

**DESIGNATION OF
MULLICA HILL HISTORIC DISTRICT
AS AN
AREA IN NEED OF REHABILITATION**

May 27, 2008

Introduction/Background

The Mullica Hill Historic District is the traditional center of the Township of Harrison and dates to its founding in the Colonial era. Harrison Township is a growing community in central Gloucester County, approximately twenty-five (25) miles south of the City of Camden. Its population at the time of the 2000 Census was 8,788 people. The Mullica Hill Historic District (M.H.H.D.) is the heart of the Township, straddling both sides of Main Street (New Jersey Route 45). The area was designated a National Register Historic District in 1988 by the U. S. Department of the Interior and the New Jersey Historic Preservation office. The limits of the district are shown on the enclosed map.

The Township desires to preserve the historic nature of the Mullica Hill District. To accomplish this, the governing body desires to provide financial relief or assistance to the owners of difficult to maintain historic properties in the form of tax abatements. As part of this effort, the governing body directed that the Planning Board conduct a Preliminary Investigation to determine whether the district meets the criteria established in N.J.S.A. 40A:12A-14 as an "Area in Need of Rehabilitation". This request was submitted to the Planning Board by Resolution No. 049-2008.

On February 21, 2008, Remington & Vernick Engineers provided a verbal report to the Planning Board establishing that the properties met the criteria for the proposed designation. Based on this, the Planning Board passed Resolution 17-2008 concurring with the governing body that the M.H.H.D. be declared an Area in Need of Rehabilitation. On March 3, 2008, the governing body considered the Planning Board's recommendation, and adopted Resolution 064-2008 declaring the M.H.H.D. an Area in Need of Rehabilitation. Copies of the resolutions are attached.

In accordance with 40A:12A-6, the findings of the Township Committee were forwarded to the Office of Smart Growth for concurrence. On March 31, 2008, Mr. Benjamin Spinelli, Executive Director of the Office of Smart Growth, wrote to the Township that a Preliminary Investigation Report must be submitted in order for the designation to be accepted. Furthermore, we were requested by staff of the Office of Smart Growth to provide an explanation of Township's intent in using the designation.

Preliminary Investigation

N.J.S.A. 40A:12A provides criteria that must be met to determine that a delineated area is in need of rehabilitation. The governing body must determine by resolution that there exist in that area conditions such that (1) a significant portion of structures therein are in a deteriorated or substandard condition and there is a continuing pattern of vacancy, abandonment or underutilization of properties in the area, with a persistent arrearage of property tax payments thereon or (2) more than half of the housing stock in the delineated area is at least 50 years old, or a majority of the water and sewer infrastructure in the delineated area is at least 50 years old and is in need of repair or substantial maintenance; and (3) a program of rehabilitation, as defined in section 3 of P.L. 1992, c. 79 (C.40A:12A-3) may be expected to prevent further deterioration and promote the overall development of community. It is our professional opinion that the M.H.H.D. in the Township of Harrison meets the conditions of criteria (2) and (3) for the reason described below.

In the year 2001 the Harrison Township Historic Preservation Commission published a book entitled "Walking Tour of the Mullica Hill Historic District". The Commission researched the district with the assistance of Margaret Westfield, R.A., Preservation Architect. Mrs. Westfield visited and documented each principal structure within the district. This was used by the Historic Preservation Commission to publish the walking tour in 2001. Of the approximately one hundred fifty (150) structures listed in the district, only five (5) had construction dates within 50 years. Another eleven (11) were undated but had descriptions indicating an earlier date. The remaining structures were dated from the 19th century or the first half of the 20th century with five (5) dating back to the 18th century. Based on this research by the Historic Preservation Commission, criteria (2) is satisfied.

The Township has a strong desire to maintain both the historic nature of its center and to promote it as a thriving business community of antique shops, boutiques, and similar uses. The age of the properties and the requirements to adhere to a historically accurate standard is a financial burden to the owners, be they residential or commercial properties. Any program of rehabilitation will assist the owners in improving the properties and in preventing deterioration to the structures. This in turn will promote the development and continued use of the historic district as envisioned in the Master Plan.

The Township intends to assist the owners in rehabilitating their property by providing tax abatements as allowed for an Area in Need of Rehabilitation. This will assist and encourage property owners in making improvements to their properties thus promoting the goals of the Township Master Plan and preserving the historic conditions of the district. This provides conformance with criteria (3) of the public law.

Conclusion

In consideration of the age of the structures in the Historic District and the Township's proposal to assist the property owners with tax abatements, it is evident that the entire district meets the requirements of N.J.S.A. 40A:12A as an Area in Need of Rehabilitation. Such a declaration will assist the district in meeting the goals of the Township Master Plan.

It is our recommendation that the Township of Harrison Planning Board reaffirm its earlier decision by resolution and forward the same to the Governing Body. If the Governing Body is in agreement, the appropriate resolution declaring the designation should be passed and forwarded to the Commission of the Department of Community Affairs.

John J. Cantwell, P.E., P.P., C.M.E.
P.P. License #5199