

TOWN OF BOONE
HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION
MEETING MINUTES
JUNE 8, 2021, 3:00 p.m.

Historic Preservation Commission Members in Attendance:

Chairperson Eric Plaag, Bettie Bond, and Chuck Watkins

Council Liaisons:

Rennie Brantz and Virginia Roseman

Town Staff in Attendance:

Christy Turner-Senior Planner and Brenda Henson-Administrative Support Specialist

Others Present:

Mark Freed-Director of Cultural Resources, and Lane Moody-Downtown Boone Development Coordinator

Call to Order

Chairperson Eric Plaag called the meeting of the Boone Historic Preservation Commission, held via WebEx, a video conferencing software, to order on Tuesday, June 8, 2021, at 3:05 p.m.

Adoption of Agenda

Chairperson Plaag noted that Vice-Chairperson Pollitt and Member Watkins' terms on the HPC would expire on June 30, 2021. Neither Vice-Chairperson Pollitt nor Member Watkins wished to continue to serve on the Commission until their position is filled.

Chairperson Plaag made a motion, seconded by Member Watkins, to amend the agenda to discuss the HPC's board size after Public Comment and a discussion of a press release regarding local cemeteries after Cemetery Guidelines.

Vote:

Aye – All

Nay – None

The motion passed.

Chairperson Plaag polled the members: Member Bond, Member Watkins, and Chairperson Plaag

Approval of Meeting Minutes

Member Bond made a motion, seconded by Member Watkins, to approve the April 13, 2021 meeting minutes as amended.

Vote:

Aye – All

Nay – None

The motion passed.

Chairperson Plaag polled the members: Member Bond, Member Watkins, and Chairperson Plaag

Chairperson Plaag stated that the May 11, 2021 HPC meeting minutes contained numerous run-on sentences, especially in the Blue Ridge Tourist Court discussion. He asked that staff review those minutes, make necessary corrections, and place those minutes on the July agenda for consideration.

Chairperson Plaag made a motion, seconded by Member Bond, to table consideration of the May 11, 2021, Historic Preservation Commission meeting minutes until the July HPC meeting.

Vote:

Aye – All

Nay – None

The motion passed.

Chairperson Plaag polled the members: Member Bond, Member Watkins, and Chairperson Plaag

Public Comment

No individuals requested the opportunity to speak during public comment.

Historic Preservation Commission Board Size

Chairperson Plaag said that the Historic Preservation Commission is structured to have seven available seats on the board. He said previously, two of those seats were dedicated to the council liaisons. And they had the voting capability in the meetings. He said he thought as a result of a change in the state legislature, the council liaisons were stripped of their ability to vote on commission matters.

Chairperson Plaag explained that up until a year ago, the HPC had a full board, including council liaisons. He said then Former HPC Member Teresa Pearman resigned. He said now the HPC had been notified of two more resignations from Member Watkins and Vice-Chairperson Pollitt. He said the HPC is suddenly in a position where there are only two occupied seats on the board, and it is supposed to have seven seats.

Chairperson Plaag noted that approximately a year ago, the Council added a student member position to the HPC board. He said this technically meant that eight seats were available. He said to his knowledge, and there has not been a student application received for the HPC. He said there was one non-student application received recently, but that applicant lived outside of the Town of Boone's jurisdiction. He said he thought the application was withdrawn because the person was ineligible to apply.

Chairperson Plaag noted that he and other HPC members had asked people over the years if they were interested in applying for a vacant HPC position. He said the people that he has invited to apply for a vacant position all live out of the Town of Boone's jurisdiction. He talked about the loss of the extra-territorial jurisdiction, and the members that were lost as a result of this change.

Chairperson Plaag said that he has discussed with Ms. Jane Shook, Director of Planning and Inspections, many options for addressing this problem. He said that one suggested alternative was to change the eligibility requirements. He suggested including people in the eligibility requirements that work within the Town of Boone. He said these people would be employed by a business that is headquartered in the Town of Boone. He pointed out what happens when a person stops being employed by a Town of Boone employer. He said, how do you prove someone's employment as part of this process.

Chairperson Plaag said another option is to allow qualified people who are property owners in the Town of Boone, but are not necessarily residents of the Town of Boone to apply for an HPC position. He said he knows a couple of people who have the historical background to serve on the HPC board.

Chairperson Plaag talked about the risks that you could potentially have with an applicant. He explained you could have an applicant who is opposed to preservation, who is the owner of 17 properties in Downtown Boone. He said that applicant could find their way onto the Commission and get distracted and decide to vote for their interests and not necessarily the interests of historic preservation in our community.

