

History kicks in: Haymarket planners vote down demolition of old houses

By **ROB BILLINGSLEY**
Observer staff

The Town of Haymarket Planning Commission had a full agenda at the March 14 monthly meeting. All members, except for Dottie Leonard, were present.

After reviewing the lengthy verbiage of the Sherwood Forest Development's Homeowner's Association By-Laws and Declaration of Covenants, Conditions and Restrictions, the planning commission reviewed demolition applications.

If the series of applications to demolish buildings belonging to Alan C. Gossom and Youngs Branch LC had been approved for recommendation to the town council, many familiar structures around the center of town could have been in further danger of being destroyed. In all the applications, the purpose of the demolition was stated as "New



Union Col. Hutchins' house stands as originally built in 1895 except for porch lattice at 6706 Jefferson St. for which a builder has submitted a permit for demolition.

Rob Billingsley / the Bull Run Observer

Construction." The face of Haymarket would have changed

dramatically.

Of the six applications, the town historical commission had recommended denying three permits to help preserve the identity of Haymarket, and one permit was returned because it had not undergone historical commission review.

Michelle Neal-Heard, historical commission chairwoman, rose to object to demolishing some buildings because of the specific importance these buildings had to the town's historical nature.

The property at 6707 Fayette St., between Payne and Washington streets, was described in the demolition permit application as having no known historic significance. However, Neal-Heard said not only was it built in 1875 but also was the home of Union Col.

Hutchins. Neal-Heard said, "The Virginia Landmarks Commission says any building older than 50 years should be saved."

Quoting the same commission's findings, Neal-Heard said, "The Landmarks Commission recognizes this building as representative of the best of late 19th century house architecture, and it should be preserved."

Another house proposed for demolition at 6706 Jefferson St., also between Payne and Washington streets, was built in 1900. "We need to keep this home to remind us what life was like in Haymarket. The charrette also stated we need to save what we can," Neal-Heard stated in her review.

The charrette, held in May 2004, was an intense three-day planning session with out-of-town

experts to help give the town government a focus for the future of the community. It included the residents, government and builders in the discussions.

Another application to demolish a small house at 15001 Washington St. was denied because "this house was built in 1901. We need to keep a sample of different types of architecture to show what the town was like on [its] main street," according to Neal-Heard.

Just across the intersection of Washington and Jefferson streets is one of the most historic buildings in Haymarket. The larger house at 14950 Washington St. was once a tavern with origins dating back to 1780. Burned in 1806 and rebuilt in the 1830s, the house sits on the site where Thomas Jefferson is believed to have spent time in the tavern. This application had not been reviewed by the historical commission and was returned by the planning commission for review and presentation at the next planning commission meeting.

In justifying the preservation of these structures, Neal-Heard cited records from the files of the Virginia Department of Historic Resources (formerly the Landmarks Commission), Virginia Landmarks Register. Nevertheless, the applications submitted by Alan C. Gossom and Youngs Branch LC all listed "unknown" for structure age and "none known" for historic significance.

Linda Landwehr, recently appointed to the planning commission, addressed the poor condition of the historical buildings, "We need to make sure we do something to improve them and keep the historical flavor of the Town of Haymarket."

The planning commission recommended that the Town of Haymarket not approve the demolition permits. The council has final approval on whether the permits forwarded to it with the recommendation of denial from the planning commission will be approved.

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Investment aspect of real estate business is specialty of the LaBelle group

By GRETCHEN L.H. O'BRIEN
Observer staff

When his realty business started to grow, Mike LaBelle didn't focus on continuing to increase the number of realtors. Instead, the former police officer decided to cut the number of realtors in his firm, which he runs with his wife Lisa. LaBelle's Re/Max Premier firm has a total of three realtors: himself, Lisa and Gary Holcomb.

He enjoys having a small firm because it enables him to focus on helping people buy and sell homes. When his firm was larger, he was

spending more time teaching other realtors how to handle things, but he prefers helping clients.

Clients benefit from the small firm's approach to realty, LaBelle said, because he and his co-workers tend to think "out of the box." LaBelle realty can provide assistance that larger firms may not be able to provide.

Being small and independent allows the LaBelle realtors to make rules, explore different options and generally be a bit more flexible than companies who may be prohibited by "large corporate policy."

The firm's specialty is investment properties, which means different things to different people, according to LaBelle. He considers the investment aspect of their business to be its specialty.

Specifically, his firm works with investors who meet a certain criteria. Then, the realtors help people in "tough situations." LaBelle teams up the investors with those in need. The private investors act much like a bank, he said, but they can lend money which banks may not be able to. Investors get a tax deduction. The people in tough situations get a place to live.

Of course, the LaBelle realtors handle the typical buying and selling of homes, but he believes that



Gretchen L.H. O'Brien / The Bull Run Observer

Mike LaBelle, left, along with Lisa LaBelle and Gary Holcomb work with investors and homeowners in the Northern Virginia area.

has become a "different game." It's increasingly competitive, he said.

He's creative in his efforts. LaBelle realty can offer special help so that home sellers get the most for their houses. For example, if a seller needs to make repairs to the home before it goes on the market but can't afford to, LaBelle may finance the repairs, which gives the

owner top dollar. Then, the seller pays LaBelle back for the repairs, after the sale.

Perhaps those happy home sellers are the reason referrals make up the majority of the LaBelle's business. Referrals, he said, make it easier to work more quickly to help those in desperate situations.

For investors, LaBelle be-

lieves it's important to take the "time to really understand what they want to accomplish." They help investors understand what they need, then find the property that works for them.

Some investors, he's found, are misdirected or misguided. While he can't give legal or accounting advice, he understands the business of investment properties. The LaBelles have investment properties of their own.

Investors who plan to make money on equity alone may want to find out more about home depreciation and how the financial aspect of investment properties works, he suggested. If investors can verbalize what they want to accomplish, LaBelle can likely help them find an ideal property for them.

LaBelle, who has been a realtor for eight years, has been in the area for about six. The LaBelle Group has offices in Sterling and Fairfax but also works from the LaBelle home office in Haymarket. They work in the Northern Virginia area, but LaBelle has traveled to Stafford County and will consider working in other areas.

LaBelle Group realtors can be reached, at 703-467-9500, 9-5 weekdays or online: www.enjoyhomeownership.com.

H'market garden club plant sale is April 16

The Haymarket Town & Country Garden Club will hold a Spring Sale of Plants, Flowers, Spring Bulbs, Crafts, and White Elephants in back of the Evergreen Fire House (US 15, James Madison Hwy.) on Saturday, April 16 from 8 a.m. until 4 p.m. This a fundraiser to help support work done on area public gardens as well as donations to Northern Virginia gardens, plant societies and environmental protection groups, a news release said.

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