

**EAST AMWELL TOWNSHIP HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES
March 21, 2023 – 7:30PM**

CALL TO ORDER & OPEN PUBLIC MEETING NOTICE

The meeting of the East Amwell Historic Preservation Committee was called to order at 7:32 PM by Renee Stemcovski.

The following statement of compliance with the Open Public Meetings Act was read into the record by Renee Stemcovski: "In compliance with the Open Public Meetings Act, this is a regularly scheduled meeting pursuant to the annual meeting notice as published in the December 18, 2022 issue of the Hunterdon County Democrat, a copy of the agenda for this meeting was forwarded to the Hunterdon County Democrat, filed in the Township Clerk's Office and posted on the bulletin board on March 16, 2023."

ROLL CALL

Committee Member (term expires)	1/17/2023	2/21/2023	3/21/2023	4/18/2023	5/16/2023	6/20/2023	7/18/2023	8/15/2023	9/19/2023	10/17/2023	11/21/2023	12/19/2023
Paul Carluccio- Class B (12/31/2026)	X	7:33	X									
Cassie DeCandia- Class C (12/31/2026)	X	X	X									
Frances Gavigan- Class B (12/31/2024)	X	A	A									
Dave Harding- Class B (12/31/2026)	X	X	X									
Will Harrison- Class B/Vice-Chair (12/31/2025)	X	X	X									
Beth Hussain- Class C (12/31/2026)	A	7:34	X									
John Mills- TC Liaison (12/31/2023)	X	X	X									
John Seramba- Class C/Chair (12/31/2025)	X	X	A									
Paul Sterchele- Class C (12/31/2026)	X	X	A									
Mary Van Horn- Class C (12/31/2026)	X	A	A									
Renee Stemcovski- Secretary (12/31/2023)	X	X	X									

Others Present: Lora Olsen

REVIEW OF AGENDA

There were no additions to the agenda.

CITIZENS PRIVILEGE TO SPEAK ON ITEMS NOT ON THE AGENDA

A motion made by Dave Harding, seconded by Beth Hussain to open the floor to the public was unanimously approved. The public had nothing to add at this time. A motion made by Paul Carluccio, seconded by Dave Harding to close the floor to the public was unanimously approved.

PRESENTATION OF MINUTES

January 17, 2023 Reorganization Minutes

A motion made by Dave Harding, seconded by Cassie DeCandia to approve the minutes was approved.

February 21, 2023 Regular Minutes

A motion made by Dave Harding, seconded by Beth Hussain to approve the minutes as amended was approved.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

East Amwell Historical Society and Museum

Nothing to report.

Museum Occupancy Agreement and Use Policy

Nothing to report.

Kleinschmidt House

Will Harrison went to the Township Committee (TC) meeting to discuss the Kleinschmidt House (House) as a member of the public. Committee Members Dante DiPirro, Michael Dendis and John Mills were interested in the situation. John Mills said he will try to get the County involved and will keep this committee (HPC) posted. Will Harrison gave a recap of what he said at the meeting (see attached). He said he will serve on any potential subcommittee. Paul Carluccio suggested that someone from the HPC go to the next Ringoes Village Advisory Committee (RVAC) meeting to discuss the House. Will Harrison said that going forward, the HPC should only do things that work towards the goal of getting the House demolished, in regard to the House. John Mills suggested not waiting on the TC for a subcommittee and should just go ahead and create one. Will Harrison said he reached out to Claymore Environmental about the House and getting a preliminary evaluation, which should be \$500-600. He believes that as the public learns about the House, they will be equally eager to have it demolished. Cassie DeCandia said that at the TC meeting, Dante DiPirro expressed that the RVAC has a list of dilapidated houses that they want to address, and the House is one of them. She then praised Will Harrison's presentation at the TC meeting. Paul Carluccio suggested going to the next TC meeting to bring the House up again to be a "squeaky wheel." John Mills said that the overall TC opinion is that it is not a Township issue. He also suggested against shifting this issue over to the RVAC and "putting all the eggs in one basket." Will Harrison recovered the 2018 Hunterdon Horizons estimate. Paul Carluccio is hopeful that the County will take up some responsibility and/or provide some guidance. Will Harrison suggested the HPC brainstorm plans for what to do with the site after demolition (ex. memorial, park, interpretive signage, etc.)