Chairperson Plaag said that he had asked a person to apply who is a building designer who lives here in the community and is very attuned to preservation. He said that person indicated to him that he intends to apply.

Chairperson Plaag asked Member Watkins if he knew anything that the HPC could be doing differently to attract applicants to the HPC. Member Watkins said it is difficult to get someone to serve on non-profit boards unless they have a coherent interest in what the board is doing. He suggested that the leadership over the Appalachian State University history programs encourage one of their students to apply. He said in the past there were no problems in getting interns to serve on committees. He noted that serving on a town board looks good on a student's resume.

Chairperson Plaag noted that the HPC is entering the quasi-judicial phase and would be making quasi-judicial decisions about the property belonging to Boone residents.

Chairperson Plaag asked Mayor Brantz and Council Liaison Roseman their thoughts about the possible solutions to filling vacant seats on Town boards. Mayor Brantz responded and suggested possibly working through the state legislators in Raleigh to change the state regulatory requirements. She said that the idea to decrease the board size was brought to the Council's attention, and it was proposed to reduce the HPC board size to three. She said that she disagreed with the number three for the board size because she thought that number was too small. She explained that the thought behind the three board members was that they could proceed with only two voting board members. She further explained that two board members would be historical experts.

Ms. Turner told the HPC that the Town of Boone has hired Ms. Laney Pilkington to fill the position of Administrative Specialist/Communications to handle the social media for the Town. Ms. Turner suggested asking Mr. John Ward, Town Manager, and Ms. Pilkington about putting the HPC board member vacancies on social media.

Chairperson Plaag stated that he would like to propose a five-member board exclusive of the student member position who has a one-year term and voting rights. Council Liaison Roseman pointed out that there have to be four members to hear the cases. She agreed with the proposal for a five-member board.

Member Watkins pointed out that one thing that would make the student member more palatable would be if they were enrolled in a quasi-professional graduate program. He recommended that this type of student board member have specialized knowledge in architecture or a similar advanced program. Council Liaison Roseman agreed with Member Watkins on his recommendation for the HPC student board member.

Motion and Vote:

Chairperson Plaag made a motion, seconded by Member Watkins, to recommend to Council that the number of Historic Preservation Commission board members be reduced to a total of five voting members and four of the members are in three-year appointed positions with one position being a one-year student member position to take effect as soon as possible.

Vote:

Aye- All

Nay – Nay

The motion passed.

Chairperson Plaag polled the members: Member Watkins, Member Bond, and Chairperson Plaag

Discussion ensued on the action item for the recommendation to change the HPC board size. Chairperson Plaag asked Ms. Turner to create the action request for this topic for the Council agenda. Ms. Turner confirmed that the Planning Staff could present the action request to Council at their July 2021 meeting.

Chairperson Plaag pointed out that he needed to amend the previous motion and vote for this agenda topic. He noted that it was necessary to add the proposed qualifications of the student board member that would serve on the HPC.

Motion and Vote:

Chairperson Plaag made a motion to amend the previous motion, seconded by Member Watkins to also recommend to Council that the student board member position should be a graduate student who is enrolled in a historic preservation, architecture or similar graduate-level program.

Vote:

Aye – All

Nay – None

The motion passed.

Chairperson Plaag polled the members: Member Watkins, Member Bond, and Chairperson Plaag

Ms. Turner pointed out that the Council previously voted to allow students from elementary schools to serve on Town boards to gain experience from the work of the committees.

Discussion ensued on the process for filling vacant board positions. Chairperson Plaag explained that at every Council Meeting, Mayor Brantz gives a board report with the status of each board. Chairperson Plaag further explained that at every monthly Council meeting, the public is encouraged to apply at Town Hall for the vacant board positions.

Ms. Turner said that she could contact Dr. Kristen Baldwin-Deathridge and Dr. Andrea Burns in the Appalachian State University, Department of History, Public History Program and send them the Student Board application. She said that she would explain to them the situation with the HPC's student board member vacancy.

Council Liaison Roseman suggested that vacant board member positions be announced on the radio by the active board members. She also suggested that Member Bond be the one to represent the HPC on the radio. Chairperson Plaag agreed with Council Liaison Roseman's suggestion. He noted that there could be a prepared script that is approved by the Town that could be read to encourage people to participate. Ms. Turner asked if Chairperson Plaag could put the vacant board positions information on the Digital Watauga website.

Discussion ensued on a press release for the HPC's vacant board positions. Chairperson Plaag asked if the HPC could do a press release for the HPC's vacant board positions. He said that he could add the HPC's vacant board positions on the Digital Watauga's Facebook and Instagram pages. He noted that they now have 4,000 followers on Facebook, and most of them are in the Boone area.

