

DRAFT
Smithfield Historic Properties Minutes
Thursday, January 16, 2020
3:00 P.M.,
Town Hall, Conference Room

Members Present:

Chairman-Dr. Oliver Johnson
Vice-Chair-Art Andrews
Mary Nell Ferguson
Paul Worley
Rachel Ayers
Jan Branch
Deanna Simmons

Members Absent:

Staff Present:

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

Staff Absent:

Call to Order

Approval of the minutes October 17th, 2019

Mary Nell Ferguson made a motion to approve the minutes from October 17, 2019; seconded by Rachel Ayers. Unanimously Approved

Public Hearing

None

New Business

Goals and objectives of the Historic Properties Commission

Mr. Helmer stated that it was important to review the goals and objectives of the HPC from time to time. He previously asked the board to seek nominations for historic structures and places. We need to get some information in front of Town Council and try to seek their support to see if this board could expand. Some examples are the bridge abutment on Bridge Street, the Girl Scout Hut, some town-maintained cemeteries such as the one on Bridge Street or St. Paul's Church. Properties such as these are worthy of preservation. They would have to be studied, nominated and approved for preservation efforts under the jurisdiction of this board. Right now, this board only has jurisdiction South Third Street. The easiest way to do it without creating an overlay is to go after individual structures and places owned by the Town. Once Town Council were to approve that we could place a plaque on that structure.

Mr. Wensman asked if Neuse Little Theater was in the historic district.

Mr. Helmer said no it is not.

Dr. Johnson agreed this was a great idea but asked if this was allowed by the HPC board to pursue something of this nature. He wanted to make sure it wasn't viewed as overreach.

Mr. Helmer said yes, he believes it is achievable and a steppingstone to something greater. When you designate individual structures it's all on a voluntary basis. The owner must be on board and in this case, it would be the Town that owns the structures.

Mrs. Ferguson asked if the Neuse Little Theater belonged to the Town.

Mr. Helmer said he wasn't sure, but he believed it did.

Mrs. Ferguson said it is certainly a historical structure and an important part of the Town. It's the first place you see when you come into Town.

Mr. Helmer stated that the Hastings House is also a historic structure but is under the jurisdiction of this board. It's on the state and local registry.

Mrs. Branch suggested the Bingham House as a historic structure.

Mr. Helmer said yes that would be a great one to use if the homeowner agrees.

Mrs. Ferguson stated that she was interested in the Girl Scout Hut. It has undergone remodeling over years, so she isn't sure if that changes anything.

Mr. Helmer said well the history is still there even though the materials may be newer. This board has jurisdiction over it to where if the structure ever needed to have new siding, this board could vote to do it the way it originally was.

Mr. Helmer stated these are just a few structures we have mentioned there are more out there. The Church cemetery walls and gravesides go back hundreds of years. We don't have strong regulations so there shouldn't be any apprehension of this board having too much authority.

Mrs. Ferguson asked where we go from here.

Mr. Helmer said we would report back with ideas on how to proceed. We would need to do a research report by gathering historic information and compile it.

Mrs. Ferguson said she would start at the Heritage Center to gather information.

Mrs. Branch asked if we were trying to designate these mentioned structures and incorporate them into the historic district.

Mr. Helmer said not into the district but as a structure.

Mrs. Branch asked Mr. Helmer what he previously said about creating an overlay district.

Mr. Helmer said well an overlay district requires the action of Town Council, it isn't voluntary. When you create one and everyone has a chance to speak but not everyone agrees that they want it.

Mr. Worley stated that it might be a good idea to have volunteers. Those uninterested don't have to take part and those that are willing can be involved.

Mr. Wensman said there's also a level of education. People don't understand, they don't know what the benefits or negatives are. They have false ideas about what the negatives are.

Mr. Helmer said the overlay district in residential neighborhoods would be palpable if there was some incentive. If we set up a fund that made monies available to supplement some of these projects. It would help them preserve their properties in a way that's consistent with the Department of Interior.

Mrs. Branch said the historic markers will help for the public perception.

Mr. Helmer said he wouldn't, but this boards name on someone's plaque if they aren't in our jurisdiction. That could lead the owner to a false sense of security and think there's protection there when there isn't.

Mr. Worley said that's a good point and should be mentioned to people that they wouldn't be protected from future development. He also wondered how property values would be affected.

Mr. Helmer said we could come up with something. There's similar data out there we could model. He has read up on it over the year's and there's benefits that come with it and stabilization and eventually increases property values.

Mr. Worley said it should then allow someone else to invest in the home and confidently improve it.

Mr. Helmer suggests putting these structures in order and only working on one at a time. He suggested polling the Town Council to see how receptive they would be.

