

DRAFT
Smithfield Historic Properties Minutes
Thursday, January 17, 2019
3:00 P.M., Town Hall, Conference Room

Members Present:

Chairman-Oliver Johnson
Vice-Chairman Art Andrews
Deanna Simmons
Mary Nell Ferguson
Paul Worley
Rachel Ayers

Members Absent:

Jan Branch

Staff Present:

Stephen Wensman, Planning Director
Mark Helmer, Senior Planner
Julie Edmonds, Administrative Support Specialist

Staff Absent:

Call to Order

Approval of the Minutes from November 8, 2018

Mary Nell Ferguson made a motion to accept the minutes as written, seconded by Art Andrews. Unanimous

Swearing In of Rachel Ayers and Deanna Simmons

Rachel Ayers and Deanna Simmons were sworn in as new members by Chairman, Oliver Johnson.

New Business

Goals and objectives of the HPC were discussed. Mr. Wensman stated that the ordinance explained the duties of the HPC commission. He asked the group what they would like to accomplish for the year; beyond just waiting for HPC cases to arise. This board can do other things besides hear cases, they can educate and promote. We have some Historic Districts that are not under our jurisdiction because the overlay district is over the downtown area. It's hard when there isn't representation on this board. Mr. Wensman asked if any members lived in any of the Historic Districts. Mary Nell Ferguson said that Jan Branch did. Mr. Wensman mentioned that it had been a longtime since the subject was brought up, but should that area be in the board's jurisdiction as a Historic District. At one time there was an interest. If that is something this committee would want we could start a conversation and promote the benefits.

Mrs. Ferguson asked if the Historic parts of Smithfield not currently under the design plan could be incorporated through a process.

Mr. Helmer explained there are essentially three Historic Districts on the National Registry where detailed reports have been created and adopted by the state. What we have done in the past is take all three of those and take local districts which would give this board authority over review process of various proposals. Council chose to adopt

Downtown. Due to opposition they elected not to include Brooklyn and North Smithfield as a local Historic District. Downtown is a very small district, well established and very few changes. Overlay districts are ambitious and that board at the time was. There are easier things to do other than overlay districts which would include Historic land marks and substantially easier as well as cheaper. Only one property owner has to agree to it. Politically it is easier to do. You create a report for each one. For example, the Hastings House is a Historic local landmark and falls under the jurisdiction of this board. Downtown Development volunteered and a report was generated and reviewed by the State, recommended for approval and Council approved. We adopted an ordinance stating the Hastings House is a local Historic landmark.

Mrs. Ferguson asked if the Hastings House was marked with a sign.

Mr. Helmer stated yes, there is a plaque.

Mr. Helmer said there are easily half a dozen you could have adopted if Council is interested.

Mrs. Ferguson asked if that puts those districts under the same restrictions as those currently adopted.

Mr. Helmer said yes, all regulations apply except instead of it being a blanket overlay district it would be property by property.

Mrs. Ferguson asked if Art Andrews wanted to do his house considering its Historic, could he do that.

Mr. Helmer said yes, if it's considered historically significant and contributing either in an overlay district or on the national registry it doesn't matter.

Mr. Worley asked how you start the process of this type work with a level of success without it being seen as something people are scared of.

Mr. Helmer said this board may be ok with Historic Preservation but the next board that replaces you all may have a completely different attitude towards it and the Design Guidelines which are not set in stone standards. Understanding how other communities handle it would be helpful.

Mr. Wensman said I have been thinking about this. This board was dormant for 3 years and that questions the relevancy of it. I think this board needs to make themselves more relevant. He doesn't know how the Town Council feels about the HPC board. It hasn't been brought up in such a long time.

Mr. Helmer agreed anything we can do to get you all in front of Town Council and make your presence known and your intentions are good and clear.

Mr. Wensman said you all need to decide if you want to wait on cases in the smaller district or promote the history of the Town and maybe grow it if you can get buy in from

the community. You can utilize the Heritage Center. There are opportunities, the question is does the commission have the interest and energy and are the community and Town Council equally interested.

Mr. Worley asked if any of this was included in the recent polling done by the Town.

Mr. Wensman answered no.

Mr. Worley stated it's good to have an idea of what people are interested in. A lot of times what gets things of this nature moving are the loss of a building or collections of buildings.

