

**Charlotte-Mecklenburg
HISTORIC LANDMARKS COMMISSION
Projects Committee Minutes
Virtual Meeting
May 5, 2022
6:04 p.m. – 7:11 p.m.**

Present:

Mr. Brian Clarke, Survey Committee Chair/HLC Vice-Chair
Mr. Jeffrey Parsons, Projects Committee Chair
Mr. Edwin Wilson, HLC Treasurer
Mr. Jack Thomson, HLC Executive Director
Ms. Elizabeth Stuart, HLC Senior Administrative Assistant

Absent:

Mr. Robert Barfield, HLC Secretary
Mr. William Hughes, HLC Chair

Note: This meeting was held virtually through the Webex video conferencing platform.

Mr. Parsons stated that a quorum was not yet present but was expected soon. Mr. Parsons welcomed Dr. Dan Morrill to the meeting.

1. Update on Wallace House

Mr. Wilson stated that he and Elizabeth Grillo, realtor, will meet next week to discuss the property and noted his anticipation of having a listing price for the Commission at the next meeting.

Mr. Thomson reminded the Committee that he was empowered by the Commission to use Ms. Grillo's services.

Note: Mr. Clarke joined the meeting at 6:16 p.m.

2. Update and Presentation on Mount Carmel Church

Mr. Thomson stated that he has had recent discussions with Johnson C. Smith University (JCSU) representatives regarding the stabilization of the church. Mr. Thomson stated that he does not anticipate that the project will be as costly as previously expected. Mr. Thomson noted that he asked JCSU's designer, Neighboring Concepts, to apply for a Certificate of Appropriateness for the building's stabilization to be considered at the Commission's June meeting. Mr. Thomson stated that the project will be phased and that he is comfortable funding the building's stabilization but is not ready to proceed with the next step.

Mr. Thomson showed a map of the JCSU campus and noted the location of the proposed work. Mr. Thomson showed the current condition of the church and stated that the majority of the interior and sanctuary will be demolished before being reconstructed. Mr. Thomson noted that

undesigned sections, including the pastor's office and classrooms, will be removed. Mr. Thomson explained that the building will have a new roof but that the interior will be a shell once the stabilization project is completed. Mr. Thomson stated that specific key historic elements that are noted in the designation will be documented, and conservation or replication will be determined based upon condition.

Mr. Thomson stated that if the Commission were to approve the project at its June meeting, at a future meeting the Commission could recommend deploying the revolving fund up to a certain amount. Mr. Thomson stated that he does not yet know how much the project will cost but noted that he has informed JCSU that he supports providing funding that will allow them time to resolve the building's decaying condition.

Mr. Parsons asked about the Commission's role in this transaction and noted that the Commission had a contract two years ago which stated that the property would be transferred to the Commission while undergoing renovations before being transferred back to JCSU.

Mr. Thomson stated that the idea is still the same and that the Commission would take possession of the church for a dollar and assume responsibility for the building's stabilization. Mr. Thomson explained that the Commission would secure other properties that would at a minimum match the revolving fund investment. Mr. Thomson stated that he would distribute the schematic set from Neighboring Concepts to the Committee.

3. Preservation Easements Strategy

Mr. Thomson described Oak Ridge, N.C.'s new initiative to use easements as part of its historic preservation strategy. Mr. Thomson stated that this initiative indicates that units of local government are willing to get involved in conservation and preservation easements. Mr. Thomson noted that nonprofit organizations have begun using preservation easements more and are moving away from options to purchase due to the current market.

Mr. Wilson stated that easements should be added to other typical preservation methods to widen protections. Mr. Wilson stated that easements will be useful for property owners who want more protection for their properties.

Mr. Thomson described how funds eventually end up with a nonprofit easement holder to use for a legal defense fund. Mr. Thomson stated that he is investigating how the Historic Landmarks Commission can take a similar path to develop a program to purchase and place easements.

Mr. Wilson stated that there is value associated with providing a plaque or other marker to homeowners, indicating the presence of an easement.

Mr. Parsons questioned if the Commission could provide funding from the revolving fund for easements and have Preserve Mecklenburg, a nonprofit, identify easement options which the Commission would enforce.

Mr. Thomson stated that this scenario may be viable. Mr. Thomson noted that there would be limits on prospective easements due to having a real interest in landmarks. Mr. Thomson explained that the basis of grants such as in Oak Ridge is to have funding to support the

operational organization of monitoring easements with a potential law defense as needed in the future. Mr. Thomson noted that having someone in the field to inspect properties is necessary.

Mr. Clarke stated his support of using easements to make the revolving fund more impactful. Mr. Clarke stated his concern of having a grant program for historic landmarks. Mr. Clarke asked if the Charlotte Historic District Commission (HDC) is involved in this effort. Mr. Thomson stated he had not yet reached out to the HDC.

Mr. Wilson noted that the Commission is not financially able to buy properties continuously and noted that the Commission has previously sold properties at big losses. Mr. Wilson stated that the Commission should determine how it is spending money and how much impact it is having. Mr. Wilson stated his anticipation that if done effectively, easements can encourage more public engagement and more landmark designations. Mr. Wilson stated that easements can widen the impact of the Commission.

Mr. Thomson stated that if property owners are not interested in a house plaque that a capital improvement scenario could instead be offered.

Mr. Clarke stated that property owners already receive a house plaque when their properties are designated and that properties designated as historic landmarks could continue to receive that plaque while those who agree to the placement of an easement can receive something more prominent such as a road sign. Mr. Parsons agreed with Mr. Clarke.

Mr. Thomson stated that staff is working on a new designation flow chart to assist both property owners and the Commission with understanding the steps of designation. Mr. Thomson stated that this issue will be labeled a preservation agreement and explained clearly in its inclusion in the flow chart.

Dr. Morrill stated that Preserve Mecklenburg (PMI) is interested in assisting the Commission with easements. Dr. Morrill noted the possibility for PMI and the Commission to collaborate on educating the public on easements. Mr. Parsons stated that a benefit of PMI is that it can protect historic resources that are not designated landmarks.

Mr. Parsons noted that he will report to the full Commission that the Committee is interested in actively pursuing easements as a preservation tool.

Mr. Thomson stated that he has plans to have lunch with Myrick Howard, President of Preservation North Carolina, and will discuss Oak Ridge's efforts.

4. Old Business

Mr. Parsons asked about the status of the Excelsior Club. Mr. Thomson stated that there is no update and that the property has parking challenges. Mr. Thomson stated that he has reached out to the property owner but has not received a response.

5. New Business

Mr. Parsons stated that he was recently appointed to the board of Preserve Mecklenburg and noted the potential for cooperation between the organizations.

The meeting adjourned at 7:11 p.m.