

TOWN OF BOONE
HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION
ADVISORY MEETING MINUTES
January 7, 2025, 3:00 p.m.
Planning & Inspections Department & WebEx Video Conferencing

Historic Preservation Commission Members in Attendance: Vardell Smyth-Chair, Bettie Bond-Vice-Chair, and Ayden Basinger

Council Liaison: Virginia Roseman (via WebEx)

Town Staff in Attendance: Jessica Mitchell-Advanced Planning Specialist, Alyson Wuagneux-Customer Service Specialist, and Brenda Henson-Board Clerk

Call to Order

Chair Smyth called the Boone Historic Preservation Commission meeting held in the Planning & Inspections Conference Room at 680 West King Street and via WebEx to order at 3:03 p.m.

Adoption of Agenda

Chair Smyth suggested that the discussion with Drew Gruber regarding the Stoneman's Raid Interpretative Panel be moved up on the agenda before the Approval of Minutes and Approval of Written Decision.

Commission Member Basinger made a motion, seconded by Vice-Chair Bond, to adopt the agenda as amended.

Vote: Aye – 3

Nay – 0

The motion passed.

Stoneman's Raid Interpretative Panel Discussion with Drew Gruber (Civil War Trails)

Ms. Mitchell introduced Drew Gruber with the Civil War Trails marker program.

Mr. Gruber complimented the HPC for making a difference in the community. He explained that Civil War Trails was a multi-state travel and tourism initiative. Mr. Gruber noted that while consumers often viewed them as being public history or educational, their goal was economic development. Civil War Trails (CWT) aimed to provide a snack bite of history while people spent money in the community.

Mr. Gruber stated that he reported to a board of 26, 25 of which were in the tourism industry. He noted that they had just over 1,525 sites across six states, and he dealt with 520 municipal partners. Mr. Gruber stated that CWT signs should fuel people's imaginations in bite-sized bits and have active language that would cause someone to imagine the space around them and maybe even empathize with the people who were there. He explained that each sign was marketed internationally and was built to be edited, updated, moved, and changed. Mr. Gruber stated that the understanding of history changed and the consumer's appetite for word choices changed, so signs should not be put in concrete or built-in materials that could not be edited.

Mr. Gruber noted that the HPC had been extremely thorough, to the point where he had received too much information from them. He stated that he had a nice photo showing the sign's proposed location looking up at the Council house. He had the property owner's permission forms and the membership form. Step two was the draft content creation. Mr. Gruber explained that the draft needed to be a one-page Word document in active voice containing the proposed text of the sign, including any quotes, as well as captions or citations associated with the map and the image of Major Myles Keogh. The word count should not exceed a total of

275 words. Mr. Gruber stated that once the one-page document and the two proposed media pieces (map and image) were submitted to him, he would put the submittal in front of his board members, editor, and a blind review panel that was made up of people from all walks of life, ages, colors, and creeds. The blind review process would determine if the content made someone want to stand on the site and want to know more, if it was just a data dump, or if there was too much information. Mr. Gruber felt that HPC's text was very close to what he would call perfect. Mr. Gruber stated that all the citations documenting the soldiers did not need to be submitted. He noted that a quote by someone who experienced the occupation in Boone should be included as part of the 275 words, whether in the text's main body or pulled out as an inset quote.

Mr. Gruber noted that the blind review panel would not like the big overview map of the campaign path through Boone. He stated that multiple other Civil War Trail sites used that map showing the route of Stoneman's Raid. He suggested that the HPC create a sketch map of how the engagement happened in Boone.

Mr. Gruber stated that the line of text regarding the three soldiers who died from disease and are buried at the Boone Cemetery should be cut from the text. He suggested that if the cemetery was within the confines of the street fighting of downtown, a little dot on the map indicating the Boone Cemetery could be inserted as an added location for the public to visit. Mr. Gruber said that creating a map showing how the battle flowed through town could allow for incorporating other signs or sites in town that the public could visit.

Mr. Gruber stated that the minute the sign was erected and went live, they would start recording visitor feedback and making edits to the sign. Because the sign was editable, Mr. Gruber suggested that the HPC not vote on the exact language to allow for the fluidity of language changes to the sign.

Ms. Mitchell stated that the Town Council requested the proposed text mentioning the Boone Cemetery and that Town Council members wanted the reference to the Cemetery to be in the text.

Mr. Gruber suggested the following possible edits to the text:

In the early morning hours of March 25, 1865, 6,000 Union troopers rode into town from your (left or right), led by Major Myles Keogh of the 12th Kentucky Calvary. They more than tripled the town's population in a matter of minutes. Later that spring, on April 2, Colonel Kirk's 2nd and 3rd mounted infantry would arrive in occupied Boone for several weeks. Three of those soldiers who died from disease are buried at the nearby Boone Cemetery. While here, they had orders to blockade in port and mountain passes.