Region Nine

The committee opened the floor to the public. Lora Olsen said a resolution was passed by the Planning Board regarding Region Nine. She said there is another structure on the property that was previously unknown, as it is obscured by vegetation. It might possibly be a wagon house. Lora Olsen suggested the structure be documented. Will Harrison said answering the Septic and Well questions are the next two things Region Nine needs to address. Every house in the township has individual septic tanks and wells, which has kept the township small. The committee brainstormed what the structure could have been, since masonry structures are rare in the township.

Historic Barns

Dave Harding spoke to Marilyn Cummings about the project. She did not have barns on her list, so she was very intrigued. Paul Carluccio said this new structure at 20 John Ringo Road could be added to the list and he reiterated the importance of documenting structures before they are demolished or completely deteriorated. He hopes to create a working group or subcommittee to take on this project. Beth Hussain said she knows of a property that could be included. Paul Carluccio said the state probably has grants that could be used for this. Will Harrison said this committee previously photographed historic houses that may include barns. A motion made by Paul Carluccio, seconded by Beth Hussain to create a subcommittee with the goal of documenting and surveying historic farm structures in the township in order to create a living registry was unanimously approved.

NEW BUSINESS

None.

ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION

Paul Herbert was a conservationist that used to live in the area and died in the 1980s. Dave Harding discovered a partial manuscript titled *Life As it Was* by Paul Herbert, and is searching for the full manuscript. If anyone has any leads, please reach out to him or this committee.

ORAL REPORTS

None.

PRESENTATION OF VOUCHERS

There were no vouchers for approval.

OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

A motion made by Dave Harding, seconded by Beth Hussain to open the floor to the public was unanimously approved.

Lora Olsen suggested looking into the Cultural & Heritage Commission in Flemington for barn research. She expressed interest in the Kleinschmidt House.

A motion made by Dave Harding, seconded by Beth Hussain to close the floor to the public was unanimously approved.

CORRESPONDENCE

There was no correspondence for discussion.

ADJOURNMENT

A motion made by Paul Carluccio, seconded by Dave Harding to adjourn the meeting at 9:02 PM was unanimously approved by voice vote.

Renee Stemcovski, Secretary

Attachments

OPENING REMARKS

Why am I here on March 9, speaking with you tonight? The Historic Preservation Committee has been asking to speak with the EA Township officially on the agenda regarding the Kleinschmidt House since August 2022 but we have been repeatedly denied. This year, Jenna explained to me that since “we had nothing new to offer” she would not add us to the agenda but “we are welcome to speak during the **open to the public** section of the meeting”. So, I am here speaking to you on my own.

Like most of the public, I was unaware of the house and its condition until Frances Gavigan brought some pictures to our meeting early last year. When I saw those pictures, I said to myself, “This is terrible, somebody should do something about it”. Then, in the summer I saw more pictures and I talked with John Staats, President of the Cemetery, who informed me of the negative impact the crumbling house was having on the adjacent cemetery. I again said, “this is worse than terrible, someone really should do something about it”. Upon investigating, including talking with John Staats and David Wang-Iverson and looking through the Kleinschmidt file in the Township office I knew that I must become involved. Then, the HP Committee decided to approach the Township Committee offering to partner with you to solve this on-going problem. What did **you** say to yourself when each of you saw these pictures or, better still, visited the site yourself?

On one hand Jenna’s opinion that “there is nothing new to offer”, she is partially correct -- if one sees only the past, bi-partisan failure to remedy the problem, allowing the house to continue to collapse.

Let’s look forward to a bi-partisan solution.

My presentation follows:

Kleinschmidt property located at 2 Old York Road in Larisons Corner near Dutch Lane 3/9/2023
To the EA Township Committee

Many have voiced concerns to you about this abandoned, derelict property for many years. The house is, at least, an eyesore in a community with historic ties and it lies adjacent to a historic cemetery. The house has begun to fall down partially into the cemetery which while unsightly, poses a significant safety hazard to anyone who might venture too close. In addition, it can desecrate the graves of those buried nearby.

Heretofore, NO ONE has been willing to assume the responsibility of taking over the property, razing the house and clearing the property of all debris. Inaction can no longer be considered an option! [SHOW PICTURES]

Can we assume that all viable options for grant money have been thoroughly and vigorously pursued? The house seems to be within the 33’ County Right of Way on Old York Road (30’, 6” by our measurement).

The Historic Preservation Committee has agreed that to initiate any improvement to this situation a **goal** must be established and the **goal** we agreed upon is that **the only way to remedy this serious problem is to have the house removed**. How this will be accomplished

may be debated but to do nothing is no longer an option. The Historic Preservation Committee has come to you as partners; not antagonists.

