

**CHATHAM COUNTY HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION**

**REGULAR MEETING  
110 EAST STATE STREET**

**ARTHUR A. MENDONSA HEARING ROOM**

**August 6, 2008**

**2:00 P.M.**

**MINUTES**

**CCHPC Members Present:**

**Daves Rossell, Chairman  
George Cohen, Vice-Chairman  
William Haynes  
Stephen T. Lindell  
Pamela G. Lossing  
Lisa L. White**

**CCHPC Members Not Present:**

**Jane A. Feiler  
Vaughnette Goode-Walker  
Christian Sottile**

**CCHPC/MPC Staff Members Present:**

**Ellen Harris, Historic Preservation Planner  
Sabrina Thomas, Administrative Assistant**

**I. WELCOME**

The meeting was called to order at 2:08 p.m.

**II. INTRODUCTIONS**

**Dr. Rossell** asked Board and Staff members to introduce themselves.

**Ms. Harris** stated that the scheduled speaker was ill and that Mr. Stewart Dohrman, Curator of Buildings at the Coastal Heritage Society (CHS) is in charge of preservation and new construction. She said that Mr. Dohrman is a civil engineer who has worked in commercial construction, attended the Savannah College of Art and Design (SCAD), and helped to start a historic preservation trade school in Arkansas before coming to work for CHS.

**III. GUEST SPEAKER: Stewart Dohrman, Preservation Operations Officer for Coastal Heritage Society, “Coastal Heritage Society’s Master Plan and Initiatives”**

**Mr. Dohrman** stated that he has been with CHS for five years and after a few months the very first Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax (SPLOST) came through. They went from an organization

with tight budgets to one with a fair amount of money to work on old buildings. He said it was fortunate because they have 17 structures on the Roundhouse site and each one needed help.

He said that the Central Georgia Railroad was one of Savannah's biggest employers and CHS began a preservation team with three repointers who taught themselves to repoint masonry at this site and at Fort Jackson. The team is up to 40 and they have expanded their capabilities which has grown into less of a student preservation team and more of a professional organization. They do masonry, metal work, carpentry, documentation, conservation, grant writing, estimating, full construction services, and are considering doing private work as a way to raise money. They have two design team members who do the documentation drawings, and they have a Railroad Operations Department who is in charge of restoring train cars and locomotives. The garden was restored in 2006, and inside the Roundhouse is 80 percent of wood block floor that has been taken up and re-laid. It is one of the few wood block floors left in the country. There are not many people who know how to do wood block floors so they do a lot of prototyping to figure out the best and most economical way to did it and get it done fast.

He showed a photograph of a steam locomotive that was completely disassembled, inspected, reworked and then put back together by a company called Steam Operations Corporation. The steam locomotive is now up to standards of the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA), and it could run on any railroad in the country. They did site survey on the Roundhouse, worked on, and restored the carpentry shop. He said that Battlefield Park is nearing completion and all of the signage should be in place by October 9<sup>th</sup>. He provided an overview of the CHS and the projects that they are currently working on.

He said that it is a breathtaking project and that they get through each day by focusing on what is in front of them, but keep a big picture in mind with each project. He said that the City has been supportive with SPLOST and they have six million dollars coming from the state.

**Mr. Haynes** asked if site visits are available during the work-in-progress.

**Mr. Dohrman** answered yes. He said that they would love to have individuals or groups all together or one at a time. They could go behind the construction line with hard hats to see what is going on.

**Mr. Lindell** asked about the elevation of the area.

**Mr. Dohrman** stated that it is 30 to 32 feet and that they are in good shape for Savannah, but that it is not untouchable. Their collections person is concerned about storing and keeping things as safe as possible during a hurricane.

**Dr. Rossell** asked how the new hotels tie in and how it affects the mission to have commercial activity close to their everyday efforts.

**Mr. Dohrman** stated that he is thrilled because the side of the Battlefield that was behind Parker's was a vacant lot that people would park on. He said it frames the park and will give them activity by making people not afraid to go there. That fear is evaporating with SCAD, the dorms, and the development. There is a 50-year lease of some land that was sold to SCAD to allow their development to go forward and CHS was involved in the design process. They worked with Gunn, Meyerhoff & Shay, and

Greenline Architecture and had input on the cottages being built. They worked well with them and are pleased with the process.