Mrs. Ferguson said she felt muddled and that each HPC member needed to think about what their personal goals were to sit here and what each person can or can't offer. She wants to protect our buildings so they aren't destroyed. We have to make it easy enough for businesses to come downtown and operate.

Mr. Wensman said the Town is not in any of the previously mentioned districts. So best case scenario let's say for preservation, if all the districts come into the fold. We are still talking about 8 to 10 blocks. Most of the pressure for growth is elsewhere and will be for a longtime. We should ask though, what happens to the properties downtown deemed as historic by the studies.

Mrs. Ferguson said someone mentioned the old hotel, which is in the historic district. Yet it sits there an eye sore, so there's nothing that can be done about it right.

Mr. Wensman said the old hotel is trying to figure out its fate.

Mrs. Ferguson said that wouldn't be the job of this board though.

Mr. Wensman said no, what would happen if someone did come along and want to renovate, then it would become your job. It would have to be renovated meeting our standards.

Mr. Wensman said this board does have the authority to review all demolitions within their jurisdiction as well as delay demos up to one year. You just have to be careful how you use that power.

Mr. Johnson agreed he too feels muddled. The HPC hasn't been involved and it all slowly is sinking in. He thinks it will take time for it all to emerge. Maybe we can absorb and make a determination on what the board wants.

Mr. Worley stated to him it seems the HPC is a component in the growth of the Town. Before we can entice people to move here we have to preserve it and make sure it is here and will remain here. The Appearance Commission, Planning Department and Town Council all play a role in this. From the Councils level, how would each of you want to inline your policy boards and positions in the Town to try and go for this overall

goal. There are unseen gifts here in the Town of Smithfield. We need to find out how we can position with other entities to push some kind of direction.

Mr. Wensman said you can tell the story without having control over the historic districts. You could organize walking tours, voluntarily have people post plaques if their home is historically significant or post history. The extension of the Greenway is supposed to come out by the Kiddie Park and then go into the neighborhood for so many blocks. There is opportunity for people to see things and say this is a historic house. Bringing pride to the community is what we can hope for. You don't have to have control but you can get voluntary participation.

Mrs. Ferguson said she liked what was mentioned earlier about bringing pride into our community. That is what she is all about; she wants to be proud to live in Smithfield. She asks what benefit she has on the board to help keep the pride of which we all are, the history and the future.

Mrs. Ferguson questioned markers for homes that are in the historic districts. She named 211 N. Second Street owned by Mary & David Stephens as an example. They bought this home and had work done on it. She doesn't think there is a marker in there yard but imagines they would want one.

Mr. Helmer said he agreed this would be a great idea. The homeowner could voluntarily become a historic landmark or structure then a marker would be appropriate.

Mr. Johnson asked how as a board we would get the word out that this opportunity was available.

Mr. Helmer said word of mouth is one way, you could possibly petition the homeowners that you already know that live in these structures.

Mrs. Ferguson said she would reach out to Mary Stephens and ask if she and her husband would be interested in displaying a marker on their property.

Mr. Worley mentioned the Wayfinding; he asked if there would be an opportunity to use some kind of subset to that design or do something that's in with the Town's marketing. It brings in a sense of unity.

Mr. Wensman said the programming for that project was just submitted to the sign consultants who will fabricate the signs. If there is a need, additional signs could be created in the future.

Mr. Helmer said he would encourage the board to do things that lead them towards certification as a board. Then in return that would eventually lead to funding of things you many want to do in the future.

Mrs. Ferguson agreed to do two things, call Mary Stephens and see what her thoughts are on volunteering to display a marker on her property. Also, contact Todd at the

Heritage Center and get his thoughts on the markers they have done at the Heritage Center.

Mr. Johnson asked if there were any more discussion on this topic or do you want to let it rest where it is until next time we meet.

Mr. Andrews asked how to obtain information on how to become certified.

Mr. Helmer said there is information out there. I can get it together and send it to everyone.

Mrs. Ferguson asked if anyone writes grants for the Town of Smithfield.

Mr. Wensman said there have been various people who wrote grants, some successful some not, but the Town doesn't have a specific person to write them. We do have a new communications director so we don't know what his role will be.

Mr. Andrews said his wife use to write many grants for JCC, he could ask her if she would be interested in helping the board out.

