

Township Committee Minutes

July 19, 2022

A Special Meeting of the Kingwood Township Committee was called to order at 9:00A.M. with Mayor Syrnick presiding.

Also present at the meeting were Deputy Mayor Ciacciarelli, C.F.O. Diane Laudenbach, Clerk Cynthia Keller, Committee Member Russano was absent. Mayor Syrnick called the meeting to order and following the salute to the flag, read aloud the following:

NOTICE REQUIREMENTS

Adequate notice of this meeting was provided in accordance with the Open Public Meetings Act by publication of the notice in the Hunterdon Democrat and Courier News on July 14, 2022 and by telefaxing a copy of the notice to the Express Times on July 11, 2022. Copies of the notice were also posted in the Kingwood Township Municipal Building and Baptistown Post Office on July 11, 2022.

In order to ensure full public participation in this meeting, all members of this Committee, and also members of the public are requested to speak only when recognized by the Chair so that there is no simultaneous discussion or over-talk. Your cooperation is appreciated.

Township Committee Discussion - William Lindsay White House Preservation Plan

Mayor Syrnick read aloud her message below:

When the Township acquired the “Farm” with Green Acres funds, which is State funds for land preservation. It was the first time the Township acquired open space land with an historic structure on it. There are many historic structures within Kingwood Township and most of them are privately owned. It is up to the owner to make it historic.

The Township is proposing a different type of preservation plan that is more fiscally responsible from the Township’s point of view than what was originally proposed. The William Lindsay White House is eligible for both State and Federal historic status. This means, as soon as, the State deems it as an historic property, they send it off to the federal government and it enters the federal government rolls as a historical significant building. While sections of the building were originally built in the 1918, the historic significance comes from the owners in the 1950’s and 1960’s the White Family. It is a prime example of the Hunterdon County Arts Farm Retreat. Everyone thinks historic is the 1800’s, but the 1950’s and 60’s are historic. The William Lindsay White House was extensively renovated in the middle 20th Century by Journalist William Lindsay White and his wife Katherine who occupied the home as a country residence.

Following the Whites, the First Reformed Church in Somerville purchased the property from the Whites in 1964 and they made a number of additional alterations to the house to accommodate its chosen use as a retreat.

This is not a building that is being restored to the 1800's, only a section of the building is from the 1800's. The rest of the building was restored in the 1950's and 1960's when the White's lived there. William Lindsay White's significance is that he was a war correspondent for Life Magazine. He wrote a couple books primarily in that retreat.

Under the guidance of the former Mayor and Committee Member Richard Dodds who acquired a lot of grants for this project, Dennis Bertland, Bertland Associates/Historic Preservation Consultant was hired by the Township to study and document the house in its history. Mr. Bertland crafted an extensive application to not only make the house historic status, but to make an application to the New Jersey Historical Trust Fund for a one-to-one matching grant for phase one of full restoration back to the 1950's status.

Mayor Syrnick reviewed several spreadsheets over the overhead projector for the public. She prepared a chart of the costs to restore the William Lindsay White House. The figures were from 2020, which they have been working on the preservation plan for some time. The figures for 2022 are most likely significantly different than the 2020 estimate. She explained this is more than just painting the house. Many tests would need to be done prior to phase one, which some of it has been done and still a lot needs to be done, which would be an extra cost to the preservation of this building. The Township received a grant in the amount of \$45,000 from the County to help with maintenance. The grant funds have been received, but the Township has not acted upon that yet or used any of that money. An application was made to the Historic Trust Fund for \$250,000.00 for phase one. Kingwood Township would need to match that to a one-to-one, therefore come up with \$250,000.00 to match that grant restoration for phase one. The \$45,000 from the County can be applied to that grant match.

