

**TOWN OF BOONE
HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION
MEETING MINUTES
November 7, 2023, 3:00 p.m.
Planning and Inspections Conference Room & WebEx Video Conferencing**

Historic Preservation Commission Members in Attendance: Chair Eric Plaag (WebEx), Vice-Chair Bettie Bond, Chuck Watkins, Vardell Smyth, and Riley Ziegler

Council Member Liaison: Virginia Roseman

Town Staff in Attendance: Jane Shook- Director of Planning & Inspections, Marlene Crosby-Board Secretary, Amy Davis-Town Manager, Mark Freed-Director of Cultural Resources, Lane Moody-Downtown Boone Development Coordinator

Others in Attendance: Brenda Councill, Jill Privott, Karolyn Mack, Susan Keefe, Roberta Jackson, Anna Boyce Phillips, and JC Feimster

CALL TO ORDER

Chair Eric Plaag called the Boone Historic Preservation Commission meeting to order at 3:01 p.m.

ADOPTION OF AGENDA

Commission Member Ziegler made a motion, seconded by Commission Member Smyth, to adopt the agenda as written.

Vote: Aye – All

Nay – None

The motion passed.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Chair Plaag explained that he had yet to review the September 5 and September 20, 2023, meeting minutes, and tabled the review of the minutes until the December 5, 2023 meeting.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Chair Plaag referred to the Town of Boone Rules of Procedures for Boards and Commissions for public comment. He explained public speakers would have five minutes per speaker.

Chair Plaag opened the floor for public comment.

The first speaker was Ms. Jill Privott, who stated she was a resident of Boone. She noted she had submitted a letter to the town about the proposed revisions made to the Boone Cemetery Interpretative Panels. She indicated the letter included proposed changes that she hoped the HPC would consider. [See November 7, 2023 Board Packet page 383 for full letter]. She noted the scope of the proposed language was not comprehensive and seemed imbalanced as it did not represent the full history of the cemetery. She noted she appreciated the time the HPC members had spent on the proposed language for the cemetery panels.

The second speaker was Ms. Brenda Councill, who stated that she was a resident of Watauga County but not a resident of Boone. Ms. Councill noted that she had submitted a letter noting the same things as preceding letters have said. She noted the Boone Cemetery is a place to invoke peace and meditation and deserving of non-offensive language and devoid of subject commentary. She noted the town should

allow for respect and commend the cemetery as sacred but, instead, the space had deteriorated into a divisive site that would invite controversy and perpetuate myths and stereotypes that should be disallowed collectively. She said the Council family descendants supported the quest to accept and approve the draft text formerly presented by Commission Member Watkins. Ms. Council then reviewed the points she had submitted in her letter, which included rationale for supporting Commission Member Watkins's draft text as opposed to the draft text presented. [See November 7, 2023 Board Packet page 365 for full letter.]

The third speaker was Ms. Anna Boyce Phillips, a resident of Boone. She indicated that most of the information about the cemetery's history should not be put on the cemetery panels but in other parts of Boone. She supported Commission Member Watkins's draft text as opposed to the current draft text and thought it was the best information for the cemetery panels. She said that if the HPC wants to preserve the earlier history of the cemetery, they need to contact all of the people who grew up in Boone from the 1930s through the 1960s and listen to their stories of how it was when they grew up in Boone during those times. She noted that she was making a list of those people, and she wanted many names on the list. She thanked the HPC for preserving the history of Boone.

At approximately 3:18 p.m., Chair Plaag closed the floor for public comment.

BOONE CEMETERY INTERPRETATIVE PANELS REVIEW

Chair Plaag noted that written commentary was submitted specifically by Ms. Brenda Council and Ms. Jill Privott and that in at least one case, there were specific references to individual members of the HPC, including allegations about the motivations, intent, and actions of individual members of the HPC that he did not think were accurate. He opened the floor for the individuals named during public comment to respond to those comments.

Vice-Chair Bond stated that she would like to know the basis for the statements made about her she did not understand what was being referenced as she had based her comments on historical facts and figures.

Commission Member Watkins stated that he did not wish to respond to the comments about him during public comment. He did note that before the meeting, he had emailed Ms. Mitchell additional text material, but he did not realize that she would not be at the meeting.

