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to: Joseph Pacera, Chairman, Joint Land Use Board
Susanne Rhudy, Secretary, Joint Land Use Board

from: Robert F. Melvin, AICP, PP

date: April 29, 2013

re: Designation of Mullica Hill as an Area in Need of Rehabilitation,
Amended Boundary to include Block 52, Lot 8 and Block 69, Lot
14

Introduction/Background

This report serves as the evaluation of whether Block 52, Lot 8 and Block 69, Lot 14 qualify under N.J.S.A. 40A:12A-14 as an "Area in Need of Rehabilitation". Based on our review, it is our professional conclusion that the area does qualify if included with and amended to the Mullica Hill Historic District which was designated as an Area in Need of Rehabilitation in 2008. The planning justification for this recommendation is that the two areas are physically contiguous and connected and they support each other socially and financially by their walkable proximity to each other.

By way of background, the Mullica Hill Historic District is the traditional center of the Township of Harrison and dates to the American Colonial era. Harrison Township is a growing community in central Gloucester County, approximately 18 miles south of the City of Camden. Its population at the time of the 2010 census was 12, 417 people, an increase of 41% over the 2000 census. The Mullica Hill Historic District (M.H.H.D.) is the heart of the Township, straddling both sides of Main Street (New Jersey Route 45). The area was designated a National Register Historic District in 1988 by the U. S. Department of the Interior and the New Jersey Historic Preservation office. The limits of the district are shown on the enclosed map.

In 2008, the Township hired Remington & Vernick Engineers to conduct a preliminary investigation to determine whether the Mullica Hill Historic District meets the criteria established in N.J.S.A.40A:12A-14 as an "Area in Need of Rehabilitation". The study was prepared and concluded in a report dated May 27, 2008 that the district qualified as an "Area in Need of

Rehabilitation". The findings were adopted by the Governing Body and memorialized by Resolution 064-2008.

At this time, the Township wishes to amend the area in need of rehabilitation to include Block 52, Lot 8 and Block 69, Lot 14 in addition to the previously adopted Mullica Hill Historic District. The additional lots are contiguous with the boundary of the Historic District and found on the south westerly edge of the District along High Street. It should be noted that a portion of Block 69, Lot 14 was previously included as an Area of Rehabilitation in the 2008 study. At that time, it was a separate lot but has subsequently been consolidated with Lot 14.

Block 62, Lot 8 consists of 168 multi-family dwelling units and Block 69, Lot 14 consists of the Friends School of Mullica Hill. The institution and the 168 residential units found within Block 52, Lot 8 and Block 69, Lot 14 directly benefit the Mullica Hill Historic District by providing services and customers that directly support and enhance the economic vitality of the Historic District as they are within $\pm \frac{1}{4}$ mile walking distance of the commercial core of Mullica Hill.

The Township desires to preserve the historic nature of the Mullica Hill Historic District by ensuring its vitality. To accomplish this goal, the governing body desires to provide financial relief or assistance to owners of difficult to maintain properties both within the Historic District and within its walkable environs in the form of tax abatements.

As part of this effort, the governing body directed that the Joint Land Use Board conduct a Preliminary Investigation to determine whether the study area, as amended, meets the criteria established in N.J.S.A.40A:12A-14 as an Area in Need of Rehabilitation. This request was submitted to the Joint Land Use Board by Resolution 91-2013.

Preliminary Investigation

N.J.S.A. 40A:12A provides criteria that must be met to determine that a delineated area is in need of rehabilitation. The governing body must determine by resolution that there exist in that area conditions such that (1) a significant portion of structures therein are in a deteriorated or substandard condition and there is a continuing pattern of vacancy, abandonment or underutilization of properties in the area, with a persistent arrearage of property tax payments thereon or (2) more than half of the

housing stock in the delineated area is at least 50 years old, or a majority of the water and sewer infrastructure in the delineated area is at least 50 years old and is in need of repair or substantial maintenance; and (3) a program of rehabilitation, as defined in section 3 of P.L. 1992, c. 79 (C.40A:12A-3) may be expected to prevent further deterioration and promote the overall development of community.

It is our professional opinion that Block 52, Lot 8 and Block 69, Lot 14 when combined with the Mullica Hill Historic District in the Township of Harrison meets conditions of criteria (2) and (3) for the reasons described below:

In the year 2001 the Harrison Township Historic Preservation Commission published a book entitled "Walking Tour of the Mullica Hill Historic District". The Commission researched the district with the assistance of Margaret Westfield, R.A., Preservation Architect. Mrs. Westfield visited and documented each principal structure within the district. This was used by the Historic Preservation Commission to publish the walking tour in 2001. Of the approximately one hundred fifty (150) structures listed in the district, only five (5) had construction dates within 50 years. Another eleven (11) were undated but had descriptions indicating an earlier date. The remaining structures were dated from the 19th century or the first half of the 20th century with five (5) dating back to the 18th century. GMD reviewed 2013 aerials to confirm that the 2001 study is still valid in terms of unit counts and age of structures.

In addition to the 150 structures identified in the 2001 study, there are nine (9) structures on Block 52, Lot 8 and Block 69, Lot 14 for a total of 159 structures in the combined area. Review of historic aerials indicates that the nine (9) structures are less than 50 years old; however, seven (7) structures are 40 years old.

Therefore, of the approximately 159 total structures, approximately 14 are less than 50 years old. Based on the research by the Historic Preservation Commission and aerial photography evaluation, criteria (2) is satisfied.

