

ABINGTON TOWNSHIP VACANT PROPERTY REVIEW BOARD

Thursday, June 23, 2016 + 4:00PM

AGENDA

- I. Welcome and roll call.
- II. Approval of minutes.
- III. Blighted property report from Northampton Township—provided by Cathy Gauthier (thanks!).
- IV. Notes and updates: Call on John Spiegelman.
- V. Updated vacant properties list and status updates: Call on Shaun Littlefield.
- VI. Discussion of, updates on, and reevaluation of focal properties.
- VII. Next meeting (Thursday, August 4, 4:00PM) and adjournment



Township of Northampton

NORTHAMPTON TOWNSHIP COMPLEX • 55 Township Road, Richboro, Pennsylvania 18954-1592
Township Administration - (215) 357-6800 • Fax: (215) 357-1251

BLIGHTED PROPERTY REPORT

for the

**MILL RACE INN
183 Buck Road
Holland, PA 18966**

**Prepared by:
Northampton Township
55 Township Road
Richboro, PA 18954**

March 2013

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**MILL RACE INN
183 BUCK ROAD
HOLLAND, PA 18966**

INTRODUCTION

The Mill Race Inn is located at 183 Buck Road in Holland and has been a significant eyesore in the community for many years.

From an historical perspective as outlined by Michael Tomkins from the Historical Commission, "tradition has it that the Mill Race Inn was erected in 1787 and was rebuilt after a fire in 1918. The mill was powered by a wooden overshot water wheel, which utilized the waterpower created by the damming of Mill Creek a short distance upstream from the mill. Portions of the original machinery, which assisted with grinding the grain, still exist within the basement of the building."

He added that "during the 1870s, the mill was owned by Isaiah Gerhart and from the late 1880s until early 1960s, it was managed by the Finney family. During this period, Lafayette C. Finney owned all of what is the core of Holland, a farming community historically known as Rocksville and also Finney's Corner. The Finneys owned and operated both the gristmill and the general store located directly across from the mill on the opposite side of Buck Road. The building was recently renovated and currently houses Johnny Apple's Restaurant. Lafayette Finney passed away in 1961 and the mill property was sold out of the

family and then converted into a restaurant. Members of the Finney family still reside in Holland and in the Newtown area.”

In 1999, Hurricane Floyd caused significant damage to the Mill Race Inn. In July of 2001, there was further damage when the dam broke as a result of pressure from driving rains.

To this day, the Mill Race Inn is an eyesore, especially given its location as a focal point in the Village of Holland. As a result, it has a blighting influence on the surrounding area and properties.

OWNERSHIP

The Mill Race Inn property is identified as Tax Map Parcel 31-026-059-002. The parcel is irregularly shaped and consists of approximately 2.488 acres. In addition, based on the tax parcel map, the property has 348.69 feet of frontage on Black Road.

ATTACHMENT A is a copy of the tax parcel map for this property.

As shown on **ATTACHMENT B**, the MEA Report shows the current owner as Mill Race Inn Ltd. with an address of 1361 Taylor Drive, Langhorne, PA 19047.

PROPERTY HISTORY AND CONDITION

Early Township records show that the property was used as a restaurant on May 29, 1968. From an overall perspective, **ATTACHMENT C** shows an aerial of the subject property and the surrounding area.

As stated previously, in 1999, Hurricane Floyd caused significant damage to the Mill Race Inn. In July of 2001, there was further damage when the dam broke as a result of pressure from driving rains.

Since that time, the building has been in a significant state of disrepair.

ATTACHMENT D shows pictures of the property. Specifically, these pictures show the following violations:

- Building in a complete state of disrepair and in violation of nearly all building, plumbing, and fire codes.
- A building that is an attractive nuisance.
- Structural instability.
- A parking lot in a significant state of disrepair creating a hazard to motorists and pedestrians.
- High grass and weeds.
- Loose gutters and exterior elements of the building not secure thereby creating a hazard to nearby residents and businesses.
- Penetrations and easy access to the building allowing for the potential of vandalism and varmints to enter the structure.

- Foundation in a state of disrepair creating a safety hazard, especially given the proximity to the roadway.
- Exposed electrical wires.
- Junk and debris.
- A collapsing roof.
- Broken windows.
- Plumbing in a state of disrepair.
- Structural instability of the chimney.
- A building that is in a total, uninhabitable condition.

ATTACHMENT E shows a copy of the two recent violation notices that were issued by the Township. The first violation notice was issued on September 21, 2012 for high grass, weeds, junk, and debris present on the property. In addition, a second violation notice was issued on the same date for a violation of Section 27-111 of the Northampton Township Code. Specifically, the notice states the following:

No land, building, structure or premises in any commercial or industrial district shall be used, altered or occupied in a manner as to create any dangerous, injurious, noxious or otherwise objectionable fire, explosive, radioactive or other hazard; noise or vibration; smoke, dust, odor or other form of air pollution; electrical or other disturbance; glare; liquid or solid refuse or wastes; conditions conducive to the breeding of rodents or insects, or other substance, condition or element in any manner or amount as to adversely affect the surrounding area.

Furthermore, the violation notice noted the following deficiencies:

- Roof, wall, and foundation damage resulting in structural instability of the building.
- Chimney in a state of disrepair and structurally not stable.
- Holes in the exterior walls and open areas throughout the building.
- Heavy damage to the soffits, including open access to the building, and gutter damage.
- Broken windows providing access to the building.
- Exposed wires creating an electrical hazard.
- Property and building conducive to the breeding of rodents or insects.

