

PCDO Executive Committee

Resolution Supporting Formation of the Witherspoon–Jackson Historic District

WHEREAS the Witherspoon-Jackson (W-J) Neighborhood has a compelling legacy that we should never forget in acknowledging the inhumanity of slavery and segregation; and

WHEREAS the formation of a Historic District will preserve this legacy by maintaining the structures, character, and streetscape of the W-J Neighborhood, augmenting the physical and cultural viability of a neighborhood that has been the home for generations of African-Americans since the 18th century, and later also a home for immigrants chiefly from Italy and Ireland, and most recently from Latin American countries; and

WHEREAS present action is required to preserve the physical representation of the fundamental legacy of Princeton's African-American community (as well as its Italian-American history) so that it is not lost forever, since the buildings and their distinctive porches **are** the memory-bank of a close-knit community that has survived through struggle and cohesion that is unique, nationally; and

WHEREAS the formation of the W-J Neighborhood has been recommended by Wise Preservation Planning LLC, which was commissioned by the Princeton Historic Preservation Commission(HPC) to study the neighborhood and make recommendations; and

WHEREAS this neighborhood was found in 1994 by the State Historic Preservation Office (DHPO) to be eligible to be on the National Register of Historic Places; and

WHEREAS this Historic District designation will stabilize property values, with the expectation of moderated future growth in overall valuations more consistent with the town overall, with limits placed upon the construction of outsized buildings whose configuration and style are not in character with the neighborhood; and

WHEREAS a Historic District keeps the existing zoning designations in place; and

WHEREAS a historic district protects the character and scale of existing homes and checks the construction of "McMansions"; and

WHEREAS a Type II designation for a Historic District allows not only for the preservation of the neighborhood but for renovation flexibility for its homeowners; and

WHEREAS routine maintenance that does not change the house's appearance from the street is permissible without HPC review, and the HPC will work with the homeowner to find less expensive alternatives for more extensive alterations; and

WHEREAS the creation of a Historic District will discourage "tear-downs," and the HPC will work with the owner to suggest alternatives that might save the structure and still accomplish the goal of the owner to improve the structure; and

WHEREAS a historic district, while not a “neighborhood association,” can nevertheless help to create community pride and a sense of unity in bringing diverse people together for a common purpose; and

WHEREAS developers and architects alike can participate in preserving the neighborhood’s critical important legacy, while still moving forward with creative projects; and

WHEREAS a review of recent teardowns of historic structures in the neighborhood creates a genuine urgency for immediate action that will prevent or significantly reduce or curtail the construction of new mega-structures not compatible with the neighborhood’s character, where the many such new structures have caused neighborhood tax assessments to spike, thus making the neighborhood unaffordable for existing long-term residents whose well-being the Historic District designation aims to protect.

Now therefore be it resolved by the PCDO that:

the Princeton Historic Preservation Commission and the Princeton Council should

- 1) unanimously adopt the Wise report and the general historic district boundaries that it recommends; and
- 2) make a determination to adopt Type II Preservation Criteria; and

further, that the Princeton Council should move forward quickly to adopt an ordinance that will legally constitute the formation of the Witherspoon-Jackson Neighborhood Historic District; and

further, that the Secretary of the PCDO will forward a copy of this signed resolution, once it has been voted upon by both the PCDO Executive Committee and by the General Membership, to the Mayor and the Members of the Princeton Council and to the Chairperson and Members of the Princeton Historic Commission.

Adopted by the Executive Board on 12/5/15 - unanimously

Adopted by the General Membership of the PCDO on 1/31/16 - unanimously