

**MINUTES OF A MEETING
OF THE LANDMARKS PRESERVATION COMMISSION
OF THE VILLAGE OF THOMASTON
October 28, 2024**

The Landmarks Preservation Commission met on Monday, October 28, 2024, at the Village Hall, 100 East Shore Road, Thomaston, NY at 7:30 p.m. to consider whether to landmark the property located at 715 Northern Boulevard Road, which is currently owned by the Korean Methodist Church. The request received by the Village to designate buildings on this property as landmarks, together with accompanying photographs, is on file in the Village office.

Present: Don Stern (Chair), Julie Georgopoulos (Deputy Chair), Carol Adams, Ben Marzouk, and Village Administrator Denise M. Knowland

Excused: Gary Noren

Chairman Stern opened the meeting at 7:30 p.m.

Mr. Stern welcomed everyone to the meeting, and recognized Carol Adams and Ben Marzouk, who are new members on the Commission. Mr. Stern noted that the members of the Commission are all Thomaston residents and unpaid volunteers. He thanked the Village Administrator for her assistance with the work of the Commission.

Mr. Stern noted that, while this is a public meeting as required by law (so that the public can see and hear the proceedings of the Commission), there is no legal requirement for a public hearing at which the public can offer comments to the Commission. However, the Commission will nevertheless welcome public comments, as was indicated in the notice for the meeting, and has been the Commission's practice in the past. The meeting was also available live, to those unable to attend in person, via Zoom.

Mr. Stern related that the site at 715 Northern Boulevard contains three permanent structures: (i) a church building or sanctuary, (ii) a parish hall and (iii) a parsonage. There is also a trailer located on the site. The landmarking request received by the Village relates only to the church and the parish hall (the parsonage appears to be a more contemporary, pedestrian structure with vinyl siding and without historical or architectural mention in the public records reviewed by Commission members).

Mr. Stern next summarized briefly the relevant history of the site, based on information available to Commission members prior to the meeting, as follows. The land was originally deeded to a Great Neck congregation of the United Methodist Church in the late 1800s by Joseph Spinney, a prominent local merchant. In addition to the land, Mr. Spinney donated money for construction of a church, parish house and parsonage. The church was built around 1872, was significantly refurbished in 1945, burned in 1948, and was completely rebuilt in the period 1951-56, with significant modifications. For example, while the original church had a wooden spire, the new

church has a brick spire. The parish hall was opened in 1881 in Gothic Revival style, and underwent a significant renovation in 2012. While care was taken to keep the appearance of the structure generally consistent with the original Gothic style, there were changes, including to windows and the exterior cladding of the structure. The site is currently owned by the Korean Methodist Church, which received a deed to the property in 1982 from the New York Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church. The property is subject to a deed restriction requiring that the property only be used for Methodist religious worship. This restriction is binding on the present and all future owners of the site.

Mr. Stern also summarized the legal context of the Commission's work as follows: (1) first, the Commission must decide whether the church and/or parish hall fits within the definition of "Landmark" in the Village Code, and (2) second, if a structure fits within that definition, the Commission must decide whether to designate the structure as a landmark for purposes of the Village Code. He noted that a building which satisfies the definition of "Landmark" is not, by reason of that fact alone, automatically designated as such in the Village Code; instead, the Commission has discretion and may take into account relevant factors in deciding whether or not to designate a structure as a landmark. Mr. Stern stated that, in the past, the Commission has taken into account such factors as: the historical significance of the building to the Village, the importance of the architectural value of the building to the Village, the integrity of the original building (i.e. impact of subsequent renovations to the original structure and its appearance), any significant hardship to the owner that could result from landmarking, the impact of landmarking on the community (e.g., is there a realistic risk that the building could become derelict in the future as a result of landmarking), and the impact of landmarking on religious use by the owner.

Finally, Mr. Stern noted that, in 2009, the then Landmarks Commission of the Village recommended designating the parish hall as a landmark (but not the church or parsonage). However, the Commission apparently did not produce a written report at that time (none can be located). Further, upon consideration at a public meeting later in 2009, the Village Board of Trustees rejected the Commission's landmark designation, as is within the authority of the Board of Trustees pursuant to the Village Code. Accordingly, no portion of the site is currently landmarked.

Mr. Stern then opened the meeting for public comments.

The following members of the public offered comments in favor of landmarking the church and/or the parish hall: Wendy Halpern, 10 Brompton Road; and Olivia Pinsley, 30 Brompton Road. Andrew Cronson, a Manhasset resident and a student of architecture and preservation, made a presentation, the slides from which are on file in the Village office. Points raised included, among others: (i) the Village has been a leader in designating landmarks in the community, and this leadership should continue, (ii) the church and parish house are of historical importance to the Village and Great Neck more generally and add to the special character of the Village, (iii) the Great Neck Historical Society awarded the parish hall a plaque commending the 2012 renovation of the historic structure, (iv) historic structures have been successfully repurposed in many other places (specific examples were provided), (v) maintenance of a historic structure is not that much more expensive than maintenance of an ordinary residence, and (vi) if there is hardship to the property owner from landmarking, it should be judged in the context of a particular renovation in

the future (as the Village Code permits), but should not affect the Commission's ability to designate a building as a landmark now.

The following members of the Korean Methodist Church spoke in opposition to landmarking of the church and parish hall: Mr. Sang Ji and Mr. Paul Choi. As part of his remarks, Mr. Ji presented historical and current pictures of the church and parish house, which are on file in the Village office. Points raised included, among others: (i) significant changes have been made to both the church and parish hall since their original construction that affect external appearance, such as reconstruction of the church as a brick building rather than wooden, and changes to the roof materials, roof line and windows of the parish hall, (iii) significant hardship would result to the property owner from landmarking the church and/or the parish hall, especially in light of the reduced size of congregation after COVID, and the ongoing lack of financial resources of the church and its members (specific examples were provided), which could threaten the survival of the congregation, and (iv) in the course of the 2012 renovation of the parish hall, the church tried hard, within the constraints of its limited resources, to be a good neighbor and maintain the general external character of the parish house, although there were changes to windows and roof necessary to minimize renovation expense.

There being no further comments, Mr. Stern closed the public comment session of the meeting at 8:33 p.m.

Mr. Stern outlined the next steps to be taken by the Commission, including an adjournment of the meeting to December 5, at which time it is expected that a final determination would be made by the Commission. In this connection, Mr. Stern moved the following resolution, which was seconded by Mr. Marzouk:

RESOLVED, that the meeting of the Village of Thomaston Landmarks Preservation Commission is continued to Thursday, December 5, 2024 at 7:30pm at the Thomaston Village Hall, 100 E. Shore Road, Thomaston, NY; and that the Village Administrator will provide notice of such continued public meeting as may be required by law.

The vote on this resolution was:

Donald Stern, Chair: Aye
Carol Adams: Aye
Gary Noren: Excused

Julie Georgopoulos, Deputy Chair: Aye
Ben Marzouk: Aye

Adjournment

At 8:35 p.m., there being no further business, a motion to adjourn was made by Carol Adams, seconded by Julie Georgopoulos, and unanimously approved.

Respectfully Submitted,

Denise M. Knowland
Village Administrator