

Community Planning Committee  
Minutes, 19 May 2010

Present: Committee members Cynthia Dewick, Ron Meick, Danny Schweers, Ray Seigfried, and Sally Sharpe; Arden Trustees Mike Curtis and Connee McKinney; residents Bev Barnett, Ruth Bean, and Larry Walker; and visitors George and Roo Plymyer, who are previous residents and who hope to move back.

Ray Seigfried, chair, called this meeting to order at 7:03 p.m. in Room 2 of the Buzz Ware Village Center.

#### Instant Ticketing

Ray has been working with James Smith, Assistant General Manager for Code Enforcement of the Department of Land Use of New Castle County (NCCo). Ray told us that the County has revised its Instant Ticketing so that violators are told specifically what the violation is.

Ray and James have prepared a draft of legislation to revise NCCo Ordinance No. 10. Amended would be the following:

Section PM 302.4.2.1 - In Arden, Ardentown, and Ardencroft, weeds and grass on developed parcels shall be no more than eight (8) inches within four (4) feet of any property line.

Section PM 302.8.6 - This section does not apply to Arden, Ardentown, and Ardencroft. (that is, vehicles do not need to be parked on a hardened surface).

Section PM 302.11 - In Arden, Ardentown, and Ardencroft, debris shall not include fallen tree branches.

The impact of these changes were discussed. There was agreement only on the last item, that fallen tree branches should not be included in the list of prohibited debris. ACTION: members will brainstorm by email about the pros and cons the first two items.

#### Public Hearing on Vacant Domiciles

Several leaseholders from the Village and members of the Trustees have raised the concern over vacant domiciles and whether some action should take place to discourage long-term vacancies. One domicile has been vacant for over 15 years, another has been vacant for 3 or 4, and neither owner shows any desire to see the dwellings occupied. Other domiciles are also vacant, empty of life.

We heard from those in attendance, especially why they believe long-vacant domiciles are a problem. Two reasons became apparent: that most houses and yards deteriorate when houses remain unoccupied, and that vacancy itself is bad for the life of the community. We learned that one house, the Glass Menagerie, burned down after sitting vacant. We learned that another house

was once repossessed for back taxes. We then discussed possibilities for moving forward on this issue. Seven possibilities were discussed:

No action at all.

Institute vacant domicile fees such as Wilmington's, fees that increase the longer the domicile remains empty, starting at \$500/year and increasing to \$5,000/year. (In Arden, this might take the form of a new factor for land-rent assessments.)

If the dwellings or leaseholds are in violation of County Code, pursue ways to get those codes enforced, perhaps even getting the dwellings condemned.

Revoke the leases on those properties.

Revise future lease agreements to minimize vacancies.

Petition the owners of vacant domiciles to do better.

Institute an Arden ordinance that would require leaseholders with a house that has been vacant for X years to register with the Trustees and if for health and safety concerns a leaseholder believes that the vacant house is in violation they can report this to the Trustees who in turn could decide to call the County Land Use to have the leaseholder of the vacant house correct their violation.

After two hours of discussion, there was some agreement to:

Have the Registration Committee inform the Town Assembly once a year which houses are vacant.

Find out why the houses are vacant and if they are likely to remain so. This may mean writing a letter to the owners of the house. (Who would do this?)

If house is vacant and likely to remain so and is in obvious violation of Land Use regulations, the Village will ask the County to deal with it. (Who would do this?)

Hand out a flyer at next Town Meeting that summarizes county code affecting vacant houses and how such violations may be reported. Also publish in the Arden Page and on the Village website.

Meet again on Wednesday, June 16, to put together a report to be presented at the June 28 Town Meeting.

Again, there is a form on New Castle County's website for reporting vacant houses that are in disrepair. The form is found at: County website > Land Use > Property Code Enforcement > Complaints and click on "Submit Complaint".  
Next Meeting, Adjournment

Our next meeting will be Wednesday, June 16, 7:00 p.m. at The Buzz. This meeting adjourned at 9:27 p.m.

Respectively submitted,  
Danny Schweers, Committee Secretary