Mayor Syrnick reviewed the list of proposed work for phase one. All the costs from the grant for the renovations, which in 2020 would have cost \$710,000.00. Today it would cost over a million dollars. The open space trust fund is for purchasing open space, farmland preservation, recreation and historic preservation. Three (3) cents from every \$100 of a homeowners assessed taxes goes to the open space trust fund, which is several hundred dollars from each household each year. Out of that fund, the Township needs to pay the off the bond on the purchase of the Horseshoe Bend Park. In the end, when Horseshoe Bend Park is paid off, the Township residents would have paid over three million dollars for the park. This does not include the restoration of the William Lindsay White House. In addition, the Township also has several other parks.

The open space trust fund money also goes towards legal fees for properties of landowners that want to preserve their property for surveys, appraisals and other legal fees. If the Township wanted to do any open space projects at any of the parks for maintenance, the money would need come out of that trust fund.

Mayor Syrnick reviewed an excel spreadsheet for the public. She pointed out the taxes collected out of the open space trust fund, which was started in 2011 when the fund was established.

The Township collects \$185,474.00 each year. In 2022 the Township will add to the fund \$186,700.00. Anytime the Morton Building is rented or the Township receives money from those using the park, it goes into this fund. The Township has to pay \$200,000.00 a year to pay off the bond for Horseshoe Bend Park. There are also interest payments of approximately \$22,000.00 and the interest varies as the loan gets paid down. The Township is at a deficit, which has approximately \$700,000.00 in the Open Space Trust Fund while taking out \$230,000.00 and replacing it with \$186,000.00.

The Township Committee needs to make the right decision and what would be best. The Township needs to decide if and when would be the best time to preserve the White House. The Township needs to be fiscally responsible. To take on a project that could ultimately put the Township's responsibility at over a million dollars, is something the Township really has to consider without putting the Township at risk. There were some scenarios, which included after paying Horseshoe Bend Park off, the Township may even have to pay money into the fund from the Township's general fund to help provide for expenses for the William Lindsay White House. If the Township waits until Horseshoe Bend Park is paid off, then there is no more money coming out of the trust fund. Approximately three years following the Horseshoe Bend Park being paid off, there would be about a million dollars in the trust fund that the Township could use to start a restoration project.

Mayor Syrnick reviewed the feedback from committees, commissions, boards and residents who were not very supportive of this project. The Parks and Recreation and the Historical Society was very supportive of the restoration. She would like everyone from all the organizations, committees and boards to take time to promote this project and start taking educational classes.

Mayor Syrnick suggested the Township take the grant of \$45,000.00 from the County and plan to take a small portion from the Open Space Trust Fund to do the needed maintenance on the William Lindsay White House to reopen the building. One of the obligations with Green Acres is that the Township has to have the building open to the public. The Committee Members suggested the Township reopen the building after working on the proper maintenance needed and start to use it. Garner support from the community and in five to eight years from now, everyone would be behind this project to support and fully restore the William Lindsay White House.

Mayor Syrnick spoke to a representative from the Historic Trust who was surprised the Township applied for a construction grant since they have no plans first as to what the White House will be used towards. They suggested the Township apply for a planning grant for the use and projected uses, a plan how to utilize it, and then apply for a construction grant to spend a couple million dollars to restore it. This way after it is restored, then there would be a solid plan of how the building will be used and maintained.

Mayor Syrnick noted the William Lindsay White House will always be eligible to be put on to the Historic rolls.

The Mayor proposes the Township not take the funding for the construction grant, which would put a lot of obligations for the Township to continue this project at this time, and also put the Township in debt. The Committee Members also propose to postpone the actual nomination of the William Lindsay White House being historic until sometime after paying off the bond for Horseshoe Bend Park, which would be more fiscally responsible to do it at that point and time.

Mayor Syrnick opened the comments to the public at this time.

Public Comment – Privilege of the Floor

Jenna Kimuck, Flemington NJ, Introduced herself and her sister Jamie Sackie who are not residents of Kingwood Township. They grew up in Somerville NJ. They came this evening to show their support and advocate this project. The William Lindsay White House, formerly the “Farm” has been a part of their life’s, as long as, they could remember. Their large family rented the building for holiday’s, weddings, graduation parties, Christmas Day and many other events. Jenna stated she personally paid and hired Dennis Bertland to complete the certificate of eligibility, which allowed for the grant preservation plan.