Junaluska Local Historical Marker Dedication Event

Chairperson Plaag began the discussion on this agenda item and showed a photo of the location of the placement of the Junaluska Local Historical Marker. He noted that he previously emailed this photo to the HPC for their review. He said he thought that Ms. Roberta Jackson, a member of the Junaluska Heritage Association, was invited to this meeting to comment on this photo. Chairperson Plaag noted that he met with Mr. Deron Geouque, the Watauga County Manager, and a Town of Boone Public Works employee who contacted a locater service to discuss the exact location for the marker on the site. Chairperson Plaag said that there were no issues with the locater service.

Discussion ensued on the ownership of the art pad at the corner of North Depot Street and Queen Street. Ms. Lane Moody, Downtown Boone Development Coordinator, said that she and Ms. Nicole Harmon are working on the ownership of the art pad.

Ms. Moody informed the HPC that there is a potential for public art to come back to this art pad. Chairperson Plaag noted that this art pad has been vacant for at least four years. Ms. Moody said that she thinks it belonged to Mr. Wayne Trap. She said that Mr. Trap took his art piece home to refurbish it but unfortunately, Mr. Trap passed away. She said Mr. Trap had donated his art piece to the Town of Boone.

Chairperson Plaag asked Ms. Moody to follow up with Mr. Geouque regarding the Town of Boone possibly taking over the managing of the art pad at the corner of North Depot Street and Queen Street. Chairperson Plaag said that Mr. Geouque noted that he thought maybe the Watauga County Library controlled this art pad. Ms. Moody agreed to follow up on it.

Chairperson Plaag noted that he felt from the HPC's discussion in this meeting the HPC is alright with the placement of the said marker. He said that he would inform Mr. John Ward, the Town Manager, of this information.

Discussion ensued on the presenters at the Junaluska Local Historical Marker Ceremony. Chairperson Plaag confirmed that Mayor Brantz would open the ceremony. Chairperson Plaag said that he would speak regarding the significance of the said marker. Ms. Roberta Jackson from the JHA would be the last speaker at the ceremony. Ms. Turner said the Junaluska Choir will sing at the ceremony. Ms. Turner said that Ms. Jackson requested that Pastor Mike Mathes give an invocation.

Discussion ensued on the order of the ceremony. Chairperson Plaag and Member Bond suggested that the proposed order of the ceremony be as follows: Mayor Brantz, Chairperson Plaag, Ms. Roberta Jackson, invocation, the unveiling of the marker, and the Junaluska Choir. Chairperson Plaag asked for a consensus from the HPC to allow the JHA to change the order of the ceremony if they wanted to.

Chairperson Plaag asked the Planning Staff to create a program to be handed out at the ceremony that lists the order of events and includes the marker text with the ceremony date and location.

Ms. Turner said that the Planning Staff had completed the following tasks in preparation for the ceremony: mailed out the invitations for the ceremony, is working with Ms. Laney Pilkington to do the press release for the ceremony, invited the Appalachian State University, Head of the Department of Diversity and they accepted the invitation, invited the Head of the Department of Diversity who suggested that the ASU Chancellor be invited to attend the ceremony and those invitations have been sent out, invited the ASU Diversity Officer Cashae Cook from the University Police Department and she has accepted the invitation to the ceremony and invitations have been sent out to the members of the Mennonite Brethren Church and others in the Junaluska Community.

Chairperson Plaag suggested that invitations to the ceremony be sent to the Black Lives matter group. Ms. Turner said that Officer Cashae Cook said she would email the said group the invitation.

Ms. Turner confirmed with Mr. Mark Freed, Director of Cultural Resources, that he would be providing a tent, chairs, podium, sound system, video recording, and photos. He requested for the HPC to provide him with the number of chairs that he would need to deliver to the event.

Inventory of Town of Boone Cemeteries

Chairperson Plaag reminded the HPC that they had authorized him to meet with Ms. Allison Meade, Town Attorney, to discuss the Hayes, Brian, Greene Cemetery. He said that he has not yet met with Ms. Meade to discuss the said topic. He said he would report back to the HPC in July on the result of their discussion.

Local Cemeteries Press Release

Chairperson Plaag talked about the press release regarding locating cemeteries in the Town of Boone. He said that he would like an update on the status of the press release. Ms. Turner said that the Planning Staff would try to have it completed by July. Chairperson Plaag noted that the Planning Staff does not need permission from the HPC to work on the press release. He did ask the Planning Staff to send it to him for his review, and he would place it on the Digital Watauga Facebook page to get that feedback. He said that if we get people excited about participating and telling us about cemeteries, this might be a chance to recruit some people to the HPC

Chairperson Plaag said that he had found a total of seven properties with cemeteries. He said he found them through the Town of Boone GIS system by entering various spellings of the word cemetery.