The house itself, although somewhat historic, has nothing worth saving -- but the entire community will be greatly enhanced by its removal; yes, the historic cemetery and the old church will surely benefit as well.

The recent pictures were taken last winter showing the debris in the cemetery before the Trustees came with a work party to throw it back over the wall.

If there are no viable plans currently in the works, here are some suggested guidelines going forward:

1. Establish a four-fold approach:
 - Agree with the Historic Preservation Committee to add the Kleinschmidt House to 2023 Township **Goals**.
 - Appoint a joint subcommittee (Two members, each) to work on details, followed by:
 - A plan to accomplish the **goal**, then-
 - Report back to their respective committees.
2. The County has been asked to help us but they are absolutely not interested.
3. Failing all other options, the township should take over ownership of the property including liability using insurance.
4. Then a full assessment of all costs to be incurred should be obtained – Using licensed experts in the field. This may involve legal costs, asbestos remediation, as well as the cost to fully clean up the site and return it to an attractive vacant lot. The usual bidding procedure should prevail.
5. How can this project be funded if no grant money is available? Once an estimate of the cost is established, the Historic Preservation Committee is asking the Township Committee to offer the plan to the public in open public meetings. The information given to the public should include the total cost of the project as well as the impact on each property owner. The Township Committee may elect to pay off the project in one year or issue bonds that may be paid off over time.
6. The Historic Preservation Committee would like to have a say in the wording that is presented to the public.
7. We will encourage every member of the Township Committee to personally visit the site as well as the public. It can be viewed from the road although weeds and bushes partially obscure that view. It can also be seen from the cemetery where the hazards can be more clearly observed. Stand where these pictures were taken and see for yourself. Then say, "Yes, it is a mess but whose problem is it?" Google Earth shows the house from the road without the growing bushes.
8. If the plan is accepted, then a decision will be made to either deed it to the cemetery, which will assume the maintenance in the future, or keep it as open space owned by the township.
9. If the township has a better plan, go for it. As we stated earlier, doing nothing is no longer an option.
10. If everyone can agree on a demolition plan, to save money, maybe the DPW crew could finish leveling the site for seeding.

Thank you for allowing us to speak with you this evening. Any questions?

John Seramba, Chair - Will Harrison, Vice Chair

HISTORICAL INFORMATION

This narrow lot was once part of the Larisons Corner Cemetery but in 1846 the cemetery trustees sold it to John W. Larison, the owner of the hotel across the street for the sum of \$7.50. We may assume that the building then erected was to be a storehouse for Larison's hotel and/or his other businesses. Later, in 1850, John reportedly retired from the hotel business but continued to live in the area possibly converting the building to a house at that time. [From: *A History of East Amwell 1700-1800, by The East Amwell Bicentennial committee 1976*]
Now, the eastern third of the land is maintained by the cemetery, although they do not officially own it. They are willing to accept integrating the cleared land back into the cemetery, maintaining it as they are already doing with the eastern part.

Information from Kleinschmidt File

Kleinschmidt file in the township office is available for anyone to see with an OPRA request.

- Property was deeded to Robert Kleinschmidt in 1949.
- Building permit issued to Robert Kleinschmidt to "Reroof Vacant Building", in 1981, but it was never acted upon.
- Demand was sent to Robert Kleinschmidt in May 1997, regarding "the unsafe structure which constitutes a fire hazard" and he was ordered to demolish and vacate.
- However, Kleinschmidt died Feb. 15, 1994.
- Title search was done in 2016 and found title is clear.
- 2018 much work was done, including many letters, some from the Cemetery officers.
 1. Preparation was done for demolition
 2. Request for bids went out and there is mention of one bid received but no evidence exists here of what that bid could have been.
 3. Sumner Sieke of Hunterdon Horizons is mentioned as a potential bidder along with names of other contractors who may have been contacted.
 4. David Wang Iverson applied for a grant at that time but it was denied.

Can we agree that it would have been helpful if that estimate from 2018 had not been destroyed? We may be able to supply that information tonight.

SOME IDEAS TO CONSIDER TO FURTHER ENHANCE THE CLEARED PROPERTY

1. The property could be used to erect a memorial honoring all US Veterans and/or first responders in a parkland setting.
2. A message board mounted near the cemetery entrance displaying the history of the Larison's Corner community and the cemetery including many historical pictures would make the area very appealing.
3. A kiosk might be used for either of the above features.
4. Other ideas would also be welcomed.