

Introduction

Whether it is thoughts of summers spent at the swimming hole on the southern end of the property, memories of the petting zoo and retail shops, bowling at Hiohela, or the anticipation of a hearty meal at H.I. Rib, the site known as Pennytown has long been a prominent destination in the cultural and commercial history of Hopewell Township and in the geography of the adjacent village of Marshall's Corner.

Marshall's Corner, which was settled in the early 18th century, was originally known as Furman's Corner, and was founded at the intersection of two Indian paths, one connecting Hopewell and Pennington and the other connecting the Millstone River Valley to Pennington and Trenton beyond. During the Colonial period, these paths became public byways, and at this time, a lesser-used Indian path heading over the Sourland ridge to Ringoes was opened as a public byway as well.

Like many of Hopewell Valley's early settlers, the Furmans came west from Long Island. The original Furman farmhouse still stands today, in the northwest corner of Pennington-Hopewell Road and Woodsville –Marshall's Corner Road. This stone and frame structure has been nominated by the Hopewell Township Historic Preservation Commission for designation to the register of local landmarks.

Marshall's Corner, as we know it today, got its name from its brief but famous resident, James Marshall, who discovered gold in California in 1848. His father, William Marshall, had settled in the Furman house in the 1830's and took over as the proprietor of the village store. Today, the village is primarily comprised of frame dwellings and their modest outbuildings, dating from the mid-1800's to early twentieth century, and sitting on lots ranging in size from .25 acre – 1.2 acres.

Area in Need of Redevelopment

Motivated by a concern for the dilapidated and substandard conditions at Pennytown, the Township's Round 3 Council on Affordable Housing (COAH) requirements, and the opportunity to create a holistic, integrated development in the Marshalls Corner area, the Hopewell Township Committee, by way of a resolution adopted in June 2009, authorized and directed the Planning Board to conduct a preliminary investigation to determine whether the area consisting of Pennytown, Kooltronic, the PSE&G site, and the former 84 Lumber site, together, met the criteria set forth in the NJ Local Redevelopment and Housing Law (N.J.S. A. 40 A:12A-1 et. seq.), and whether it should be designated an area of redevelopment. The Planning Board hired Clarke Caton Hintz, a local planning and architecture firm specializing in redevelopment, as a planning consultant to conduct the investigation. A copy of the final report from the planning consultant details the features of each property and how these relate to the applicable redevelopment criteria; the report is available on the Township website (www.hopewelltp.org).

Based on the findings of the report, the Township Committee adopted a resolution designating Pennytown, as well as the nearby Kooltronic and the PSE&G sites, collectively, as an Area in Need of Redevelopment in September 2009. This designation grants the Township the authority to create and adopt a redevelopment plan for the entire redevelopment area and to implement redevelopment projects. In addition, the housing element of the Hopewell Township Master Plan allows for the creation of 70 units of affordable housing.

Pennytown Task Force

In the fall of 2009, the Township formed the Pennytown Task Force, a group of Township citizens charged with assembling relevant information, identifying stakeholders, and holding public conversations in order to educate the public of the site's redevelopment possibilities and to hear from those interested in or affected by the redevelopment plan.

Meeting monthly, the Task Force plans to have individual members research and present on topics related to the redevelopment area. When complete, these presentations will be the basis of a cohesive, detailed report whose findings will be presented to the Township Committee and other township boards/commissions, as well as to the broader community, in an organized, public question and answer session. The ultimate goal of the Task Force is to produce a "consensus document" that describes the greater community's intentions and objectives for the redevelopment area.

The Pennytown Task Force will also produce a bi-monthly update, to be published as a guest column in the Hopewell Valley News, in order to regularly share its findings with the Hopewell Valley community. These meetings are open to the public and all interested parties are encouraged to participate in this exciting process.

Both the schedule and a list of the members of the Task Force can be found on the Hopewell Township website.

Kooltronic Site

In 2005, as a means of settling a lawsuit arising from the Township-wide down-zoning, the Hopewell Township Committee adopted an ordinance creating a Hamlet Light Industrial (HLI) District for the approximately 100 acre site owned by Kooltronic. The HLI District permits a maximum density of 0.23 residential units/acre in the 60 acre Hamlet portion of this district. Additionally, the ordinance provides a mechanism for the owners of the Kooltronic to transfer development rights from properties in both the Mountain Resource Conservation (MRC) and Valley Resource Conservation (VRC) districts to the Hamlet portion of the site, thereby increasing the maximum allowable density to 3 residential units/acre, for a potential total of 180 units. In order for that maximum density to be achieved, Kooltronic is obligated to acquire substantial conservation easement acreage from the MRC and/or the VRC Districts – specifically, 1,169 acres of conservation easements in the MRC District, or 501 acres of easements in the VRC District, or some combination thereof.

As the Hopewell Township ordinance states, *"The intent of this provision is to provide an alternative development opportunity that furthers the goals of resource conservation in the Township, while also providing a development form that supports the goals and policies of the Master Plan."* The Township ordinance also supports the intent of the NJ State Development and Redevelopment Plan for the area, which is to *"direct growth and development into areas served by public infrastructure as a means of more efficiently using public resources."*

Redevelopment plans, which include the Kooltronic site, present the opportunity for affordable units to be distributed within the entire redevelopment area, rather than be limited to the Pennytown site, and to achieve infrastructure and utility efficiencies. In informal discussions to date, the owners of the Kooltronic have been receptive to the concept of including the Kooltronic site in the area of redevelopment.

Conclusion

At present, the future of COAH and its impact on municipal obligations to provide for affordable housing, remain unknown. However, because the Pennytown site was purchased with Affordable Housing Trust funds, the Pennytown Task Force will continue in its efforts of gathering relevant information and holding public conversations regarding the future of the Pennytown site and affordable housing in Hopewell Township. Please come join us on the third Thursday of each month at 7p in the Hopewell Township municipal building.

This article was authored by Elizabeth Ackerman, RA/LEED AP and Ed Truscelli, AIA/LEED AP, co-chairs of the Pennytown Task Force.