

**Orange County  
HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION**

**Meeting Summary—Approved**

**August 26<sup>th</sup>, 2015  
Old Orange County Courthouse  
106 East King Street, Hillsborough**

---

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

**MEMBERS ABSENT:** None

**STAFF PRESENT:** Peter Sandbeck

**GUESTS:** None

---

**ITEM #1: CALL TO ORDER**

Chair Dickinson called the meeting to order at 7:05 pm.

**ITEM #2: CHANGES OR ADDITIONS TO AGENDA:** Staff asked for permission to add two items: a) a brief update of the historic resources review process for the proposed light rail line between Chapel Hill and Durham and b) an update on membership.

**ITEM #3: APPROVAL OF MINUTES (June 24<sup>th</sup>, 2015 meeting)**

Ballard and Ireland pointed out corrections in two areas. Golan moved to accept the minutes as corrected, seconded by White. Motion passed unanimously.

**ITEM #4: ITEMS FOR DECISION: None**

**ITEM #5: DISCUSSION ITEMS**

**a. Member discussion of options for book project**

Dickinson and others raised the question of the Town participation in the book project. Staff needs to revisit this with the Town HDC staff. There will come a time when this needs to be decided, probably at the point when they start to put their budget together this fall and winter. Staff can recommend funding for a match for a CLG grant application this fall, but that is not certain until a budget is passed in late spring. The idea was floated this year but the budget was too tight. Ireland asked if we could allow for this by planning our book to include a separate section for Hillsborough. That way, if that funding does not come together in time, then we can still proceed on our own without the Town. This will not delay our project. We just received our second CLG grant to complete our update and write our essay/narrative, which will happen between now and September 2016. Our hope is that they will apply for the grant this winter and we'll know in the spring. The Chair noted that we no longer need to call it the "proposed" book now that we are deep into this effort.

Members proceeded to discuss the memo sent by staff describing the Book Project and our format and options. Staff felt that after our last meeting, it was clear that our diverse group was in relative agreement about the big picture items. The overall goal of the staff memo was to provide the background about the SHPO format that has evolved over time.

We are expected to follow that format in general terms because they have provided substantial funding for the project. The other purpose was to lay out some of the options and choices that lie ahead, working within the SHPO framework.

Discussion followed about the front essay or historical narrative. There is a wide range of scope and depth of these in the various books we have looked at. Some have done an excellent job of including the pre-European story. Grant noted that this is most likely coming out of the growing interest in the relatively new concept of the study of the cultural landscape. This is really about how the landscape is used and settled by the various peoples. Archaeologists have been doing this for awhile and architectural historians are only just now catching up. White pointed out that the spring on the property where she lives was used by Indians and later by Europeans. We need to remember that the landscape was heavily shaped by native people, through clearing many fields and creating trading paths, long before the first settlers moved in. Golan noted that we need to explore ways to include artifacts/things in the ground. How do we broaden this to include archaeology in a meaningful way? It makes such a difference when you can show a map, a site drawing or plan, and the artifacts. A good example is the essay in the Greene Co. book, which includes a good presentation about the Tuscarora fort called Nehorooka. The Wake County book includes some very informative site plans showing the arrangements of the outbuildings.

How do you go about handling the transition from the archaeological to historical approach? It is a complex story that is often presented in simplistic terms. There are the subtle issues of the philosophical points of view toward the land. The Christian ethic was to clear the forests and make the land fruitful, versus the native people's holistic relationship to the land. We should intersperse illustrations of original land grants and other historic documents that help convey the larger story. All agreed that visuals were key: maps, floor plans, good documents to illustrate/broaden the story. For example, John Lawson's drawings could be used. How do we help readers understand that wild buffalo roamed the landscape until the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, or the whole process of driving pigs up to Petersburg? Grant volunteered to help with maps or site plans. Steve Davis. Brett Riggs and the team at UNC have written a whole lot about the native Americans in Orange County; there should be something already written that we could get them to distill or edit for this effort, while giving them full credit as the author(s).

Staff reviewed the discussion of the SHPO format. We have choices under each heading:

Historical overview essay versus architectural: how can we integrate our rich historical story into an architectural discussion? The last history of the county was done in 1952 by Lefler, which is not bad but very old school. We should not attempt to create a new county history for this. We should be able to provide at least a historical framework for the reader, to link things. But we cannot go into every piece of history. Staff noted that the County had paid an architectural historian to write a history essay back in 1996 for the book effort. It is not a great work but lays down the basics. Staff will share with members. SHPO felt it was not complete or good enough to form the basis for the book, so it was never adopted. SHPO and our consultants agree that we can't take that and rework it. But it is very instructive to read it. For example, it helps make it clear that there is very little known about the earliest 18<sup>th</sup> century structures in the county, so that remains a challenge. There were French traders here long before the county was established, working through the Piedmont to VA. We need to understand that there is only so much depth we can include in this for topics that have not been researched before. Getting the native American story in a brief format will be critical. Grant suggested a theme of "settlement and subsistence" from prehistory to today. It all boils down to: what were people doing here? How were they eating/raising food? And what were their activities doing to the landscape? Architecture

plays into this too, the architecture of the land, the built environment, or cultural landscape. Old/historic photos will be helpful to bring topics to life.

