

## City doubles size of historic district

**By Jason deBruyn**

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MONROE - More than a dozen property owners cheered the council after it approved doubling the size of the historic district.

"I am so happy for this," said Monroe Historic District Commission Chairwoman Vickie Hedgepeth, unable to contain a smile. "This really is historical, it's been a long journey."

Before Tuesday, the Monroe historic district did not include any area west of Charlotte Avenue. It now includes areas as far west as Craig Street and spreads from Jefferson Street to south of Lancaster Avenue.

The expansion was first initiated some 10 years ago and hit several roadblocks and had varying degrees of interest over the past decade. Steadfast through it all, stood members of the historic commission, including Hedgepeth who has been working on the expansion, in her words, seemingly forever.

"This was a community effort initiated long ago by homeowners in the expansion area," she said.

Several property owners addressed the council before it made a decision, almost all were in favor of the expansion.

"This will be a significant benefit to Monroe, Union County and the region," said John Dickerson, a local architect and activist in the historic district.

Property owners said they have been investing in their houses for years and are glad to now see that investment protected and make sure other properties in the community will be protected as well.

"Ten years is a long time to work on the extension, but when you are protecting century-old housing stock, it was well worth the effort," said James Kerr who lives in a circa 1922 home on Franklin Street and is a partner in the Middleton Place condos. "We are stewards of these architectural treasures that finally have some protection. The overlay rules along with the caring leadership of the Historic District Commission, will continue to enhance and improve downtown Monroe and our new downtown master plan will be aided by this designation."

Still, not everyone was happy to be included.

Steve and Sue Barnett have lived at 302 S. College St., which was added to the district, for 23 years, and pleaded with the council not to add their house.

"I cannot see an advantage to me in the long run," said Steve Barnett adding that his sons do not want to inherit the house and he does not want to seek approval if he wants to change anything about the house.

"If this is approved, there will be a 'For Sale' sign at 302 South College," he said. As soon as the council made its decision he leaned forward and asked, "Do you want to buy a big house within walking distance of (The Enquirer-Journal)?"

All properties with features that do not meet the historic district codes are grandfathered in. Historic requirements must only be met if any changes are made to the outside of the house.

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