Chair Plaag said in both cases, both commenters made statements that he neither believed were accurate nor did he agree with how those statements were presented. He noted that he was puzzled by how both commenters have requested to return to Commission Member Watkins's proposed text and specifically a desire regarding the first sentence regarding Jordan Council Jr, owning the land and donating it for the cemetery. Chair Plaag noted he was frustrated because the HPC has documented through existing land records the land on which the cemetery was located was owned by Benjamin Council, Sr. He noted that previously, the HPC had indicated that though Benjamin Council, Sr. likely inherited the land from his father, Jordan Council, Sr., there is no clear documentation or basis for the claim. Chair Plaag gave a brief review of the documented ownership of the property and noted his confusion as to why the ownership is in question when there is extensive documented evidence to those facts as presented in the draft text. Chair Plaag additionally, noted that there was an implied request, if not directly stated, asking that there be a more direct reference to the ownership history while at the same time asking the HPC to embrace the first sentence in Commission Member Watkins's draft that did not include the detail outlined proposed text. Chair Plaag noted that detail was in a draft that preceded Commission Member Watkins's

draft text. He noted that when Commission Member Watkins reduced the text from three panels into one panel, a lot of that nuance was eliminated. He said the first sentence in Commission Member Watkins draft text did not address the complaints in both statements. Chair Plaag noted there was a demand for oral history, to be taken from current living individuals on things that happened at least 150 years ago, to document the early history of the cemetery even though there are living documents from a closer time period that document the ownership of the cemetery by Benjamin Councill, Sr. Additionally, in contrast, both statements seem to suggest ignoring the oral traditions of the Junaluska Heritage Association (JHA) and the Junaluska community. He said for decades the Junaluska community has understood that the Black section of the cemetery was the burial ground of people who were enslaved by the Councils and their extended families, dating to before the Civil War. He said there was no information to contradict this documentation.

Chair Plaag suggested that the next step for the HPC would be to recommend draft text based on whatever was decided at the current meeting to present to Town Council. He noted that at this time, he felt the HPC had received the community input needed for the project. Commission Member Vardell agreed with Chair Plaag.

Ms. Shook provided the HPC with a copy of the proposed text material in the email that Commission Member Watkins sent to Ms. Mitchell (permanently on file).

Discussion ensued as to the use of the term “slaves” versus “enslaved”. Council Member Liaison Roseman noted Town Council would want the Junaluska Community to make the decision on which term was used. Commission Member Vardell indicated he had learned from his meeting with Dr. Deathridge that the HPC should in this context use the term “enslaved” rather than “slave”. Dr. Sue Keefe, confirmed that “enslaved” and “enslavers” are the preferable terms in today's phraseology. She noted that Dr. Deathridge had submitted some revisions to the cemetery panel text on November 3, 2023.

Chair Plaag referred to the Revised Panel #1: Boone Cemetery (October 2023 Draft) on packet page 391. Chair Plaag suggested to the HPC that they review the draft cemetery panel text to compare the revisions in the packet from the JHA, the October 2023 draft, and the draft that Commission Member Watkins submitted. There was consensus from the HPC to review the revisions in this manner.

Discussion ensued on the draft text, sentence by sentence. With final draft text as follows:

Panel #1: Boone Cemetery

“The land historically associated with the Boone Cemetery was once owned by Benjamin Councill, Sr., who probably inherited the land from his father, Jordan Councill, Sr., upon the latter’s death in 1838. The earliest burials here were likely Councils and others from interrelated families, as well as people enslaved by these families prior to the American Civil War. As was the practice throughout the United States before the 1960s, this cemetery was segregated, with Black people buried in the eastern part and White people buried in the western part. At times, a fence separated the two sections.

By the 1880s, locals treated this area as the town cemetery, even though it remained on privately owned land. Overcrowding became an issue in the 1930s. By the 1950s, the cemetery was rarely used for new burials as both Black and White residents developed new burial spaces outside of Boone’s

downtown. In 2015, the Town of Boone acquired both sections of the cemetery. Since then, the Town has made several improvements to provide for the cemetery's long-term preservation.

Resting here are many of Boone's elected officials, civic and cultural leaders, and veterans of the nation's wars, including those who fought on both sides of the Civil War. The Boone Cemetery remains a sacred space for reflection on the lives and history of those interred here.

[Aerial image of Boone Cemetery from ca. 1907] *Caption:* Detail crop showing the Boone Cemetery from the northwest, circa 1907. Image courtesy of the Historic Boone Collection, Digital Watauga Project.

Panel #2: A Divided Cemetery

The stone line at your feet marks the fence line that once divided the Black section of the cemetery to the east from the White section to the west. Racial segregation of gravesites was common in the United States. Slavery formally ended in 1865, but widespread segregation, including the segregation of the Councill Cemetery, did not. In the century that followed, locals usually called the cemetery's east section the "Colored Cemetery" and the west section the "City Cemetery." Cemetery trustees and town officials maintained the western part but often neglected the eastern part.

On at least two occasions, local civic leaders erected a fence separating the two sections and fully enclosing the White portion. The first fence, constructed in 1898 was made of planks. In 1958, town officials took over maintenance of the privately owned west section and constructed a chain-link fence. In 2015, the Town of Boone acquired both sections and removed the fence that physically and symbolically divided the cemetery.