Building Narratives: All noted the issue of entries being dry and boring, just building descriptions. We want to avoid that. SHPO surveys and updates like ours require an inventory entry, written according to National Park Service standards driven by National Register nominations. These are inherently dry and descriptive. Our consultants are committed to finding and telling the story wherever possible. What is important about this building or person? Why is it in the book? Our policy will be to not have dry entries. The HPC will have a chance to review and edit them. There will be a need for members to help with research, finding the extra stories. Staff will seek volunteers for this.

Glossary: members agree that a good glossary is valuable. Many of the existing ones depict high style architecture, and don't really apply to our vernacular properties. There is interest in a visual glossary, one that informs and is relevant. SHPO convention calls for placing these at the end. There were ideas about icons, or keys that give readers a clue.

Index: This is a key element of a serious book. The challenge is to find a balance point in the level of detail and how to cross-reference. Members like the idea of using bold type or italics to indicate where a feature is illustrated.

Organization of property entries: Discussion followed about how to organize properties within the catalog. Are they arranged by townships or chronologically? Townships are a convenient, albeit arbitrary way to organize the catalog. This is probably a default mode. Do you arrange the same way within each township, for example, show all houses, churches, stores, and barns in one township, then do the same again for the next township. Can icons or other graphic symbols be used to show different building types? Or is that more geared to online offerings? We have to remember, the local people who help pay for these books, donate money, pay taxes etc. are really most interested in their corner of the world. This is perhaps our core market. The townships are different in subtle ways, say in Cedar Grove township, they made a lot of money in tobacco. There is a lot more dairy farming in the southern part of the county. There may be a better way but we have not seen it. We should provide an overview of each township, its soils, its economy, etc. Members are OK with the township organizational model in general terms. This puts a lot of pressure on the front section, to really make that set the stage, present the context for the townships. We went from hunter gatherers who move all across the land, to using the land, not moving, settling down in one place, and then soil mattered a lot. Lawyers certainly left their mark too. Tribal movements were extensive. Many of their methods had been changed by early contact and trade patterns with the French.

Selection of properties: There was general agreement that we will seek to present a broad sweep of our resources, not just the finest and most photogenic, but include the utilitarian and farm buildings. We will follow the SHPO geographical convention rather than the chronological approach. There was more discussion about the pros and cons of using images to show the distribution of building types and styles in each township, perhaps keyed to maps. Is there a role for the glossary section to handle some of this? Maybe this is a way to avoid repeating the same things over and over again. Whatever we do should translate readily into a digital format. The better books attempt in different ways to connect the dots for average readers, for example show an example of an Orange County bungalow, then illustrate the same house as shown in the Sears catalog. The history section could include the history of the architectural development of the whole county, then when you go to each township, you have covered that to some degree in the general history. The first step of creating the book will be to develop a detailed outline, with a lot of discussion with the consultants about how to organize this. The challenge is to create a book that could become digital, then be picked up by a traveler who could plot out a route

to see what they want to see, for example the barns or the log houses or whatever. This might lead to a very different kind of book, an electronic version.

Members checked out different survey publications to continue their background research. We don't have to reinvent the book. If we find one type that we like, we can take that and adapt it for our needs. Are there things members liked about some of these books? For example, White liked the books that used close up or detail images, to give interesting views of the details that enliven the reading. Grant commented on how good the Hyde County book was, and how well it presented human impact on the landscape, especially the huge land drainage project.

**ITEM #6: UPDATES AND INFORMATION ITEMS**

**a. PNC Annual Conference:**

Staff reminded members that the annual PNC Conference was being held in Salisbury from Sept. 16 to 18<sup>th</sup>, and that the County has in the past tried to help pay for registration for a member to attend. This will count for CLG training. Happily, Ireland and Golan attended the CLG training held in May in Wake Forest, so we are up to date on training.

**b. State Historic Preservation Tax Credits:**

This is still stuck in the budget deliberations between the House and Senate. Staff attended a rally where the Gov. and a number of legislators spoke in favor of reinstating the credits. We should know by our September meeting.

**c. Survey Project Status and Book Update:**

Staff explained that the project is moving forward nicely as we near the deadline of Sept. 30. All fieldwork must be completed and all forms and database work submitted. Staff thanked Ballard for making arrangements for the consultants to get access to several fine modernist houses. Our consultants will present a program for us in September.

**d. Membership:**

Grant's first term expired on March 31. Grant agreed to serve again. Members agreed to recommend her for a second term. Staff explained that Dickinson's reappointment was presented for the last meeting in June but the BOCC deferred those appointments until September. According to County policy, members can continue to serve for a year after their term expires, or until they are replaced. Staff did reach out to the preservation architect at UNC who lives in rural Orange County and he is interested in serving.

**e. Light Rail Historic Resources Review Update:**

Staff showed several maps depicting the proposed route of the light rail line. It will pass near several historic neighborhoods in Chapel Hill but not directly affect them. It comes closest to the Rocky Ridge Historic District and the Highland Hills neighborhood.

**f. Open Air Time:**

Dickinson discussed an issue with a local painting contractor

**ITEM #7: STAFF PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION:**

- a. Eno and Little River Townships:** This was deferred to a later meeting in the interest of time.

**ITEM #8: ADJOURNMENT:** White moved to adjourn, seconded by Grant; motion passed. Chair Dickinson adjourned the meeting at 9:03 pm.