



# MONTGOMERY

TOWNSHIP, NEW JERSEY

## LANDMARKS COMMISSION

July 27, 2023

To: ALL members of the Montgomery Township Planning Board, Township Administrator Lori Savron and designated Planning/Zoning Department Staff

RE: Harlingen Associates project and public hearing at August 14, 2023 Planning Board meeting – The name “Harlingen” should not be used at all.

Dear Respected Township Officials, Staff and Community Leaders:

As chairperson of the Montgomery Township Landmarks Preservation Commission I am writing to state the consensus of the Commission on a major concern, as the proposal from Harlingen Associates appears on the Planning Board meeting agenda for Monday evening, August 14, 2023.

It is the decided position and current priority of the Montgomery Township Landmarks Commission to emphatically reject and oppose the proposed name of the new development of townhouses and apartments, which will be immediately adjacent to the State of New Jersey Harlingen Historic District (designated in 2021) and historic resources within the district.

Allow me to be blunt: the name Harlingen should never appear in any formal name, marketing materials, address info or signage for this proposed development. Harlingen references the Dutch settlement of this portion of the Township and the historic village, which is in between two Montgomery settlements – Dutchtown to the west and Bridgepoint (National Register Historic District) to the southeast.

The name “Harlingen” was arrived at, originally, in honor of the longtime

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pastor of the Church which served the historic village. Domine Harlingen was much beloved in our community, and his name is prominent in the annals of the township. The name continues to be synonymous with the Harlingen Church and historic Harlingen village. It is **NOT** an appropriate name for new development housing units and any associated amenities.

We find any inappropriate and blatant use of the historic name detrimental to all aspects of the rich heritage of Montgomery Township and the new State and National Registers of Historic Places-designated district, *Harlingen*, which sits at the center of our community. The name Harlingen is of high historical importance and significance for Montgomery, for Somerset County and clearly for the State of New Jersey because of this approved and registered historic district.

A sense of place is critical in ensuring historic preservation and responsible community growth and associated infrastructure can be properly balanced, organized, referenced, and welcomed by members of the community. I do not know of one individual who could characterize the village of *Harlingen* with inclusion of a private multifamily, multi-unit development with state of the art amenities.

We have previously stated in writing that the proposed new housing in our Township is absolutely not *representative of Harlingen*. It can not be argued that any design aspect or feature of the proposed development would be an ode to the history of Harlingen. Therefore, there is absolutely no reason for the name "Harlingen" to be offered, used as a place setting, and referenced going forward – especially as this project comes before you seeking local Planning, Zoning, Land Use and associated environmental approval.

It is the privilege and responsibility of members of the Planning Board and Township government to protect and celebrate the rich history of Montgomery Township – not to alter the landscape and designation of locations within the community that the State of New Jersey has recently formally recognized and celebrated. I urge all of you to initiate a Township action and communication with Harlingen Associates that would prompt the developer to strike

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Harlingen from the name of this new housing and community site altogether.

Within Montgomery Township and at the Planning Board hearing level there is a strong precedent for a development's naming to not be so bland and uncreative as to use the immediate neighborhood name as its official site name. The historic and iconic "Belle Mead" name was ultimately not used for the two shopping plazas located at the intersection of Rt. 206 and Belle Mead-Griggstown Road. That is because at the Country Club Meadows' hearing in front of the Planning Board in 2016, in my capacity as a resident of Montgomery Township (a few years before being appointed to the Landmarks Preservation Commission) I stated that the name Belle Mead should not be used for shopping centers, as Belle Mead Plaza was the proposed name and equally inappropriate to use. Belle Mead also has a rich history which Montgomery Township recognizes, and thankfully the developer at that hearing understood the constructive feedback I offered on the naming.

The result as we can see today and with new businesses and services moving into the township over the past several years is:

- a) Montgomery Place, and
- b) The Grove at Montgomery

These projects represent two successful, conveniently-situated (new construction) additions to the Township's commercial landscape – and one of the two includes apartment housing with affordable housing units. With their built and subsequent rental/leasing operations there were absolutely no viable benefits and economic factors or marketing purposes for the developments in that section of the community to have to use the historical name Belle Mead in attracting new tenants, residents and ultimately daily customers into Montgomery. The use of their present names has worked out very well for the developer and businesses alike.

Likewise, there are and will be *no valid and pressing reasons* for the name "Harlingen" to be put forth over all the concerns and objections raised previously in official Landmarks Commission communications and documents

on this project, and in our Commission's meeting minutes, as well as any remarks and testimony that will be presented in-person as the Planning Board considers this application.

In summary, over the last several months, again today and going forward the Landmarks Preservation Commission will urge every Township official and member of the Planning, Zoning and administrative staff to understand our collective need to protect the historic name and State of New Jersey designation of "Harlingen" as it is a very important part of Montgomery Township history. This name should be appropriately honored and not kept on the proposed site project you will consider for approval. Please ask the developer, again and again, to have the respect to come up with a better name.

Best of luck with your project reviews and Planning Board business in the upcoming public meeting, and always.

Sincerely,

**Rikki N. Massand, MS/CHP**

- Chair of Montgomery Township Landmarks Preservation Commission
- Montgomery Site Plan/Subdivision Committee member 2019 + 2021
- Montgomery Township liaison to the Delaware and Raritan Canal Commission
- Somerset County Cultural & Heritage Advisory Committee member