Jamie Sackie, Edison NJ, A Youth Leader for the Reformed Church and hosted many retreats for the Youth Groups. They used the property to learn about nature, help maintain the trails, build fences and other various projects, which was very educational. Jamie and her sister are on board to help out to get it open for the public’s use. She feels it has so many benefits. They do not want the house to sit and fall apart. She stated it was not a huge money maker.

Mayor Syrnick noted that with Green Acres the Township cannot take funds from outside. Jenna and Jamie offered their support and help to bring awareness to the community or whatever is needed.

Lois Voronin, Township Resident - Asked if the list regarding the cost of \$710,000.00 for the renovations of the William Lindsay White House is a wish list, or is it more than what needs to be done to restore the building. Mayor Syrnick responded the list is part of the grant application to the historic trust fund. This consists of elevations, plans, drawings and items in detail on a 300-page application. These items need to be done to the building if you take historic trust fund money, which is restoring back to a certain period and character. This would only be one of the grants the Township would need to take. This first grant would be one of several grants that would need to restore the building. In the end, it would cost over 2 million dollars.

Mayor Syrnick explained this is why the Township is proposing to hold off on the historic status, so that the Township can do repairs without some of the restrictions, which go into full historic status by using funds. The Township would need an engineer, building inspector to inspect the building to see what needs to be replaced and repaired.

Lois Voronin asked if the Township could use County funds to pay for an engineer. She feels that things always fall by the wayside, asked if there is a sub-committee to work on this project.

She would like the Township Committee to make a motion to form a subcommittee and obtain grants to restore the building.

Mayor Syrnick hopes that the Historical Society will use this building in the future. Also noted the work Dennis Bertland worked on is kept on file and will always be good.

Betty DeSapio, Kingwood Township Historian – Explained the Historical Society is a very relaxed group. They do not even have a members list at this time. Betty DeSapio noted she expressed her support for the White House in her monthly report to the Township Committee. She has one concern, that this White House will be turned into another Old Fairview School. The Old Fairview School was on the Hunterdon County list as one of the historic sites in the County. Since then, so many renovations were done and it ended up not being historic any longer. She explained the Township sold the Old Fairview School a few years ago. She also asked if the money the Township obtained from selling the Old Fairview School, could go into this project.

Mayor Syrnick responded by stating the Old Fairview School, which was owned by the Township was not bought with grant money. It was a piece of property off the tax rolls and there was nothing going on in the building any longer. The Township offered this building to several organizations and no one wanted to use the building. It was costing the Township a lot of money to maintain the building.

Betty DeSapio asked about the Historic Trust and the grant. She noted if the Township does not take the grant and they decide to apply several years down the road, they may say that Kingwood did not take the grant when it was offered the first time. She feels they will not consider giving Kingwood a grant for this project in the future if we do not act on it now. She asked about keeping the building up, would the Township have a historic individual suggesting how to restore without changing the historic value of the home. Mayor Syrnick responded that it would be minor changes and not to change the structures of the building. Also explained she spoke to a representative from the Historic Trust who suggested the Township first apply for planning grants first and not a construction grant. This would give them a foundation of how the Township would be using the funds to restore the building.

Dennis Bertland - Bertland Associates/Historic Preservation Consultant – Introduced himself as a neighbor from Stockton Borough.

He wanted to give the Committee Members an example of a building in Stockton, which is known as the Locktown Stone Church, which he explained is adjacent to Kingwood Township and it is a similar situation. This property was acquired with Green Acres funds and the Township decided they did not want to manage this property or building. Therefore, in the 1980's they had a non-profit group that was formed specifically to do that. Since then, they have succeeded to do extensive rehabilitation and renovations, which it is now available to the public.

They also obtained many grants over the years, which was by several organizations who got involved and obtained additional grants. Dennis Bertland suggested this maybe something that could be considered for this White House project, which is very similar.

