

**Orange County
HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION**

Meeting Summary—Approved

**May 27th, 2015
Old Orange County Courthouse
106 East King Street, Hillsborough**

MEMBERS PRESENT: Todd Dickinson (Chair), Susan Ballard, Rob Golan, Jaime Grant and Bob Ireland

MEMBERS ABSENT: Grace White

STAFF PRESENT: Peter Sandbeck

GUESTS: None

ITEM #1: CALL TO ORDER

Chair Dickinson called the meeting to order at 7:12 pm.

ITEM #2: CHANGES OR ADDITIONS TO AGENDA: Staff asked for permission to add a discussion item regarding the question of holding another “Preservation Summit” like the two we hosted before.

ITEM #3: APPROVAL OF MINUTES (April 29th, 2015 meeting)

Golan moved to accept the minutes, seconded by Ballard. Motion passed unanimously.

ITEM #4: ITEMS FOR DECISION: None

ITEM #5: DISCUSSION ITEMS

a. Should HPC host another Preservation Summit for 2015

Staff explained that during his recent meeting with the staff of Preservation Chapel Hill, he was asked if the HPC was interested in reviving this concept and hosting another one. We held them in 2009 and 2012. Members discussed how these had been organized in the past. Most thought the best aspect was that it provided a forum for various preservation groups and staff to get together and share what they were doing. The most recent one promoted renewed interest in some sort of web site where the various groups could share information. It was the general consensus that we had plenty going on right now and did not need to undertake this after all of the work that went into last year’s symposium. Grant moved that we do not host a summit this year but are willing to participate. Motion seconded by Ballard. Motion passed.

ITEM #6: UPDATES AND INFORMATION ITEMS

a. Colonial Inn:

Members reviewed the two news articles describing the recent developments, based on the report submitted by the UNC School of Government. Staff explained possible scenarios whereby landmark status could become a part of the financing package. Earlier discussions pointed to a possible role by the County HPC to enter into an appropriate

agreement with the Town to allow us to officially designate the Inn as a landmark. This is just a concept at this point but there could be a time when we may be asked to play a role. More recently, the Town has adopted an ordinance allowing it to designate special structures as landmarks, for now limiting this to the two historic mill structures—Eno and Bellevue. The landmark status permits the 50% deferral of Town property taxes, which provides a modest financial incentive.

b. State Historic Preservation Tax Credits:

Staff described the current House bill proposing a revised tax credit program that caps the amounts that can be claimed, thereby reducing the cost of the program to the state budget. A plus is that this version lowers the expenditure threshold for homeowners, down to \$10,000. Thus, someone could do an approved scope of work to their historic house, and spend relatively little, and be able to use the credit program. Under the old rules, the minimum threshold was \$25,000. This current house bill may be eliminated by the Senate which has gone on record in opposition to this and all other tax credit programs. One Senate concept calls for local governments to implement their own local tax credit programs. This might be something that would gain some traction in some of the progressive metro counties, like Wake, Durham and Mecklenburg, and perhaps even Orange. This would be new territory for the counties.

c. Survey Project Status and Book Update:

Staff explained that the project is moving forward nicely. All fieldwork must be completed by the end of August and all forms and database work submitted. It has been hard for the consultants to get into some of the houses. They sent an excellent letter to all of the targeted property owners and are getting a good response. Staff would like to get some help from members for some of the owners that they may know.

d. Member Report on CLG training workshop in Wake Forest:

Ireland and Golan attended, so thanks to them we have now met our CLG training requirement for the year. SHPO staff did most of the programs. Ms. Mitchell spoke initially about general issues. Mitch Wilds spoke about alternative materials. Reid Thomas did a great program about energy efficiency, and how to properly insulate wall cavities so as to prevent the insulation from getting wet and losing its R value. The idea now is to install 2" solid foam panels between the studs, but mounting it in the middle of the wall cavity, so that there is an air space on both sides, an air gap. Duct booster fans help move conditioned air to the farther reaches of a building. Thomas recommended Preservation Brief #3 by the National Park Service; this covers this same information.

e. Blackwood Farm Park Opening Update:

DEAPR has picked the date of June 20th for the formal opening of Blackwood Farm Park, to be held that Saturday morning from 10-12. All HPC members will be invited. The County Commissioners will make some remarks, and Bob Strayhorn will talk about life on the farm back in his earlier days.

f. Open Air Time:

Golan reported on the status of his ongoing effort to preserve his mailing address on Halls Mill Road, rather than Bane Road for 911 purposes.

