



# MONTGOMERY

TOWNSHIP, NEW JERSEY

## LANDMARKS COMMISSION

### MEMORANDUM

**TO: PLANNING BOARD**  
**FROM: LANDMARKS COMMISSION**  
**DATE: MAY 10, 2023**  
**RE: CASE PB-03-23**  
**BLOCK 6001 LOTS 33, 34, 34.01, 35, 35.01 & 36**  
**HARLINGEN ASSOCIATES**

It is the responsibility of our Landmarks Preservation Commission to serve as stewards of the township's historic resources and attributes. We are determined to ensure the longevity and visibility of the township's brand new State and National Register(s) Historic District which officially recognizes Harlingen and Montgomery's traditions and character as well as our place in United States history.

Taxpayer funds and community support involved for both the nomination process and ultimate State and National Register Listing of Harlingen Historic District represent the investments and interest of our neighbors, ourselves and State Preservation office.

The timeline of events that led to formal authorization of a State of New Jersey Register of Historic Places and National Register of Historic Places district in Harlingen began in 2019 as the Landmarks Commission utilized over two years' worth of its municipal budget funds to pay for the services of consultant Clifford Zink, who performed research and a survey of the vicinity and completed the Harlingen district nomination. In July 2019 the former chairperson of the Commission walked through all of Harlingen with Andrea Tingey of the New Jersey State Historic Preservation Office to review criteria and status of local historic buildings and sites.

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The process continued as the March 26, 2020 meeting agenda for the NEW JERSEY STATE REVIEW BOARD FOR HISTORIC SITES contained the Harlingen Historic District application, but the pandemic heightened that month and a delay occurred.

The historic preservation focus and taxpayer-funded effort to have Harlingen become a State of NJ and National Register Historic District culminated about 14 months later, with notification via email from the former Landmarks Commission chair on June 8, 2021: "Finally - the Harlingen Historic District has been officially added to the New Jersey State Registry of Historic Places and forwarded to the National Park Service."

The Montgomery Township Landmarks Preservation Commission has contacted the NJ State Historic Preservation Office regarding the present application for townhomes and apartment units in Harlingen, proposed for a location adjacent to the new State and National Historic District. Further, we believe the developer should proactively approach the State Historic Preservation Office with fair notice of the intended project, and in doing so invite any input, questions or concerns about impacts to the Harlingen District that state officials and employees in the Historic Preservation Office may have.

We do not take this proposed development potential lightly and will advocate for the district's protection and retaining of the historic character of all of Harlingen and along Montgomery Township's main roadway, historic Van Horne Road (206). It is the character of the Harlingen Historic District that the proposed name of the development, Harlingen Village Square evokes. However, it is that same historic character that is jeopardized by its construction.

The developer's marketing uses the historic charm as a draw, the integrity of which will be lost when the ratio of modern construction exceeds that of the historic.

If the developer is not willing to change the style and structures of the development to meet the historic style of the State and National District, we strongly recommend that the project be totally hidden from view in every direction, by the use of high fencing and concentrated use of vegetation, trees, shrub and vines. This would also protect the visual appearance of Route 206/Van Horne Road.

Should the New Jersey DOT wish to widen Route 206 to four lanes in the future, as it is doing just to the north, enough space should be provided to protect the screening mentioned in the previous paragraph.

The attempt to jam something wholly alien into the heart of Montgomery appears to have only two redeeming features: it counts toward a court-mandated quota of affordable housing and brings sewers where they are badly needed.

The Landmarks Preservation Commission is always concerned about the effectiveness of stormwater management as Montgomery Township transitions from a farming community to a residential one. The historic structures we are appointed to protect are all close to water sources. While land use has changed, the drainage pattern has not – i.e. our tributary brooks and streams, into Pike Brook, into Bedens Brook, into Millstone River, or into the Millstone River. We are asking that every new development contain its stormwater 100% on site.

In reviewing the plan and the site, it appears that the developable area will contain impervious surfaces with runoff collected and contained by creating a

pond. However, the proposed site also contains wetlands and a stream “Fox Brook” which will also flood during a storm – within this area, how is stormwater management addressed? Will it affect the developed area of the site?

This development has used the name “Harlingen Village Square” but this is totally unacceptable. It is not a recognized developed “Harlingen Village” recently put on the State and National Registers of Historic Places. It is not a public square. The authentic historic Harlingen Village does have a village square which contains a wonderful gazebo (built by former Mayor Matthews) and the gazebo has been used as a meeting space by the community.

Members of this Commission have viewed the proposal as “monstrous” and in stark contrast to the planning for future development south of the historic district; there, generous setbacks backed by dense plantings totally obscure the houses on Matthews’ old cornfield and the one-story veterinary clinic across the way. In fact, setbacks and screenings extend all the way to Bridgepoint Road and beyond maintaining the open space look that Montgomery zoning and master planning strived to achieve up to where old-time structures begin.

Visual buffering on this project’s entire perimeter demands attention because the scale of development is totally out of character with everything that surrounds it. Some believe the location selected will isolate tenants from essential amenities within a non-walkable state highway corridor.

The proposal is also problematic because this vegetation is deciduous and visibility could affect property values of million-dollar Montfort homes. Nor should we inflict a view of the township’s landfill on the people who will live here or create a visual exchange between tenants in this project and homeowners in the historic district.

The extent to which trees along the stream corridor at the rear can suffice as buffering, and it is difficult to judge from a plot plan. Since do-overs are most likely impossible, we need to err on the side of caution and buffer densely and extensively all round.

Along the highway is the most glaring necessity and the developer has proposed nothing other than a few spindle saplings. Say what you may about the interior being immutable, this highway front will never do. That northwest corner building has to go somewhere else to plant screening of the caliber we see south of the historic district and it appears to be highly unlikely it would survive the eventual highway widening so why build it?

