

# Long Valley residents, property owners ask about German Valley historic district

WASHINGTON TWP. — Townspeople and property owners of the German Valley section of Long Valley Monday night attended a public hearing conducted by the Historical Preservation Commission.

About 30 people heard the commission's plans to create and oversee the historical preservation zone, which would be in addition to the economic-based zoning.

The preservation board heard questions and comments on the effect the historic zoning will have upon the resident's ability to freely renovate their homes and businesses.

Long Valley's original name was German Valley. The downtown area is on the state and federal registers of historic places but the proposed local ordinance would allow the township Historic Preservation Commission to review changes to the exteriors of buildings, demolitions and renovations to "significant" architectural aspects of buildings. About 60 properties would fall into district.

The hearing is a necessary step toward the Township Committee ultimately considering and voting upon the zone. The Planning Board would review it, as well.

Chairwoman Margaret Nordstrom outlined the commission's main objective, which is "to work with and not against the citizens of German Valley to help maintain the historical integrity of the valley."

She said that the historic zone in Long Valley, as many other historic areas in New Jersey, is increasingly being pressured to change in order to suit the needs of a growing population, increased traffic and the demand for renovating older, historical buildings for modern family and business uses.

One of the commission's main concerns is with preserving the stone-arch bridge and its adjacent properties at the intersection of routes 517, 24 and 513 in Long Valley center.

The intersection has become a symbol of the value of historic districts, Nordstrom said. Any project that needs state or federal review, or uses state or federal money, must take historical factors into consideration. "Historical factors can no longer accommodate the increasingly congested commuter traffic."

Bert Swackhammer, whose family has lived in Long Valley since the early 1700s, expressed his frustration with the traffic that backs up on Fairmount Road in front of his house, and his desire to "get rid of the bridge and let traffic get through and out of Long Valley."

Other residents expressed their concern for the bridge's preservation, but also said that they realize the need to resolve the traffic problem.

Several individuals asked why their properties were included in historic zone and subject to the zoning regulations when they are not "historic" buildings. Many expressed their anger at not being able to choose whether they wanted to be in the historic register or not.

Nordstrom assured the audience that the commission's by-line included "more liberal standards for non-contributing," or non-historical buildings that are located within the historical zone.

James Barras, president of the Long

Valley Fire Company, told the commission that the company will some day have to move and sell the firehouse on Fairview Avenue, and he feared the historic district might lessen the value of the property. If that happened, he said, the company would have to appeal to the township government for help and it might fall back upon taxpayers for financial support.

Nordstrom told Barras that historic districts often increase the value of properties, and that the commission would help market the property, if necessary.

Larry Oppel, chief of the fire company, asked why the six or eight "non-contributing" properties in the proposed district couldn't be exempted.

Preservation commission member Sherri Heiber-Day added that the inclusion of all buildings, both contributors and non-contributors, is important in order to maintain the "architectural conformity that is indigenous to the area." Excluding some properties from the commission's jurisdiction would enable future owners to alter the effect on the town as a whole by constructing a building contrary to the historically significant structures around it.

When asked what mainly concerned the commission with reference to renovating a non-contributing commercial building, Nordstrom replied, "lights and signs."

Joan O'Dowd, a commission member, warned that all buildings add or

detract from the zone and keeping "non-contributing" buildings from detracting as little as possible helps the "integrity" of the zone.

"There's a word 'stewardship' involved here that most people don't understand," she said after the meeting. "We're only here for a certain period of time and the whole purpose of preservation is for future generations to have some knowledge of what was here before them."

Other concerns were for the financial burdens historical status requirements could possibly incur upon homeowners. The possibility of tax

deductions or other financial incentives were discussed. Nordstrom and other members of the commission insisted that they would help homeowners to find both historically and financially responsible methods of renovation.

"The Historical Preservation Commission is concerned with the history of our area. They are here to remind the public of the importance of our heritage and to assist in any way they can to keep Long Valley historically significant by making responsible alterations for present and future," said Nordstrom.