

**Orange County
HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION**

Approved Meeting Summary

June 22nd, 2022

Bonnie Davis Center, 1020 US 70 West, Hillsborough

MEMBERS PRESENT: Tom Loter, Cecelia Moore, Paul Noe, Steve Peck

MEMBERS ABSENT: None

STAFF PRESENT: Peter Sandbeck

GUESTS: Todd Dickinson, Art Menius

ITEM #1: CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 6:36 pm.

ITEM #2: CHANGES OR ADDITIONS TO AGENDA: None

ITEM #3: APPROVAL OF MINUTES for March 23, 2022 (Attachment 1): Moore moved to approve the minutes; seconded by Noe; motion approved.

ITEM #4: TEMS FOR DECISION:

- a. **Ridge Road School: approval for staff to proceed to hire a consultant for the National Register Nomination Process:** Staff provided an overview of the historical and architectural significance of the school and shared a PowerPoint with exterior and interior photos. Research indicates it was built sometime in 1932, after the Board of Ed voted on May 30 of that year to approve an amount of \$500 as their contribution toward the building of the school, as noted in those meeting minutes: “Delegates from the Sunnyside district, colored, and the Ridge Road district, colored, appeared before the board in the interest of their new building. Both districts agreed to furnish some rough lumber, labor, and hauling. The Board promised the people that it would build these houses....” The building possesses a great deal of architectural integrity, retaining its original siding, doors, coat rooms, and foundations, along with beaded board walls and ceilings on the interior. The original moveable panel still remains in place in the internal partition walls that separates the two classrooms. Some early or original school furnishings still remain inside. The large original wood windows were replaced with smaller wood windows, probably in the 1950s or 1960s but the original window size is clearly shown by the patched areas of the siding. The building and site are owned by the Jones Grove Baptist Church, which dates back to 1926 on the adjoining lot. According to oral tradition, this school was built on or near the site of an older Black school that was in poor condition. Members discussed the story of the church and expressed their support. At this stage, the church congregation does not wish to propose this for a landmark, due to the requirement for HPC review of any proposed work. Peck moved to direct staff to proceed with the National Register project, seconded by Moore. Discussion followed and motion approved.

ITEM #5: DISCUSSION ITEMS

- a. **Oaks Community Rural Historic District Project—next steps:** Staff would like to get a sense of the feeling of the HPC as to their interest in moving this project forward as a potential National Register Rural Historic District. Staff shared a map showing the

proposed district, as developed by the SHPO staff after we carried out our initial county-wide architectural inventory in 1992. Members discussed those boundaries and the inclusion of the sites visited during our field trip, including extending the district to include the historic roadbed and mill site. It may be possible to extend the boundary to the north along Mebane-Oaks Road depending on the integrity of the historic resources there. It may be necessary to adjust the eastern boundary to pull out the Pluck Farm land given the level of new construction there. Staff noted that the great range of resources, from the archaeological sites to the road to the various standing structures that date from the late 18th century up to the 1922 church. As of this time, we don't have a good understanding of the presence of any resources with ties to the African American community—this is something the folks in Oaks are reviewing now. Moore discussed her research on the Mary's Grove Church and the Black community that lived and worked around that church, but that is a bit farther north in Alamance County. Outstanding questions include: what is the real level of community support for this project, and what will the current SHPO staff think about this as a proposed project? Discussion followed about next steps, including getting pricing from consultants, getting SHPO staff to visit, and having further discussions about how this will be funding. The future of the Bethlehem Presbyterian Church is also an issue too—staff needs to follow up with church members to see what has happened.

- b. **Ideas for Identifying and preserving slave cemeteries:** Staff provided a PowerPoint presentation to give members an overview of the ongoing question of how to preserve and protect these fragile historic resources. The county learned a great deal from our work on the project to preserve the Strayhorn Slave Cemetery out at Blackwood Farm Park, where we conducted archaeology to map out all the burials. The mapping revealed clear family groupings and showed numerous youth burials as well as adults. Other cemeteries were discussed, including the Stadler's Slave cemetery up on 86 north, the Johnston Slave Cemetery, the Harvey Clark cemetery at the Durham Tech property, the one at the original site of Harvey's Chapel on Crabtree Creek, and another up in the northeast corner of the county. Looking ahead, there seems to be a responsibility for the HPC to take steps to help identify and protect these endangered sites and to develop a process for protection, for example, permanent markers, fences and interpretive signs. Only a small percentage of these resources have been mapped. In many cases, these are burial grounds for both slaves and then free blacks, often with burials continuing well into the 20th century. This can be an asset to current efforts by Black descendants seeking to locate their ancestors. Some BOCC members are very interested in this topic. This will be an ongoing discussion.
- c. **Summer Meeting Schedule:** Staff noted that most years, the HPC agrees to take one month off each summer. Members discussed options and agreed to cancel the July meeting. Our next meeting will be August 24th.
- d. **Membership:** Staff has been discussing HPC membership with several qualified candidates and has some positive leads. With luck, we will be able to enlist a new member this fall to replace Susan Ballard.

ITEM #6: UPDATES AND INFORMATION ITEMS

- a. **Book Project:** Author Laura Phillips is now working on editing her initial drafts of the architectural and historical essays, after Catherine Bishir looked at them and directed her to create better introductory paragraphs. Then she will go back over all the entries and edit those as her final phase of work.
- b. **Annual Report and Work Plan feedback from the BOCC:** Menius and staff attended the work session and received positive feedback on the book project and the cemetery

study. There is also interest in our proposed marker program, so we will need to reconvene our marker subcommittee to move this forward.

c. **Open air time:** No items to report.

ITEM #7:

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ADJOURNMENT: The meeting was adjourned at 8:43 pm.

Meeting summary by Peter Sandbeck, DEAPR staff