Mr. Gruber stated that the map would do a large amount of work on wayfinding and orienting.

Council Liaison Roseman stated that removing any reference to the Boone Cemetery from the text would not be an option from the Town Council's perspective. She felt that Mr. Gruber's suggestion to include a map dot for the Cemetery was a good idea and appreciated the connection between Stoneman's Raid and the Boone Cemetery. Mr. Gruber responded that they always wanted the Civil War Trail signs to direct people to other amenities in town, even if they were not Civil War amenities, so long as they were history-oriented amenities.

Council Liaison Roseman asked if Vice-Chair Bond was able to find any information from the owners of the Blair Farm since Stoneman's Raid occurred near the current Blair Farm property. Vice-Chair Bond replied that she talked with Sharon Tolbert, who told her no stories or documentation about Stoneman's Raid had been passed down from ancestors. Vice-Chair Bond added that the Blair Farm, State Farm area, the Greenway, and the dams along the river were all locations that could potentially be flagged on the location map. She stated that she also spoke with Jim Lewis, whose ancestors were Blackburns, and she felt he might be able to offer some historical knowledge of Stoneman's Raid to the HPC.

Chair Smyth stated he would work to revise the map and text to incorporate Mr. Gruber's suggestions for discussion at the next HPC advisory meeting.

Vice-Chair Bond stated that when the sign was erected, Mr. Gruber should attend the unveiling. Mr. Gruber replied that he had been doing this job for 9 ½ years and had only been invited to two ribbon cuttings.

Mr. Gruber stated that once a final draft was approved, they would design the sign and select a date for installation. During the installation, they would take photos of the sign going in and create a draft press release. The Town could edit the press release and include a ribbon-cutting date. He added that after installation, CWT would monitor visitor comments and maintain the sign.

With nothing further, Mr. Gruber left the meeting.

Approval of Minutes

Commission Member Basinger made a motion, seconded by Vice-Chair Bond, to approve the December 3, 2024, advisory meeting minutes and the December 10, 2024, quasi-judicial meeting minutes as written.

Vote: Aye – 3
Nay – 0

The motion passed.

Approval of Written Decision

Commission Member Basinger made a motion, seconded by Vice-Chair Bond, to approve the Written Decision for Case A24-0698 Professional Office Group – Certificate of Appropriateness as written.

Vote: Aye – 3
Nay – 0

The motion passed.

HPC Work Plan

Ms. Mitchell explained that the HPC Work Plan was created yearly to present to the Town Council at the annual Planning Retreat. The document would provide the Council with an overview of the accomplishments of the HPC during the past fiscal year and any future budgeting needs and allow them to give direction on tasks for the upcoming fiscal year. Ms. Mitchell stated that Staff would request the HPC be allowed to focus on completing the current in-progress tasks before engaging in any additional tasks as Staff continues the comprehensive plan update process, with the Work Plan to be revisited when those tasks are complete.

Ongoing tasks include Stoneman’s Raid, the Jones House Local Historic Landmark Designation report, the Boone Cemetery Interpretative Panels, and UDO Appendix D revisions.

Chair Smyth noted that Public Works had cleared brush and trees from the Boone Cemetery, which looked great.

Staff Updates

Statement of Conformity Report

Ms. Mitchell stated there was one new application for a Statement of Conformity for the former M-Prints building. The request was to repaint the façade.

Ms. Mitchell stated that the next HPC meeting was scheduled for February 4, 2025. She noted that there were no cases for the February 11 quasi-judicial meeting. Chair Smyth stated he would be out of town soon and would let Staff know if his trip would coincide with any HPC meeting dates.

Council Liaison Roseman asked about the stipend for HPC members who attended quasi-judicial meetings. Ms. Mitchell replied that members had submitted the required information and that stipends had been dispersed for the third quarter. Council Liaison Roseman asked that budgeting for HPC member stipends be included in the Work Plan and presented to the Town Council at the Planning Retreat and the Budget Retreat.

HPC Member Updates

Vice-Chair Bond invited everyone to the Watauga County Public Library on January 16, 2025, at 5:30 p.m. for a presentation by the Watauga Historical Society. She also noted that January 29 was the Chinese New Year.

Adjournment

Commission Member Basinger made a motion, seconded by Vice-Chair Bond, to adjourn the meeting at 4:05 p.m.

Vote: Aye – 3
Nay – 0

The motion passed.

Vardell Smyth, Chair

Brenda Henson, Board Clerk