Cemetery Guidelines

Chairperson Plaag explained that Member Bond and Council Liaison Brantz are working on possible criteria for the HPC to use when determining if cemeteries should or should not be considered for acquisition by the Town. Member Bond said she had reviewed some of the Hillsboro, North Carolina guidelines, and she felt the HPC could use some of these guidelines. Council Liaison Brantz said he found some valuable information from the National Register Bulletin, and the HPC might use it in the proposed guidelines or criteria.

Chairperson Plaag clarified that the HPC should be working on a way to evaluate whether the Town should be spending time on a cemetery. Council Liaison Roseman explained the Council's direction to the HPC regarding the proposed cemetery guidelines or criteria.

Discussion ensued on family burials on residential properties. Ms. Turner said that someone contacted the Town of Boone, and they wanted information about being buried in their back yard. She noted that the Planning Staff asked Ms. Meade to research it. Ms. Meade said she found out that it is legal to bury a body in your yard. And they only have to be buried 18 inches from the surface of the ground on a residential property.

Ms. Turner informed the HPC that the Boone Methodist Church now has a columbarium. Council Liaison Roseman said the catholic church has a wall for cremains. Council Liaison Roseman asked if it counted as a cemetery. Chairperson Plaag noted that we might need to include this type of thing in the inventory of cemeteries. He said the Town could then decide what they want to do with that information. He said the HPC should probably contact all Boone churches and ask them if they have a memorial garden or graveyard, or cemetery attached with their church. Member Bond said that the Epistle church behind Earthfare has a memorial garden, and she thought it was just for cremains. Chairperson Plaag pointed out that some of the churches may be within the town limits. He also pointed out that their cemeteries may not be in the town limits and vice versa.

Discussion ensued on the interpretative panels at the Boone Cemetery. Chairperson Plaag talked about the deadline pressure the HPC is under to get the panels completed by the Boone 150 celebration. He spoke of the interpretative signage at the Boone cemetery. He said that he had received an email from Mr. Drew Gruber regarding the status of the Civil War Trails marker. Chairperson Plaag read aloud said email to the HPC. In the email, Mr. Gruber stated that his team is behind trying to catch up on all of the work they could not accomplish in 2019. Mr. Gruber said he has Chairperson Plaag's materials, and Mr. Gruber intends to present them to tourism and his team for consideration. Mr. Gruber also noted that he hopes that he will install the signage in late winter or early spring. Chairperson Plaag said the HPC is looking at 2022 for the proposed Civil War Trails Marker installation. Chairperson Plaag noted that while we are waiting on the Civil War Trails feedback, the HPC can design the other panels of the Boone cemetery because they have nothing to do with the Civil War Trails marker.

Chairperson Plaag said that he could work on preparing the text and images for each of the Boone Cemetery markers, and he could begin this work probably in the fall. He asked the HPC if they felt comfortable waiting until sometime in September for him to begin this work. He said he could bring his work to the HPC in November of 2021 for their consideration. He said the proposed marker information could be sent to Council for their consideration in December of 2021.

Chairperson Plaag confirmed that the HPC had previously discussed doing either three or four panels, including the Union Soldiers marker that might be a Civil War Trails marker. He said if we exclude the possible Civil War Trails marker, there will be either two or three markers left to work on. He said a QR code would need to be created and put on the sign at the cemetery and also linked to the Town GIS database. He confirmed that this work can be done prior to the rest of the work he will be doing for the proposed markers. Chairperson Plaag said

he could research options and costs for the markers from different signage companies. Chairperson Plaag asked Ms. Turner to work with Mr. Chris Miller on the QR code. Ms. Turner confirmed that there was a consensus from the HPC for Ms. Turner to work with Mr. Miller on said topic.

Chairperson Plaag talked about the footstones that would run along the old fence line in the cemetery. He confirmed with the HPC that there was consensus from the HPC to place an interpretive panel on the old fence line. He said this was as opposed to spending about \$16,000.00 for footstones. He suggested conveying this information to Council as part of the whole package that the HPC will present to them in December 2021. Member Bond agreed that the interpretative panel on the old fence line is better than purchasing the footstones. Chairperson Plaag said the interpretative panels would cost about \$2,500.00 to \$3,000.00 per panel. He said he would try to get more cost estimates on the panels. He asked Ms. Turner for the company's name that was used for the panel at the powerhouse on the Greenway Trail. Ms. Turner said she would try to find that company name. Member Bond said there are interpretative signs along the Middlefork Greenway Trail. She said she would try to find out the company that was used for those panels.

