Weiss stated he feels that if the Committee feels that we should direct our efforts to certain buildings, the Board will try to make that happen.

Ms. Sovinee asked if Spirit Golf is putting in some preliminary proposals does that mean that we would not need the Township engineer to look at the Slack House. Mr. Steadman stated if the final and best use of the Slack House is in association with an event venue at Makefield Highlands, there will be significant money needed to be invested in the Slack House and significant money that needs to be invested in an event venue to go with it. He stated he is also operating under the premise that Lower Makefield would like to keep that property as part of the Real Estate of Makefield Highlands. He stated if there is an event tenant who is renting that, they are going to want a very long-term Lease; and how much that tenant would put in to the renovations/investments versus how much the Township puts in will be a function of what the Lease looks like.

Mr. Steadman stated there could also be a scenario where the Township would sell some of that asset, and the new owner would put their capital into it and make it their own versus leaving it a Township asset that is then leased and generating income. Mr. Steadman stated he would not expect the Township to pay for the renovations exclusively nor would he expect a long-term tenant to pay for all of it themselves either. He stated he believes it will some blend depending on the economics of the Lease and the renovations.

Mr. Steadman stated Mr. Scott is an expert in Commercial Real Estate, and he asked his opinion; and Mr. Scott stated he agrees with Mr. Steadman Mr. Scott stated Spirit is a for-profit company and will need to consider what their return on investment would be and that would dictate what they are willing to do and what they would ask the Township for.

Mr. Steadman stated if the end result is that the Township wants to own an event venue managed by a management company and sharing the profits, that would involve an RFP for others to Bid on as well and not just Spirit Golf;

although given their relationship with the Township today, it makes sense to at least get Spirit Golf's initial Bid to help set some parameters and give us some early estimates to go on.

#### PUBLIC COMMENT

There was no one from the public wishing to speak at this time.

#### ACTION ITEMS FOR FOLLOW-UP: Ms. Sovinee

1. Mr. Nycz will provide a report out of the Historic Commission by January 1 filling in some of the notes about the chronology of the buildings.
2. Spirit Golf will provide a proposal by the end of December.
3. Committee members are asked to review the working document that was sent out about each property and alternatives for use.

#### FUTURE MEETING SCHEDULE

It was noted that there had been prior discussion about having an in-person Working Session on January 6 and two Zoom meetings one on January 13 and another on January 27 if needed. Mr. Steadman stated he will follow up with Ms. McVan from the Township on the availability of these dates.

There being no further business, Mr. Steadman moved, Ms. Sovinee seconded and it was unanimously carried to adjourn the meeting at 8:15 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted

Bette Sovinee, Secretary