Mr. Wensman said if the board could put together something for the Council to look at, he could talk to Mike Scott about it and the Council could be asked. It would be a great way to reintroduce yourselves to the Council being that it's been so long since the Council has had anything to do with this board. It would show that you are active and trying to do something positive for your community.

Mrs. Ferguson said the Neuse Little Theater appeals to her the most as a starting point. She believes they will easily find information on it. She offered to speak with Todd at the Heritage Center to get started.

Mr. Helmer said there may already be a report out there that he can find. He doesn't think that the State expects Local Government to reinvent the wheel on these reports. He thinks they want something new added to the old report. It's possible the report has been designated by the State.

Mr. Worley suggested looking back around 1988 or 1989, he believes the Town bought the Neuse Little Theater from American Legion, the historical significance about the building should be in any minutes from that time frame.

Mr. Helmer asked the board if that was the consensus of the board, for him to investigate this.

Everyone agreed for Mr. Helmer to pursue this report.

Mrs. Ferguson asked Mr. Helmer to contact her and let her know when and how to proceed with contacting the Heritage Board.

Article III- Town of Smithfield Code of Ordinances

Mr. Wensman said this is just an update. We haven't done anything in terms of moving ordinances forward. The Town Council wants to do that in a workshop setting. This was held up when the Planning Board was interested in holding Public Hearings. They were removed from the Planning Board and are only heard at Town Council meetings. We no longer had dual hearings for quasi-judicial. We have been exploring Conditional Zoning and that affected the article to which this ordinance amendment was attached. So, until that is sorted out this will be on hold.

Dr. Johnson requested clarification on Section 3.5. Article 3.5.1 Intent. He asked if it was correct for it to start by saying "The purpose of this district". He stated it seemed out of context.

Mrs. Branch suggested it refer to which district instead of stating this district.

Mr. Helmer stated that the biggest change in this ordinance besides picking up the whole thing and moving it over to the UDO, is the addition of the work chart. It clarifies the authority of this board and of staff.

Proclamation of Pine Acres Subdivision

Mr. Helmer said he meant to remove that from the agenda, but he mentioned that Town Council approved the proclamation in 2019.

Mrs. Ayers asked about the entrance sign for Pine Acres. She wanted to know if it would be historical like mentioned previously before.

Mr. Helmer said yes, it would not state this boards name on it but would say Historic District.

Mr. Worley stated that he noticed some Towns use brown instead of green signs.

Mrs. Ayers also asked who the Pine Acres sign belongs to at Market Street and Pine Street.

Mr. Wensman said there's currently a for sale sign at Market and Pine Street on the property of the Pine Acres sign.

Mrs. Ayers said once the land sells the sign will likely be removed.

Mr. Helmer said he doesn't know the future of the sign but would investigate it.

Mr. Helmer updated the board on the recent Certificate of Appropriateness they approved and issued. It has been recorded at the courthouse. None of the work has started to date and the applicant doesn't necessarily have to do the work that they proposed.

Dr. Johnson asked if there was a timeline on the completion of the work.

Mr. Helmer said zoning and building permits do expire after 6 months. If that happens, they would only need to come back to us to revise the paperwork.

Mrs. Ferguson asked about the old hotel on Market Street near Pine Acres. She wanted to know if it was an historic property and what option the HPC had to fix it due to it being such an eyesore.

Mrs. Branch said it was under option by Downtown Development and they have an RFP out now.

Mrs. Ferguson asked if the building could be torn down.

Mr. Helmer stated this board's jurisdiction covers the external portion of the structure. If the project was to go forward, we would be looking at window replacements and anything that falls under the design guidelines of this board's jurisdiction.

Old Business

Mr. Andrews researched the plaques previously discussed. He mentioned some examples he found online and gave a price range for them. He considered visiting other NC towns, but he didn't want to copy anyone else.

Mr. Wensman mentioned if this board is interested in promoting signs on homes that aren't in your jurisdiction, it's an opportunity to encourage the homeowner to come into the jurisdiction.

Mr. Andrews thinks homeowners that qualify for these signs will have pride in their homes and would want to display a plaque. He also feels it will spark an interest in others to do the same.

Mr. Worley suggested requiring the homeowners to provide a package of information about the home. That information could be cataloged and uploaded in the Town.

Adjournment

Paul Worley made a motion to adjourn the meeting; seconded by Jan Branch. Unanimously approved

Dr. Johnson adjourned the meeting.

The next HPC meeting is scheduled for April 16th, 2020 at 3pm.

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Julie Edmonds
Administrative Support Specialist
Planning Department