

July 5, 2024

Re: Mount Lebanon Historic District Working Group Interim Report

Since our first meeting on March 4, the Working Group (three members of the Zoning Re-write Committee: Elizabeth Brutsch, Liz Kroboth, Tyler Fogg, and three members of the Shaker Preservation Committee: John Dax, Winfried Fuchshofen, Merrill Hesch) has met nearly weekly.

Although all of the Working Group's work is preliminary and much of it still conceptual as a Working Group we have reached a consensus on several basics:

1. The best approach to achieving the goals adopted by the Town Board is to create a new zoning district with its own uses, regulations, and bulk and area restrictions.
2. All new uses, new structures, certain expansions of existing structures, and changes of use should be subject to Planning Board Site Plan Review, which will guide and oversee new development in the district.
3. All new construction and all uses requiring physical changes to existing historic buildings will require the application of Design Standards overseen by the Planning Board during Site Plan Review, and that the Design Standards for new construction will be different from those applicable to modifications to the exterior of historic structures.
4. The district boundaries should encompass no less than the area covered by the State and Federal Historic District and certain open spaces owned by Darrow School.
5. All uses currently permitted in RA2 and RA5 should continue to be permitted with a few exceptions.
6. Additional uses of a commercial and craft nature should be permitted in keeping with the goal of repurposing while preserving Shaker buildings "in ways that are consistent with certain Shaker values that have enduring appeal, including simplicity, quality, community, hospitality, equality, and innovation."
7. Some uses currently permitted in one or more districts may require unique definitions for use in the new district.

The Working Group has started to consider bulk and area restrictions (addressing for example, lot size, building coverage, and setbacks) and in the course of those discussions has considered and continues to consider that creating tiers within the district may better achieve our mission in light of the variety of goals. Most easily understood is the difference between the goal of protecting undeveloped open space (most relevant to the open fields on the west of the Darrow campus) and the goal of preserving and safeguarding historic buildings (most relevant to the areas adjacent to Darrow Road.) In this connection, the Working Group is examining historic maps and records from which we expect to learn how the various Shaker Families arranged clusters of buildings.

We have learned that creating a district to serve the goals of the Town Board and the Comprehensive Plan is a complex undertaking, requiring an iterative process in which reaching tentative conclusions with respect to one aspect inevitably requires revisiting tentative conclusions reached regarding other aspects. Receiving input from Town Board members and from interested members of the public will provide us useful guidance in this process