



A New Direction for Preservation In Spring Lake by Peter Saklas

Yes, the PASL has tried to preserve historic structures, and we have had some success. The Duggan Building is a prime example. Another accomplishment has been our support for homeowners who have successfully appealed to the Planning Board for variances partly based on the owner's incorporation of historic preservation into their projects. Also, the Borough Council has adopted a number of land use changes that work toward the objective of historic preservation, the 2½ floor limit (discussed in the opening article) being an example.

Historic preservation is ongoing in Spring Lake. A walk around the Borough shows there are many who have preserved historic homes. Each year we recognize a handful of property owners who took extraordinary efforts to preserve historic homes and commercial buildings. Since 1999, we have recognized over 100 properties. This has not been an easy process because there are hundreds more we have left "on the table" for potential future recognition.

Modest success is not enough. Whenever a significant historic home, such as the Swain House (right), is demolished, we are berated for not stopping the demolition of historic homes. Residents ask us to do more. Our efforts to have a stronger preservation ordinance adopted have not been successful. When we ask "Do you want to preserve Spring Lake's historic heritage?" most residents say yes. Unfortunately, most residents also reject the concept of mandatory preservation requirements. Our efforts over the past 15 years have taught us that mandatory preservation requirements are not feasible and we have concluded that they are off the table. We want to focus on what we can do to enhance voluntary historic preservation. With this in mind we have developed a new strategy.



RELIEF AND INCENTIVES - A NEW APPROACH

While there are several hundred historic properties where the owners have made the effort to preserve while bringing them up to date, we feel there are many more that owners may preserve with a little bit of help from the Borough. A **voluntary** program providing some relief from current zoning requirements and incorporating incentives will encourage more folks to preserve historic homes. Some ideas are listed below.

Relief: Some small changes to zoning requirements for historic homes to:

1. Eliminate any requirement to bring the historic home into compliance with current zoning
2. Insure that historic conditions that do not meet current zoning will not influence the consideration of requests for variances
3. Allow for finished basements and exclude them from counting as against the 2½ floor limitation
4. Exclude small slabs for air conditioners, outdoor showers, generators, etc. from coverage requirements
5. Allow minor variances from setback requirements
6. Allow existing garage apartments to be rehabilitated or rebuilt
7. Delete the requirement that driveways extend to the garage

Incentives: Change zoning requirements for historic homes to:

1. Allow the “garage” to be somewhat larger and higher, including a second floor, and allow it to be used for any purpose normal to the main house
2. Exclude open porches from coverage and “bulk” requirements
3. Increase the allowed structure coverage relative to the “new” house limit by a small percentage
4. Allow the owner to allocate the allowable lot coverage among the various requirements
5. Establish historic preservation as a goal to be considered in all variance requests
6. Reduce Planning Board fees for historic homes and give historic homes scheduling priority

The “relief” and “incentives” make restoring historic structures more practical by eliminating some of the procedural headaches when adapting a historic property to current zoning and by providing flexibility to allow a property owner to bring the home up to date without destroying its historical character. The relief and incentives also give the Preservation Alliance and others in the Borough something to offer to owners of historic properties. In addition to the inherent recognition that the Borough wants to preserve historic structures, the relief and incentives would be “selling points” the Preservation Alliance and others could use to persuade property owners to consider restoration in lieu of demolition.

The Preservation Alliance recognizes that the relief and incentives concept cannot be a blank check and there will have to be reasonable limits. For example, the total bulk of the historic structure and all other structures on the property should not be allowed to exceed that allowed by new construction. Also, once a property owner elects to take advantage of the relief and/or the incentives, the historic exterior of the structure as viewed from the street must be maintained.

We know that making a relief and incentives program part of the Borough's ordinances will require a long process and a good bit of give and take. We are beginning to work on this now and hope to make steady progress.

FUTURE PLANS

We intend to implement a comprehensive program to encourage the preservation of historic properties. Some of the elements listed below are not dependent on a formal relief and incentives program but certainly will be far more effective if included with the program. To this end, the first task is to convince the Borough Council, in conjunction with the Planning Board, to establish a committee to work on the relief and incentives concept. The second is for the Borough to adopt the program. If the Borough can adopt a relief and incentives program, we envision a multi-faceted program that encourages voluntary historic preservation. But even without the program in place, some of the efforts outlined below could have a positive impact on preservation.

1. An outreach program to potential property buyers that features the availability of historic properties. This could include, in periodicals focused on preservation, articles highlighting the availability of historic homes in Spring Lake and, of course, the many features of our town. The program might also include an effort to place informational advertisements in those periodicals as well as others that circulate to readers that may be interested in property at the Jersey Shore.
2. An outreach to all owners of historic properties to explain the advantages of the relief and incentives program as well as the advantages of owning and preserving a historic property.
3. An outreach program to all realtors to explain the advantages of the relief and incentives program, plus preparation of information packets for distribution to prospective purchasers.
4. A tabulation of historic homes that have been renovated, hopefully with their owners' commitment to share their renovation experience and knowledge with those who may be interested in buying and preserving a historic home in Spring Lake.
5. A resource list of architects and contractors that are interested in preserving historic properties, as well as a list of vendors that can provide "hard to find" historic material.
6. A catalog of books, web sites, periodicals, etc., that provide information on historic structures and historic structure restoration.
7. A historic reference section in our website that includes much of the information listed in the above items.
8. An information center in the new Duggan Building focusing on historic preservation.