

Orange County
HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION

Meeting Summary

September 23, 2020 at 6:30 pm
Virtual meeting via Go To Meeting

MEMBERS PRESENT: Susan Ballard, Todd Dickinson, Tom Loter, Art Menius, Paul Noe,

MEMBERS ABSENT: Steve Peck

STAFF PRESENT: Peter Sandbeck

GUESTS: None

ITEM #1: CALL TO ORDER

Chair Dickinson called the meeting to order at 6:32 pm.

ITEM #2: CHANGES OR ADDITIONS TO AGENDA: Staff asked to be able to add an update about the SHPO's training requirements for our CLG status.

ITEM #3: APPROVAL OF MINUTES for January 22, 2020 (Attachment 1): Menius moved to approve the minutes; seconded by Loter; motion approved.

ITEM #4: DISCUSSION ITEMS

- a. **Presentation on Davis Farm and Cotton Gin:** Staff provided a powerpoint program depicting the Davis Farm and Cotton Gin complex, consisting of a mid 19th century log house and outbuildings, with later additions and a cotton gin and press dating from the 1870s. The early log house was expanded by two periods of additions. The outbuildings were all moved. The early kitchen and smokehouse survive. Down the hill and west of the house is a barn that houses an 1870s cotton gin and a unique hand-built cotton press, all still intact but threatened by ongoing roof leaks. The gin would have been powered first by a portable steam engine, and later by a small gas engine or tractor. Staff believes the gin and press and associated barn merit consideration for landmark status as a tool for long-term preservation. Our ordinance allows us to grant funds to a landmark for preservation purposes. Discussion followed with a focus on the special significance of the cotton gin and the question of public access. Member hoped to help find a way to help preserve it on site. The setting of the gin within that vernacular complex is part of its significance. And there is the larger story of how cotton growing was part of the story of the county, so the research phase of the landmark process should yield some good material. Staff was directed to proceed with the landmark process, first by doing an evaluation at an upcoming meeting. We can then seek out grant funds that we could pass through.
- b. **Bethlehem Presbyterian Church:** Staff gave a presentation about this history of the congregation, started in 1822 by Rev. Elisha Mitchell (think UNC professor and Mt. Mitchell) and others, and its several churches, up to the present imposing 1922 church. The small congregation is slowly losing members so is at present debating the idea of what to do with this wonderful building as a sort of succession plan. One thought is to engage the county in a discussion about using the church as a local community center. As part of this conversation, the HPC should be prepared to comment on the building's significance and its potential for a future landmark, as a recommendation to the BOCC should the county wish to become involved in some capacity. Discussion followed about the architectural and historical significance and how the HPC might wish to proceed with

landmark status. Other issues include the eventual care of the important cemetery, and the potential for archaeological significance for the earlier church sites.

- c. **Prospects for New National Register Nominations:** Staff raised the topic of how the HPC might be able to assist with having the original Occaneechi Village archaeological sites nominated to the National Register. It is on property owned by the Classical American Homes Preservation Trust (Ayr Mount etc.). This might be a good collaborative project to undertake with Dr. Steve Davis with the UNC archaeology program. This would require permission from the owners as part of this process, as well as participation from the Tribal Council. Members expressed strong support for this project. Another potential is the Troy and Roberta Andrews House, which is the remarkable stone modernist house designed by a student of Frank Lloyd Wright's. Noe asked for an update on the important archaeological site of the old tannery, between the Dickson House and the Post Office.
- d. **White Cross School proposed landscape improvements:** The owner is proposing to make minor improvements to the site around this landmark property, such as paving some parking spaces and adding some plantings. The use of the building has been changed from a preschool to a multi-tenant space for artists and craftspeople. Staff presented the proposed site plans and photos, noting where gravel parking spots will be paved. County planning ordinance requires a certain number of major trees along the front right of way, along NC 54. Our design guidelines stipulate the preservation of important historic vistas of the historic property, so are in conflict with the county planning rule. Staff reviewed and approved this project as presented in these plans as a minor works COA which allows for administrative approval if the project meets our design guidelines, which this does. Staff is sharing this project with members for informational purposes as per our ordinance.
- e. **Lands Legacy Action Plan update:** Staff referred members to the draft updated Lands Legacy Action Plan provided by Chris Hirni, Land Conservation Manager, for our review and information. This reflects our major concerns we voiced the last time, in 2017, such as assisting the HPC with funding for landmark and National Register reports, archaeological projects, and promoting land protection projects that also protect significant historic or cultural resources. Unfortunately, the funds we get from this program come from a professional services line item, so are not available to fund bricks and mortar preservation work, such as the stabilization of the old cotton gin.
- f. **Added discussion about CLG training requirements for 2019-20:** Staff reported that the SHPO CLG coordinator is requiring that at least two members view three CLG training videos each. So we are short. Those of you who have already viewed one or two of these need to view one more and write up a brief report and submit to staff by Sept. 30. Also PNC is holding this year's annual conference virtually, on Oct. 15 and 16.
- g. **Membership:** It is time for us to ramp up a search for new members to have as backups.

ITEM #6: UPDATES AND INFORMATION ITEMS

- a. **Piper-Cox House update:** The restoration work is completed, and it looks great. The state found some mold in the basement and so they are now working on that.
- b. **Book project status/update:**
Editor/author Laura Phillips has written approximately 120 property entries for Hillsborough and 100 for the county. The lack of detailed research continues to slow us down. The Alliance is preparing to enter into a contract with our book designer so we can get that next phase started soon. We need nicely designed promotional materials to send with our funding request letter.
- c. **Possible dendrochronology project:** At the suggestion of Catherine Bishir, we are

going to partner with the Alliance to apply for a Covington Grant to initiate a project to do the dendrochronology on a group of 5-10 buildings in Hillsborough, to support our current research and writing for the book project. We'll hear back in late October.

d. Open air time: Noe discussed the old Cameron Ice House that is behind the Cameron Park School, and that there is a boy scout project to develop an interpretive sign for this. Staff reviewed the history of the restoration of the ice house in the 1990s by the Preservation Fund. It is owned by the Board of Education, as is the Hughes Academy. There is an archaeological issue if a post hole has to be dug for the new sign. Noe volunteered to monitor the digging of the post hole.

ITEM #7: ADJOURNMENT: the meeting was adjourned at 8:12.

Meeting summary by Peter Sandbeck, DEAPR staff