



March 31, 2010

Mr. E. Van Rieker, AICP  
215 Old Church Road  
North Wales, PA 19454

Re: Main Street Historic Resource Survey, Trappe Borough

Dear Van:

On March 19, 2010, preservation planner Seth Hinshaw and I joined Borough Manager Tommy Ryan and you for a “windshield survey” of Trappe’s historic resources. Seth and I then spent the remainder of the morning analyzing these resources, which are concentrated mainly on West Main Street. We examined several areas north and south of Main Street as well.

The purpose of the survey was to determine the architectural quality of historic resources along Main Street so that this information can then be a basis for the vision planning process now being undertaken in the Borough.

**Key Findings:**

1. The majority of Main Street lies within the Trappe Borough Historic District. The district received a Determination of Eligibility (DOE) from the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission (PHMC) in 1997. The boundary, re-evaluated by PHMC staff in 2005, begins at the Lutheran Church complex in the 700 block of West Main Street and continues east to include the Frederick Muhlenberg House (Speaker’s House). The boundary includes properties that have been developed since 2005, particularly north of Main Street.
2. The district also contains the following properties individually listed on, or determined eligible for the National Register of Historic Places: the Henry Muhlenberg’s House (National Register), the Augustus Lutheran Church (National Register / National Historic Landmark) and the Lamb Tavern (DOE).
3. The district boundary does not include the following properties having a DOE: State Senator Lewis Royer Farm (preserved) and the Leonard Spare Homestead.

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4. The survey revealed additional resources in the Borough that are not part of the historic district but may be historically or architecturally significant, such as the former Collegeville-Trappe High School on East 1<sup>st</sup> Avenue.
5. The district itself has two clusters of historic resources: The Augustus Lutheran Church and other properties around the intersection of West Main Street and 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue; and a concentration of historic buildings around the intersection of West Main Street and West 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue.
6. Within the historic district, the overall quality of the historic resources in the two clusters is high, with some outstanding and important examples of Colonial and early American architecture. The quality and concentration of historic resources between the clusters varies. This area has a lesser concentration of historic resources, includes several “noncontributing” resources, and open lots. Noncontributing resources are resources that do not contribute historically or architecturally to the district.
7. The resources along Main Street present, to some degree, a uniformity of size, shape, and setback, creating an overall building pattern, which is rare for such a long linear district. Aside from the large Trappe shopping center and a few other buildings, this pattern also applies several newer buildings, helping to augment this pattern.
8. Unlike many historic districts located in borough commercial districts, the Trappe Historic District is long, flat and linear, with ample opportunity for new development or redevelopment.

**Considerations:**

A discussion on historic preservation through the heart of the Borough of Trappe will ultimately occur with the visioning process the Borough is about to undertake. That process should produce a vision for Main Street. It could include preserving the area much as it is, enhancing the streetscape with both design elements and new development, or enabling large development schemes that will transform the use and appearance of the street. Given our findings above, the Borough should undertake the following considerations as a part of this visioning process:

1. Leverage the Historic District. The Trappe Historic District provides the Borough with the credibility to promote historic resource protection. It offers a defined boundary, a history, architectural description, and a reason for its significance. The Borough can leverage this information into specific resource protection language (see below). In addition, it provides a degree of protection (through a formal review process) for state and federal projects – such as road widening – not afforded to non-historic areas. It can help obtain grants and makes it easier to dispense educational information about its history and architecture.

2. The above notwithstanding, Wise found the district to be suffering from architectural and historic landscape setting integrity problems due to the amount of noncontributing resources, altered historic resources, and other associated changes to the landscape. The staff at the PHMC also found problems associated with the district during their review in 2005, but, because the determination was made in association with a PennDOT evaluation in the 1990s, the DOE was not rescinded.
3. Wise would normally urge a municipality to seek National Register status for a district having a DOE, but in this case we recommend against pursuing the National Register. Pursuing the Register could result in the PHMC not recommending the National Register and losing the DOE in the process. (More extensive discussions with the PHMC in this matter are recommended.)
4. Consider drafting an overlay zoning article that will provide some level of protection for identified historic resources throughout the Borough and particularly resources within the historic district. An overlay ordinance can provide plenty of incentives to both protection and reuse of historic resources while encouraging development along Main Street. Though National Register status can add credibility to historic preservation ordinances within historic districts (and may still be possible here), it is not recommended.
5. Regarding the above, and given that the historic district occupies roughly the center 3/5ths of Main Street, develop streetscape design standards and design guidelines that encompass the entire length of the street through the Borough, with stricter resource protection standards within the district.
6. Draft a Board of Historical and Architectural Review (HARB) ordinance for the district. The strongest historic resource protection language in Pennsylvania, a HARB ordinance, based on Pennsylvania Act-167, will help ensure the protection of historic resources within the district only. Given the type of change that can be anticipated on Main Street, an overlay ordinance as described in 3. above is probably a more desirable alternative. The overlay ordinance affords a high level of resource protection while including more extensive language for reuse and redevelopment opportunities.
7. Establish a façade easement program along Main Street.
8. Identify specific resources on Main Street and throughout the borough that may qualify for the National Register and pursue DOEs and National Register recognition. This may be important for tax credits for redevelopment project of commercial buildings along Main Street.
9. Trappe's Main Street, including the Trappe Historic District presents ample opportunities to combine the latest tools in historic preservation and community

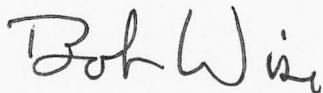
planning to meet the needs of property owners, business owners and Trappe citizens, to develop and carry out a visionary plan for the Borough.

We hope that we have provided some insight into historic preservation and resource protection issues, particularly along Trappe's West Main Street. The historic resources here, most of which are in the Trappe Historic District, are worthy of preservation. Given the extended nature of Main Street, the Borough should look at preservation holistically, which would include the historic resources and immediate landscape, open lots and other potentially developable areas (including those properties having not-so-historic buildings), as well as the street and sidewalks. All of this creates a rather unique streetscape and opportunity. With visionary planning and proper developmental tools, the Borough's West Main Street (and other areas containing historic resources) can no doubt be enhanced and made even more vital through time. This will benefit everyone. Historic resource protection zoning language, for example, can advance this visionary planning. The Borough should also take advantage of the pre-established Trappe Historic District; it offers a unique credibility to the planning process. To that end placing the district on the National Register may be possible but not recommended without further discussions with the PHMC.

Wise Preservation Planning has provided a "broad brush" survey and findings about the Borough, concentrating mainly on West Main Street. To learn more about the Trappe Historic District, we have requested a copy of the DOE and subsequent documentation from the PHMC. The attached photographs are nothing new to residents of Trappe, they simply augment some of our findings.

Should you have any questions, please call me at 484-202-8187 or email at [bwise@wisepreservation.com](mailto:bwise@wisepreservation.com). Thank you.

Sincerely,



Robert J. Wise, Jr.  
President

Attachments: Photographs and Historic District Map.