We are left with blunting impact and the only tool we have is visual buffering. Unfortunately no such screening has been provided north of Harlingen. The little commercial strip west of Route 206 does have a decent setback but is stark naked from any screening what-so-ever. As for the childcare building (The Learning Experience) with a little portico up against the highway, some Commission members say it should not have been allowed. Potential for change is inevitable when Route 206 is widened.

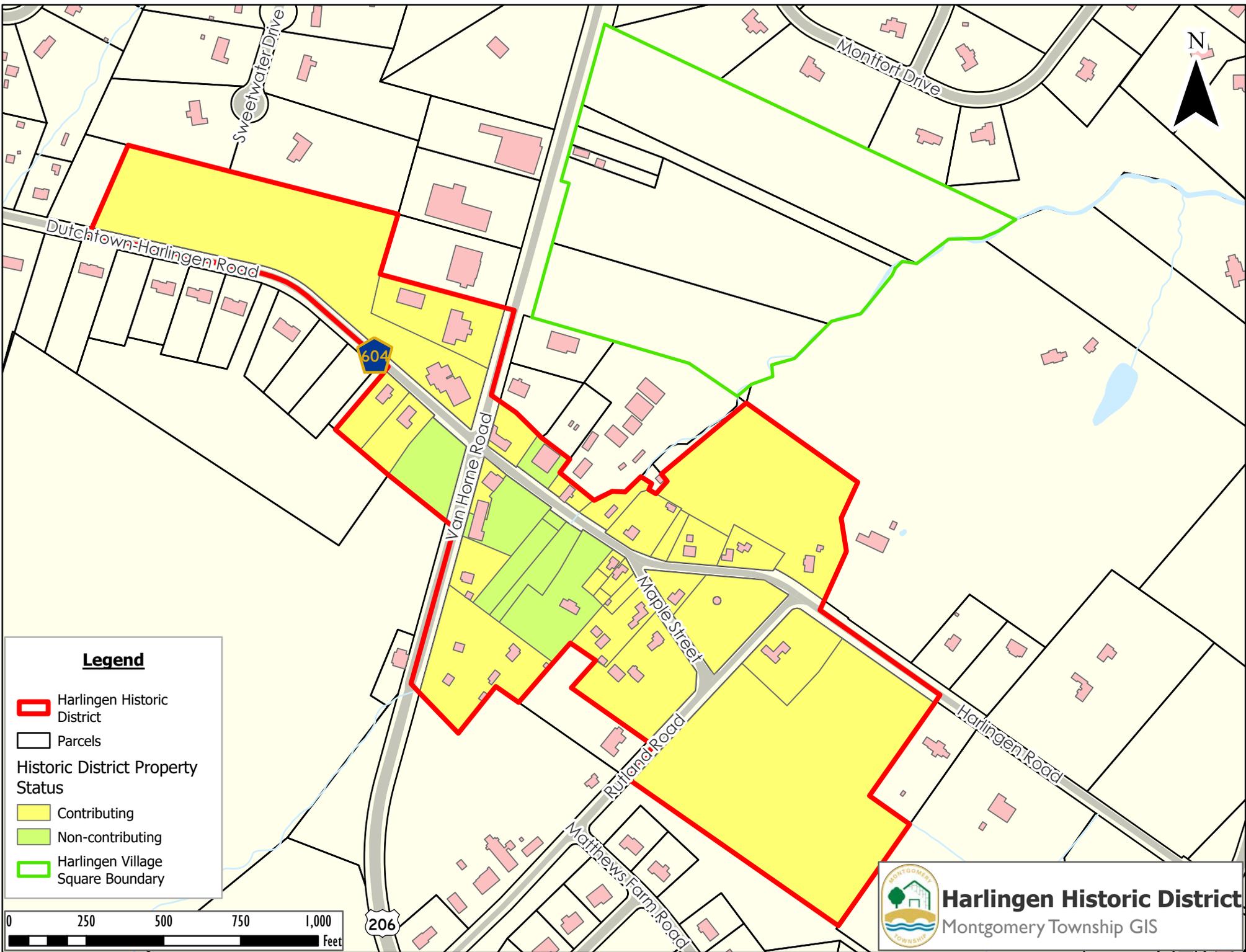
Given obvious constraints, the developer could evaluate his building arrangements and think creatively, starting with the state highway frontage, which is crucial. Instead of dense buffering, why not consider the transitioning effect of a streetscape akin to our Blawenburg Historic District, which is of the same 19th century era as Harlingen. There an agreeable prospect is achieved by two story houses of varied styles, sizes, colors and setbacks each individually landscaped.

Variety compensates for density and for the most part the houses are of no particular style – just a vernacular expression of what is pleasing to an owner. Which in turn would allow this developer to extemporize within those concepts and what's more allow such a line-up of the two-story dwellings as a screen for three story interior buildings, and to do some rearranging that would make the interior much more livable.

All told, this will possibly present a more profitable upgrade which we hope can save some of the 80 trees being sacrificed.

On behalf of Montgomery Landmarks Commission, we submit these comments on the proposed subdivision application Van Cleef has shared with the Site Plan/Subdivision Committee, reviewed on May 2. It is a pity we were not brought into the discussion before it reached advanced stages because Van Cleef has proceeded without any awareness of options they might have wished to consider. A pity because Harlingen is the best known part of Montgomery for most people, and has been admirably protected to its south.

Landmarks remains ready to meet with the developer even at this late date to help them understand possible advantages to consider, and to further understand the objections we are now raising.



**Legend**

 Harlingen Historic District

 Parcels

**Historic District Property Status**

 Contributing

 Non-contributing

 Harlingen Village Square Boundary



**Harlingen Historic District**  
Montgomery Township GIS