The Township has a strong desire to maintain both the historic nature of its center and to promote it as a thriving business community of antique shops, boutiques, and similar uses. The age of the properties and the requirements to adhere to a historically accurate standard is a financial burden to the owners, be they residential or commercial properties. In addition there are several structures within walking distance of the historic core, of

approximately 40 years old which too require investment to maintain their integrity. Any program of rehabilitation will assist the owners in improving the properties and in preventing deterioration to the structures. This in turn will promote the development and continued use of the historic district as envisioned in the Master Plan.

The Township intends to assist the owners in rehabilitating their property by providing tax abatements as allowed for an Area in Need of Rehabilitation. This will assist and encourage property owners in making improvements to their properties thus promoting the goals of the Township Master Plan and preserving the historic conditions of the district. This provides conformance with criteria (3) of the public law.

Conclusion

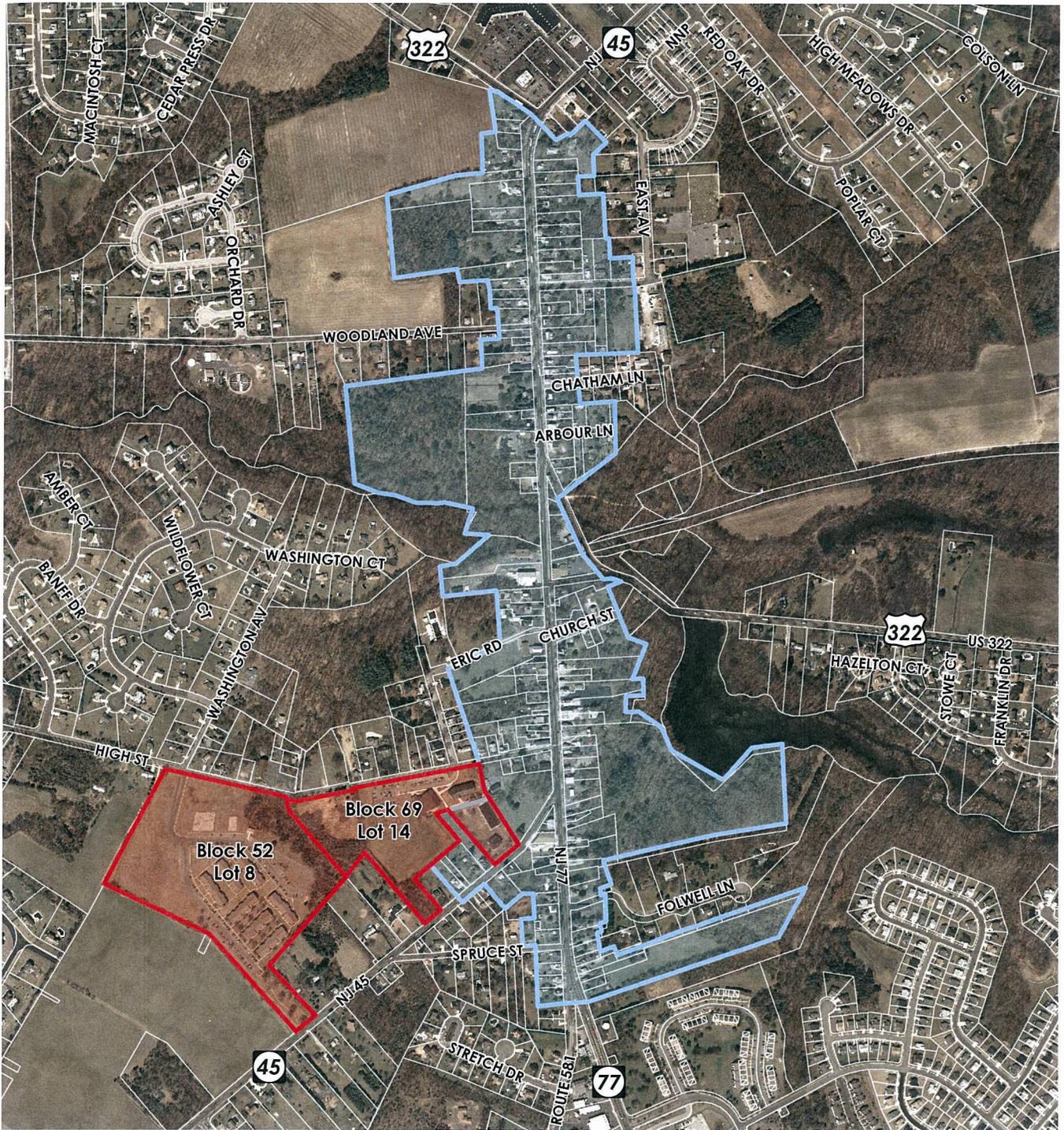
In consideration of the age of the structures in the Historic District and the Township's proposal to assist the property owners with tax abatements, it is evident that the entire amended study area meets the requirements of N.J.S.A. 40A:12A - 14 as an Area in Need of Rehabilitation. Such a declaration will assist the district in meeting the goals of the Township Master Plan.

It is our recommendation that the Township of Harrison Joint Land Use Board affirm by resolution that the amended study area qualifies as an Area of Rehabilitation under N.J.S.A. 40A:12A - 14 and forward the same to the Governing Body. If the Governing Body is in agreement, the appropriate resolution declaring the designation should be passed and forwarded to the Commission of the Department of Community Affairs.



Robert F. Melvin, AICP, PP

Mullica Hill Study Area for Rehabilitation



 Existing Rehabilitation Area

 Amended Block & Lots

