

~~W.L. Patterson~~

Cranbury

10/26

1984

- Letter to Chairman of Middlesex County Cultural and Heritage
Commission

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EXHIBIT B

Advisory Council On Historic Preservation

The Old Post Office Building
1100 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW, #809
Washington, DC 20004

OCT 26 1984

Mr. Thomas J. Sadlowski
Chairman
Middlesex County Cultural and
Heritage Commission
145 Hardenburg Lane
East Brunswick, NJ 08816

Dear Mr. Sadlowski:

Thank you for the information you provided concerning the Cranbury Historic District. We have reviewed the documentation and have several observations to make. Before doing so, let me note that the Council's primary function, besides providing general advice to the President and Congress on historic preservation matters, is to review the actions of Federal agencies that have effects on historic properties. In this role we review hundreds of cases every year that are more or less similar to the situation in Cranbury, that is, cases that involve conflicts between the maintenance of a property's historic integrity and the needs of modern society. We have no specific authority to comment on projects that do not involve a Federal agency. We have serious concerns, however, about situations in which actions taken by non-federal parties in advance of an application for Federal assistance in effect make it impossible for Federal agencies to perform their functions in a manner consistent with Federal historic preservation policies.

There is no evidence that any Federal agency is involved in the currently proposed development in and around Cranbury. It seems extremely unlikely, however, that development on the scale proposed could be carried out without some form of Federal participation (e.g. water and sewer grants, subsidized housing assistance, community development block grants, permits issued by the Corps of Engineers, etc.). If a Federal agency did become involved, Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act would require that agency to consider the effects that its action would have on the Cranbury Historic District and provide the Council an opportunity to comment in a manner consistent with our regulations (36 CFR Part 800). To the extent that non-federal actions foreclose the ability of Federal assistance agencies, the New Jersey State Historic Preservation Officer, and the Council to consider alternatives that would reduce impacts on Cranbury's historic values, such actions would frustrate the purposes of the National Historic Preservation Act.

The historic value of Cranbury is clear, and has been formally recognized at both the State and national levels through its nomination to and entry in the National Register of Historic Places. Entered by the Department of the Interior in the National Register in September 1980, the Cranbury Historic District embodies the best qualities that typify an historic district: distinctive architecture which provides historical and visual definition to a well preserved environmental setting. These qualities, which feature an excellent building stock ranging from late 18th century Federal period frame residences to early 20th century bungalows, make Cranbury, in the words of the National Register nomination form, "the best preserved 19th century village in Middlesex County" and one of the most undisturbed 19th century village environments of this type in New Jersey. On a prophetic note the nomination concludes:

"It is this assemblage of buildings - architecturally and historically - which makes Cranbury an attractive entity unique from any other contemporary villages. It is this identity which sets Cranbury aside from its nearby surroundings of look-alike suburbs and modern commercial developments creating a significant historical village."

The village, of course, does not exist isolated from its environment. On the contrary, the open, productive farmland that surrounds the historic community is vital to its ambience and sense of place.

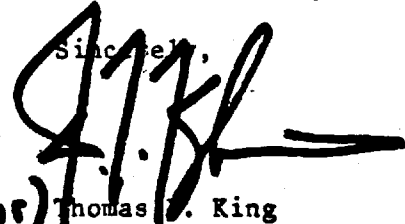
It is apparent that the qualities of the Cranbury Historic District are very fragile, but in all likelihood the District could accommodate gradual and well planned residential development. In our experience carefully designed low and moderate income housing can often strengthen the social and physical fabric of an historic district. Based on our experience, however, the scale of residential development envisioned for Cranbury's environs would make such careful planning impossible. We should anticipate the following consequences from the development as described in the documentation you provided us:

- * The village would be cut off and isolated from its historical associations with the surrounding pastoral farm land;
- * The massive influx of population into the vicinity of the village would either transform the downtown, as new businesses sprang up there to serve the needs of new residents, or diminish its economic viability as new competitive retail centers developed on the outskirts of the community.
- * Transportation patterns would be altered, resulting in immediate traffic impacts to the District and generating the need, in the long run, for highway improvements that would further alter the District's character.

The cumulative effect of these impacts would be the effective destruction of the village's setting and character.

As noted above, the Council has no current role in review of the actions proposed, but should any Federal agency become involved in the actions and seek our comments pursuant to Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act, the above would outline our initial concerns.

Sincerely,



(for)

Thomas J. King
Director, Office of Cultural
Resource Preservation