Hardin House

Chairperson Plaag said he received from Mr. Geouque's office the additional public records request items he requested. He said that he had done a cursory review of the information, and he will talk more about it at the July HPC meeting. He said his initial reaction is that in many respects, they were not responsive to the questions that were being asked.

Downtown Projects Update

Ms. Turner explained that there would be a joint meeting on June 9, 2021, at 6 p.m. to discuss the public input that has been received by the Planning Department regarding the Downtown Projects. She pointed out that there was a lot of public input on the Green Street area. She said the public input stated that they did not want that area included because it would make quite a few structures non-conforming.

Certificate of Appropriateness

Chairperson Plaag pointed out that the Planning Staff is working on the proposed draft COA application. He asked Ms. Turner about the status of the proposed draft COA application. Ms. Turner said that we are waiting for Ms. Shook to review it. He explained that the Statement of Conformity could not be used for minor works. He further said that the COA does have to include both minor and major works. Chairperson Plaag asked Ms. Turner to send the draft COA application to the HPC for their consideration at their July meeting.

Quasi-Judicial Training

Chairperson Plaag asked Ms. Turner for the status of the scheduling of the quasi-judicial training for the HPC. Ms. Turner said that the quasi-judicial training would possibly include the Board of Adjustment members. She said the HPC will be notified, when the training is scheduled.

Ms. Turner told the HPC that the Council had approved in-person meetings starting in July except for the July Board of Adjustment meeting because of the schedule for sending out adjoining property owner letters (APO). She confirmed that the July HPC meeting would be an in-person meeting at the exact location as before. She confirmed that the July Planning Commission would also be an in-person meeting.

Chairperson Plaag noted his personal opinion regarding attending town meetings from his home. He said that he wondered if the Town might consider allowing remote participation for Town meetings. He said he has enjoyed attending the virtual meetings from his home and not having to travel somewhere else for a meeting. Mr. Freed said that Mr. Ward is aware of this possible approach to Town meetings.

Town Streets Projects

Chairperson Plaag said that he has uploaded to Google Drive all of the Microsoft Word files for the Town Streets. He noted that Member Watkins could access the files there for editing purposes.

Chairperson Plaag went over the outstanding Town Street reports. He said that he is working on reports for King Street, Queen Street, and Water Street. He noted that Member Bond is working on Howard Street and Rivers Street.

Boone 150 Committee

Chairperson Plaag asked Mr. Freed to update how he sees things evolving over the next few months. Mr. Freed said that after the last HPC meeting, he sent out an email to the people interested in helping with the Boone 150 event. He said he highlighted some of the topics that the committee has talked about doing. He said he encouraged the groups to work independently with various ideas for projects while letting the Cultural Resources Department coordinate their efforts. He said his department could coordinate meetings or help with possible funding of projects. He said that Mr. Ward did propose to Council at the last budget retreat a modest and reasonable budget amount for projects for the said event. If needed, Mr. Freed will decide on some projects that can be started and managed by his department. He said hopefully some other groups will come forward to help his department.

Mr. Freed talked about possible events next year, such as live cemetery tours, live talks, or live recordings about Boone and public art projects. He said the HPC might be needed to help propose the language for the public art projects.

Discussion ensued on the date and time of the next meeting for the Boone 150 Committee. Mr. Freed suggested a possible in-person meeting at the Hickory Ridge Homestead on June 28, 2021, from noon to 1 p.m., and possibly another one-hour session in the evening.

Chairperson Plaag said that he would be meeting with the Digital Watauga team and the Watauga County Historical Society officers. He will discuss with them ways to support the Boone 150 Committee projects.

Chairperson Plaag gave an update on the digitizing of the centennial issue that Rachel Rivers Coffey put together. He said that it could be updated to add what has happened over the last 50 years. He said working on this topic could be a way for people to become involved.

Informal Discussion

Chairperson Plaag said after July there will be only two HPC members left on the board. He said he would like to meet with Member Bond to discuss the workload of the HPC. He said he would like to know if this type of meeting would be allowed under the current open meetings law. He asked Ms. Turner to find out if they are allowed to meet under these circumstances.

Chairperson Plaag explained that he would contact the board secretary to discuss the July agenda items.

Adjournment

Commission Member Bond made a motion, seconded by Member Watkins, to adjourn the meeting at 5:00 p.m.

Vote:

Aye - All

Nay – None

The motion passed.

Chairperson Plaag polled the members: Member Bond, Member Watkins, and Chairperson Plaag

Eric Plag, Chairperson

Marlene Crosby, Board Secretary