ITEM #7: STAFF PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION:

a. Sampling of Blackwood Farm Photos

Staff reported that the IT folks have not yet installed the software driver for the office scanner but he will share these at the next meeting.

b. Orange County Historic Resources: overview of all resources in Cheeks Township:

Staff presented an overview of resources in Cheeks Township, noting those that were tagged by the survey consultants and staff as having sufficient integrity and significance to merit possible inclusion in the proposed book. Members discussed the goal for this review exercise. Staff asked members to rank them as a “yes, this seems eligible to include in the book,” or “no,” or “maybe,” or add comments if they have remarks to make. Staff also showed some views of the version of this presentation given to the Upper Eno Heritage Group back on May 11th to inform them about the survey project. We got good input, including from former HPC member Tom Allison. The Paisley Log House was entirely rebuilt using some of the old logs, which raises questions about how to include this in the book. Members debated its integrity with some wanting to include it for its overall significance even though it was rebuilt. Faucette Mill might be a good property for an HPC site visit, as it is very well preserved. The owner Barrie Wallace, grew up at Chatwood and so goes way back in that neighborhood. This was landmarked with Chatwood as one single landmark, back when they were under one owner. Now we must go back to re-visit that situation with the tax office to see if we need to amend the ordinance. Another topic was cemeteries. We need to include some of the most important ones. All the cemeteries in the county are online now, via the cemetery census web site and also the DOGS (Durham-Orange Genealogical Society). Members reviewed additional properties and noted their opinions on their worksheets. Ireland raised the question: should we evaluate these for the book at this level? Properties like Chatwood, Little Ayr Mount and others are true landmarks for the county, yet have many additions that in some cases tend to obscure the original structure. Ballard raised the question of the purpose of the book. Is it to be an inventory of the different types of architecture, all the different types of architecture whether they be well preserved or not? In other words, what is the focus of the book? We are in the process of reviewing the data, so it is sort of a catch here. How can we review these and make the cut for the book without seeing first all the properties all over the county so that we have full points of reference. Staff explained that the purpose would be to provide a representative sampling of the different property types, ideally ones with physical integrity. Some may have poor integrity but will be the only example of a type or represent a particularly important aspect of the county’s history. The book should present the rise, sweep, etc of Orange County history as reflected by the buildings and sites. This will involve making it a representative sampling. Grant felt that many of these books tend to have a history as a separate entity all together, not integrated into the story of the buildings. She feels that many are just descriptive papers. Ireland raised the question of our audience, the folks who will purchase these books. Does this lead us to arrange the book geographically? There are so many ways to present the properties. Are we looking at these with an eye towards them being used as an example of their type in this book? There is a sense that it is hard to know if these are one of the top ten at this point. Staff reminded them that this is the first pass, the filter process that we go through. Staff wondered if this was the best way to go through this process? Staff wants you to see everything in the county so you have a point of reference as you seek to decide what to include in the book and what to cut. A lot of counties did what Grant describes, a history section at the front, by period, say a quarter of the book. Some of the books have done better with this, by telling the history story and weaving the buildings into that story. We don’t want our history section to seem canned, off the shelf. It is a real challenge to accomplish this. Some members asked Staff and the Chair if they have something in mind for the book to follow, some theme or format. Staff needs to bring a selection of the current books to the next meeting to help members see the different ways others have tried to handle this challenge. The bottom line, Orange County’s historic properties are by and large simple, workmanlike, often very plain. Ireland raised the question of the book presenting distinctive examples of historic properties. Distinctive is a challenging word if we are seeking money from certain sources. All properties have stories to tell, for example Chatwood was simple when built, but has been modified and

enlarged and changed over time to become an elite house of for folks who want to live in the country. Is one of the goals to have the book promote historic preservation? Are we telling the same old stories of how properties and styles evolved in the county, or are we going to make a distinction that helps readers see the finest examples of each style to illustrate good historic preservation practice? The goal may not be for the book to show only the best examples of preserved properties. We don't want people to think preservation is about holding things still. Or that having one or two of the best is enough, that the rest are not important. One of the few unique things about Orange is that the county has always had a relatively middling level of income, yeoman farmers, not a plantation economy. But there were lots and lots of students who would rent properties, and this had a very positive impact on the overall preservation of our historic buildings. It seems almost unfair for staff to show these and expect members to cull through these without seeing all of the resources of the county first. The goal is for members to see all the properties. Golan remarked that there is a danger here, that we could sit and cull and cull, just like we did years ago under Don Belk and Tina Moon, and never finish the project. We need to rely on the advice and expertise of our staff and consultants. It would be helpful for members to see the various books, to give them a chance to see how others have tackled this challenge. Staff resumed showing slides of Cheeks Township until it was time to adjourn. There was a question about including some churches but not all? Will there be any fallout? This has not been a problem in other counties. Another question was: if we agreed to not include any houses with vinyl siding, then wouldn't that exclude a majority of the houses in the county? Members agreed that would not work.

ITEM #8: ADJOURNMENT: Golan moved to adjourn, seconded by Ireland; motion passed. Chair Dickinson adjourned the meeting at 9:20 pm.

Meeting summary by Peter Sandbeck, DEAPR staff