To this date, all of these violations currently exist and the property remains in a complete and total state of disrepair.

Zoning

The property is currently zoned C-2 -- General Commercial/Office in the Township's Village Overlay District. This designation in the Village Overlay District carries unique considerations for this property. Specifically, Section 27-1125.1.A. through F. of the Northampton Township Zoning Ordinance, entitled Village Overlay District, states the following:

1. The Village Overlay District shall be a special overlay to the underlying zoning districts within Northampton Township. The purpose and objectives of this special overlay district are outlined as follows:

In addition, the Township is currently working with the Bucks County Planning Commission to develop an overall master plan for Holland. Coupled with a special Village Overlay District, this shows the Township's commitment to this area. Unfortunately, the current condition of the Mill Race Inn is counterproductive to these efforts. After meeting with residents and businesses from Holland, it is clear that the condition of the Mill Race Inn is an impediment to economic development efforts. As stated in Section E above, it is a goal of the Township to "retain and expand existing businesses." With the Mill Race Inn's condition, businesses are hesitant due to concerns of the economic viability of the area. Simply, the condition of the Mill Race Inn has far reaching impacts beyond the condition of the structure itself.

ATTACHMENT F shows a copy of Section 27-1125.1.A. through F. of the Northampton Township Zoning Ordinance.

Conclusion

The condition of the building in a complete and total state of disrepair, coupled with the current neglect by the property owner, shows that the property is blighted and subjects the neighboring property owners to a blighting condition. The conclusion is reached, not only by the obvious appearance of the property and structure, but also on the objective criteria of the Pennsylvania Urban Redevelopment Law -- P.L. 991 as amended. P.L. 991 provides that a property is blighted if it has one of the following conditions:

- 1.) “Any premises which because of the physical condition or use is regarded as a public nuisance at common law or has been declared a public nuisance in accordance with local housing, building, plumbing, fire and related codes.”

The current condition of the Mill Race Inn is in violation of virtually all Northampton Township Building Codes and the Pennsylvania Uniform Construction Code. For over a decade, the building has been and currently is in violation of these codes. In addition, the failure to do even the most basic of maintenance on the building and the property further magnifies this condition. As a result, the condition of the building is uninhabitable and subject to further deterioration.

- 2.) “Any premises which because of physical condition, use or occupancy is considered an attractive nuisance to children, including but not limited to abandoned wells, shafts, basement, excavations, and unsafe fences or structures.”

In its current state, the Mill Race Inn is an attractive nuisance. In various areas around the building, it is clear that the structure is not secure and can be easily accessed. In addition, the accumulation of junk and debris around the site poses significant hazards. Inside the building, given a decade of neglect, it can only be assumed that there is significant structural damage to floors and walls. This poses extreme danger, especially given the fact that the property is not secure. The photographs in **ATTACHMENT D** clearly show these conditions.

- 3.) "Any structure which is a fire hazard, or is otherwise dangerous to the safety of persons or property."

Given the ability to easily access the abandoned structure along with the junk and debris around the property, the real possibility of a fire exists. Once again, the photographs in ATTACHMENT D show this risk. In addition, given the proximity of the structure to the roadway and nearby buildings, the potential risk is magnified, especially to pedestrians and motorists.

- 4.) "Any structure from which the utilities, plumbing, heating, sewerage or other facilities have been disconnected, destroyed, removed, or rendered ineffective so that the property is unfit for its intended use."

There are no utilities to the building and the structure has suffered such significant damage that it cannot be utilized for its prior use as a restaurant. In fact, the building is unfit for occupancy for any use.

- 5.) "Any vacant or unimproved lot or parcel of ground in a predominately built up neighborhood, which by reason of neglect or lack of maintenance has become a place for accumulation of trash and debris, or a haven for rodents or other vermin."

The photographs (see ATTACHMENT D) of the Mill Race Inn property and structure speak for themselves. There is a significant amount of trash and debris around the property. In addition, given the neglect of the structure for over a year and exposure to the elements, thereby producing mold and wet conditions, the Mill Race Inn building is a haven for rodents and other vermin.

- 6.) "Any unoccupied property which has been tax delinquent for a period of two years prior to the effective date of this act, and those in the future having a two year tax delinquency."

Currently, the taxes are not delinquent on the Mill Race Inn property.

- 7.) "Any property which is vacant but not tax delinquent, which has been rehabilitated within one year of receipt of notice to rehabilitate from the appropriate code enforcement agency."

On October 14, 2002, the owner of the property was notified that the structure is unsafe. For over a decade, however, the building has never been rehabilitated and even basic maintenance has been ignored.

Of the seven criteria set out by the Pennsylvania Urban Redevelopment Law, the subject property fails overwhelmingly on six.

Since the law requires that a property only needs to fail on one to be considered blighted, the property is clearly within the definition of a blighted property as the Law provides.

Shawn Littlefield
Abington Township Code Enforcement

To Whom it may concern,

This letter is to confirm that the ramp which was added to my homes side entrance located at 2539 Radcliffe Ave, Abington Pa, is not a permanent structure and will be removed at a later date. This ramp was installed as a temporary access into my home for my mother whom is living with me. She has mobility issues and unable to walk up steps. As, per our conversation from 6-13-16 she is battling terminal metastatic breast cancer to the bones and liver, at this time her life is limited.

Thank you for your support and understanding with our situation. I truly appreciate the time you took to come and speak with me.

Sincerely,

Ilyse Hampton
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