Old Business

Mr. Wensman discussed the Town of Smithfield Code of Ordinances, Article III. He stated the last time we met we made some changes to this article. We made those changes and are back with the revisions today. We decided we would meet quarterly instead of once a year. We added in the table that specifies which are administrative and which are commission related improvements. Those are the main things. We have an old administrative code and when they updated all the codes and created the UDO, all commissions and boards went into the UDO except for this one. When I arrived with the Town you weren't meeting, so I questioned if there was even a board at all. Most things were moved over to the UDO, but this wasn't. We decided to get the board together and see what everyone's take was on becoming active again. Our next step would be to move these revisions to the Town Council. They will have to adopt them and by doing so they'd basically indorse that you are still a commission. It's a key opportunity to reinvigorate this board. If everyone is happy with these changes we can make a recommendation to the Planning Board.

Mr. Helmer said he wasn't sure how many of these changes were actually in this document the first time everyone saw it. The boards name was changed from Historic Preservation Commission to Properties Commission. The other major change was to **3.5.21 Classification of Approvals** this section is really just saying who approves what.

3.5.21.1 Normal Maintenance this explains activities that are considered to be routine maintenance of historic properties.

3.5.21.2 Work Requiring a Certificate of Appropriateness the way this chart works, it shows the type of work and work that is approved by staff and work required for the board to review, then the Certificate of Appropriateness would be issued.

Mr. Worley asked how it was determined what staff would approve and what the HPC would approve.

Mr. Helmer said he looked at several different ordinances. He went with Durham's ordinance. The key thing he noticed was if you are looking to preserve an architectural feature it can be approved by staff but if you're going to replace it then this board needs to be involved.

Mr. Andrews asked if someone is replacing a feature, what criteria the board uses to approve it.

Mr. Helmer said the Design Guidelines.

Mr. Andrews said we have a lot of duties as a board but do we have any teeth.

Mr. Helmer said you do have a lot of influence in the process. Ultimately it is the property owner's property in question. If they chose to replace a 200 year old door then this board would encourage them to get a replacement from the proper place not Lowe's. You don't want to be overly burdensome but you have to consider a structure.

Mr. Andrews asked when these revisions would go before Town Council.

Mr. Helmer said on February 5th.

Mr. Andrews said he read in their duties something about taking inventory, does the board have authority over the inventory.

Mr. Helmer said no, we've inventoried everything on the National Registry. Those are rather expensive studies. If we get to the point we need to expand on the National Registry we may look to see what studies have been done.

Mr. Andrews said we have one block of Third Street and the Hastings house.

Mr. Helmer answered yes.

Mr. Andrews asked how the board should consider taking on more properties.

Mr. Helmer said I'd pick the easy targets.

Mrs. Ferguson asked if there was a map showing when the historic homes were built.

Mr. Helmer said yes, it would be on the Inventory sheet in the HPC binders.

Mrs. Ayers said it was mentioned in several years that the next board would make changes to what this group has decided. Why would you keep making changes and throw out any values we put in place. There is no use to have meetings if things keep changing.

Mr. Wensman said well interest is lost and when you go long periods of time such as years and never meet that can happen. It's ideal to have architects or people who have experience in home remodel or preservation.

Mr. Worley suggested we ask Amber Stimpson with the Opal Preservation Commission CLG Coordinator for the state. She could advise this board as well as bring training materials.

Mr. Wensman suggested she be contacted and see if she wants to come talk with the board as well as bring training materials.

Proclamation of Pine Acres Subdivision

Art Andrews made a motion to approve the Proclamation of Pine Acres Subdivision seconded by Mary Nell Ferguson. Unanimously Approved

Mr. Johnson stated the Proclamation would now move on to Town Council.

Mr. Wensman asked if someone could attend the Town Council meeting when the Proclamation was read. Mr. Johnson nominated Rachel Ayers.

Miscellaneous Discussion

Mr. Helmer went over several documents, one being a comparison of the National Register of Historic Places with Local Historic Landmark and District Designations. He summarized this document with the duties of a Historic Preservation Commission. Mr. Helmer explained local landmarks, local districts and certificate of appropriateness.

Mr. Helmer discussed Quasi-Judicial hearings. He explained that in these cases we want factual evidence by competent witnesses.

Mr. Andrews asked that the information discussed at the next meeting be emailed to them prior to the meeting. He said that way they could do some homework and familiarize themselves with the topics. He also requested that all pages in the HPC agenda be numbered.

The meeting concluded at 4:25 pm.



Julie Edmonds
Administrative Support Specialist
Planning Department