Dennis Bertland explained how he started the process for the William Lindsay White House. He started out with a Certificate of Eligibility, which is general funding. Then the Township applied for a grant to do the preservation plan and the national registry registration nomination. They retained Dennis Bertland to prepare that grant which was successful. He then published the preservation grant which included a team of professionals. The architect determined that they did not have a structural engineer. They all looked at the building in its historical value and its physical conditions in needs. A list of recommendations was suggested at that time for the White House. They also talked about what could become of the White House. It has taken 20 years to get the Locktown Stone Church in a stable case. The key problem was the moisture penetration coming into the basement. He would like to add there are certain costs for not taking action or delaying. Every year the register nomination changes and the costs may go up.

Mayor Syrnick commented on the fantastic job Dennis Bertland did on the project.

Chuck Kolvites, Member of the Parks and Recreation Committee – Explained that the Parks and Recreation voted to make this building historic. One of the Committee's concerns is the basement and how wet it is and how much it would cost to restore. The roof needs to be replaced. He asked the Committee Members to make the building safe so it can be maintained for the future.

Jill Dodds, Tumble Falls Road, Appreciates the presentation the Township Committee presented. She also appreciates the Township wanting to be fiscally responsible. After hearing how much the cost went up from the year 2020 to 2022, she asked how much would it cost if the Township waits another 5 years or more, and asked if it is fiscally responsible to give up a grant that the Township has in hand for something that may make the cost rise.

Deputy Mayor Ciacciarelli read aloud the following message from Committee Members Russano who could not be present this evening:

Good morning, I would like to express my sincere apologies to the residents as well as the Governing Body for not being able to attend today's special meeting regarding the Historic Preservation of the Lindsay White House.

As the Liaison for the Kingwood Township Parks & Recreation, a longtime resident and agriculturalist, I truly believe in the importance of preserving our history.

Historic preservation is the identification, evaluation, and protection of historic and archaeological resources so that they continue to play an integral, vibrant role in their communities

The Lindsay White House is a small part of our townships history and is in a picturesque location.

The historic property has both economic and cultural value. It provides a sense of continuity with the past and can if properly planned for attract visitors, create a sense of civic pride, and provide opportunities to enrich the education of our children. Any successful preservation requires careful planning. The Municipal Land Use Law (MLUL) recognizes this relationship between planning and protection by including a historic preservation plan element as an optional element of the municipal master plan. As such, Article 3, “Master Plan,” (C.40:55D-28 b.10) defines the historic preservation plan element areas of importance as:

- the location and significance of historic sites
- identifying the standards used to assess worthiness for the historic site
- identifying a plan for appropriate use of the site that will benefit our residents
- analyzing the financial impact of each component

I believe that together we should place an emphasis for maintaining and protecting our Township Historic properties while remaining **cognizant** of current State Green Acre guidelines, identified concerns and all fiscal costs that result in the repair of these historic properties.

I truly believe that all Historical properties are a physical link to our past, providing meaning to the present and continuity with the future.

Thank you!

Andy Russano

Kingwood Township Committee Person

Motion by the Kingwood Township Committee - William Lindsay White House

It was moved by Mr. Ciacciarelli, Mayor Syrnick stepped down from the Chair, second the motion and carried to refrain from moving forward with including the William Lindsay White House being put on the Historic Registry and to continue with the application and have it placed on the Historic State and Federal Registry until further time in the future.

Roll Call Vote:	AYE	- Ciacciarelli, Syrnick
	NAY	- None
	ABSTAIN	- None
	ABSENT	- Russano

At the next Township meeting in August the Committee Members will discuss a plan of how to restore the building to reopen it up to the public, as well as, a plan on getting volunteers and organizations similar to how the Locktown Stone Church was restored.

Adjournment

It was moved by Mr. Ciacciarelli, Mayor Syrnick stepped down from the Chair second the motion and approved to adjourn the meeting at 10:13 a.m. All present voted Aye on Roll Call Vote. Committee Member Russano was absent.

Very truly yours,
Cynthia L. Keller, RMC Township Clerk