

# EDITORIAL: Mediation may be good counsel: County Commission should seek common ground on friary dispute

Anonymous . McClatchy - Tribune Business News ; Washington [Washington]11 Aug 2008.

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## ABSTRACT

[...] the County Commission has the authority to strike the wording about noncontributing property owners notifying the Historic Landmarks Commission and should do so immediately.

## FULL TEXT

Aug. 11—Though our opinions waver from consensus to confrontation we don't usually prescribe mediation. But exceptions are the stuff of history, and ours is no different. Nor is the effort to create the Thoney Pietro Historic District. Though meditation is a means to an end, in this event it looks to be both -- a means and an end to resolving this issue.

Earlier this year the Good Counsel Friary on Tyrone Road was put on the market. Within weeks the Monongalia County Historic Landmarks Commission sought a historic designation for that property and others nearby. Since then two motions to approve that designation by one member of the Monongalia County Commission have failed for lack of a second.

Another commissioner asserts that naming the friary an historic district will devalue the property. He objects to including six noncontributing property owners, who would need to inform the landmarks panel about changes to their property, in the measure.

And the third commissioner worries that needed repairs and upkeep of the friary property is already going to be a burden to whoever decides to buy it from the Franciscan Friars. Now, if we might mediate, this is what we suggest. First, the County Commission has the authority to strike the wording about noncontributing property owners notifying the Historic Landmarks Commission and should do so immediately.

These properties add nothing to the historical integrity of the district and appear to be an obstacle to this designation for the Good Counsel Friary.

The other commissioner's objections don't appear relevant to this issue. The cost of the friary's utilities and maintenance are what they are -- historic designation or not. Needed repairs to the friary are the province of the negotiations when selling the property and have no real bearing on its historic value. It's possible a historic designation for this property might help any new owners apply for grants or raise funds for those repairs.

Preserving this property doesn't devalue it. Adding Monongalia County and the state's recognition of the friary's value to our past and future only enriches its significance. Obviously, it does limit changes to its facade, but it doesn't curb any designs on the interior of the friary itself. Although the friary's owners fear the historic designation might make the property harder to sell on a soft market, the commission is obligated to help preserve part of our history. The flexibility needed for the County Commission to agree on this issue is in place, and the Historic Landmarks Commission appears to be amendable. It's not beyond the pale to think a buyer may also know history and craftsmanship when they see it and are as willing to compromise as the County Commission should be.

Credit: The Dominion Post, Morgantown, W.Va.

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