More than 265 known burials in the White section have graves marked by a headstone bearing the names, dates, and often an epitaph for the deceased. Relatively few gravesites are unmarked. By contrast, most graves in the Black section went unmarked or were designated with fieldstones and temporary markers, many of which have since been lost or displaced. Today, only four original headstones remain. Notable exceptions are the three replacement headstones for Union soldiers buried here in 1865.

In 2016, a ground-penetrating radar survey located nearly 200 unmarked graves in the Black section. Because these graves could not be associated with a specific person, each was later marked by a flat fieldstone. The names of those known to be buried here are recorded on the large memorial installed by the Junaluska Heritage Association in 2017.

[Aerial image of Boone Cemetery, circa 1950] *Caption:* Aerial image of Boone Cemetery from the northeast, circa 1950. Image courtesy of the Palmer Blair Collection, Digital Watauga Project."

After the HPC completed their review of the cemetery panels, Chair Plaag asked Commission Member Watkins, since he had submitted a proposal for new text, if the proposed revisions were satisfactory. Commission Member Watkins agreed and asked that clean copies containing the revisions be provided to the HPC to review and vote on before they were submitted to Town Council for consideration.

There was consensus from the HPC for Chair Plaag to make the revisions and present the final draft document at the November 14, 2023 HPC meeting. Discussion ensued as to the amount of information in the current packet and the difficulties it presented to locate materials. There was consensus that only the

final draft text for the two panels and sign with the cemetery rules would be placed in the upcoming packet.

JONES HOUSE LOCAL LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT UPDATE

Chair Plaag asked the HPC if they had feedback for Commission Member Ziegler on the draft designation report. Vice-Chair Bond noted she had offered some changes on a hard copy that she then gave to Commission Member Ziegler.

Chair Plaag noted while the first brief statement of significance was a quotation that he had authored from other works, the significance of the site should be framed similar to the National Register Areas of significance, A B C and D. Chair Plaag suggested she compare the Jones House property to similar properties He also suggested that she write about the Jones House as an influential example of domestic architecture. He suggested that since she started with the Architectural History of Watauga County book, he would send her the 2015 survey files for resources in Boone via a Dropbox link to access them. He said that as she goes through the survey files, she should look for the best example of the Queen Anne-influenced domestic architecture that survives. He added that she would want to make an argument that the Jones House was the best example of a resource associated with the Jones family. He indicated that she should include in the report other examples of domestic architecture on King Street during that period and what happened to them. He noted the Linney House should be included in that list, as well as what makes the Jones House special compared to the Linney House. He suggested that she read the Linney House Designation Report. Chair Plaag noted that he would send Ms. Mitchell a copy of past survey reports to have for future reference.

RESOLUTION FOR DR. RENNIE BRANTZ

Chair Plaag thanked Commission Member Watkins and Vice-Chair Bond for the preparation of the Resolution Honoring Dr. Brantz. He offered that in the first line, a comma be added after the word Connecticut, and in the fourth paragraph, third line the wording be changed from, "serving on said Commission as Town Council Liaison" to "serving on said Commission as a member and Town Council Liaison." There were no further changes made to the draft resolution.

Motion and Vote:

Vice-Chair Bond made a motion, seconded by Commission Member Smyth, that the Historic Preservation Commission recommends approval of the draft resolution for Dr. Rennie Brantz as amended.

Vote: Aye – All

Nay – None

The motion passed.

STAFF UPDATES

Ms. Shook briefly reviewed the Staff Updates memo prepared by Ms. Mitchell located in the board packet dated November 3, 2023.

HPC Work Plan

Ms. Shook briefly reviewed the updated work plan prepared by Ms. Mitchell located in the board packet and noted the information provided for the HPC's review and that further discussion and recommendations for the next for fiscal year would take place at the December meeting. Council Member Liaison Roseman reminded the HPC to be mindful of the Town Budget when discussing the prioritizing of their work plan.

HPC UPDATES

There were no HPC updates given at this meeting.

DECEMBER ADVISORY SESSION MATERIAL

Chair Plaag suggested that the next advisory meeting agenda include the following items: HPC Work Plan Discussion, Rivers House Local Landmark Designation Report Update, Stoneman's Raid Interpretative Panel with the Civil War Trails Program Update, Dana Folkway Project Update, Digital Photography Photo Library & Remaining Documentation on the architectural survey for Downtown Boone Update, Boone Cemetery Interpretative Panels Update, and the Election of Officers for Chair and Vice-Chair for 2024.

ADJOURNMENT

Member Smyth made a motion, seconded by Commission Member Ziegler, to adjourn the meeting at 5:26 p.m.

Vote: Aye – All

Nay – None

The motion passed.

Eric Plaag, Chair

Marlene Crosby, Board Secretary