**Dr. Rossell** stated that he is glad to hear that because sometimes properties are negatively affected by the commercial intrusion, but in this case it is a good synergy and they would feed off each other.

**Mr. Dohrman** said that they may name the cottages after the people that lived on that block. They recently secured the railroad ward houses and will begin work on moving them soon. The City was a great partner and have helped to make it happen financially.

**Dr. Rossell** asked where they will be placed.

**Mr. Dohrman** stated that the yellow house overlooking the garden will stay where it is and the white house will be moved 100 feet north and turned around so it is facing the correct way. There will be three little houses there and they hope that it will ultimately be a tenement museum, but a vignette of how the workers lived. The buildings have layers to be peeled off but some wainscoting and original items are left. They are ugly now but will be interesting in the future.

**Mr. Lindell** asked how tall they expected the Marriott buildings and the Battlefield Park condominiums to be, and how commercial they want it and still preserve the ambiance of the area.

**Mr. Dohrman** stated that the Marriott is three stories with a fourth floor setback that you cannot see. He said that for the parcel on Purse Street with the yellow house they are not clear what the developer will do but they may be asking for three stories in that location. They are not thrilled about it but they are fine with it. Their involvement in the Marriott was because they partly owned the land and cannot expect to have the same input on the other development.

**Mr. Lindell** asked if someone wanted an individual tour of the site, who should they contact.

**Mr. Dohrman** stated that they could contact him at 210-7519. He said he would be happy to give a tour any time because they are thrilled to have people come see it.

**Dr. Rossell** stated that it was a fabulous presentation, said the Commission appreciated him coming to tell about this phenomenal project. He said that Mr. Dohrman had a lot of vision and activities that are inspiring. Many of his students have worked for CHS and he is thankful when they come into class and really know about the building.

**Mr. Dohrman** stated that he is proud of it because most people that go through the Preservation and Architecture programs and don't get to work hands on. He said he grew up in construction and it is something he's always known but not everyone has that experience. Even if the students leave they have repointed and know how to confidently climb scaffolding to inspect a job later on in life. They are proud because it makes the students more confident when going onto sites to talk to contractors and know what to say.

#### **IV. DISCUSSION: Amending the Chatham County Historic Preservation Ordinance to be Eligible for Certified Local Government Status**

**Ms. Harris** stated that she is introducing some amendments to the ordinance today but will talk more about it at the next meeting with a formal recommendation. She said that a couple of months ago an application for the Certified Local Government Status through the State Historic Preservation Office was put together. She has received comments back from the State to the affect that the current ordinance does not meet the State Enabling Legislation.

She said that the owner consent clause that is currently in the ordinance does not meet the State Enabling Legislation and if the application goes forward they would deny it. She asked them to hold off on the processing of the application to see if the ordinance can be amended to bring it into compliance. The Commission would make a recommendation to the Board of Commissioners and they would have the final say. She is concerned that if they remove the owner consent clause, which states that if more than 50 percent of the property owners object, that it doesn't go forward, that the Board of Commissioners may be unlikely to amend the ordinance. She will make a formal recommendation at the next meeting for this Commission to recommend the amendment to the ordinance, and at the same time pass a resolution stating that it is not the intention of the Commission to force designation on communities or property owners who don't want it. It is only to qualify for the Certified Local Government status. She said that it is important for Chatham County to become a Certified Local Government and they currently are not.

She said since they are proposing making amendments to the ordinance it may be a good time to propose other amendments. The main reason to amend it is the property owner consent and other reasons include consistency of language and some grammatical errors. Another issue is the concept of the Conservation District that was originally intended for areas less than 50 years old that have some defining characteristics. She is not sure it is legal if the district is not historic, then it is not covered under the Historic Preservation Act, so why would the Historic Preservation Commission have control over what is done. The State Historic Preservation Office has recommended against having the designation, and they have not had anyone interested since it has been in place.

She went through the ordinance noting the important amendments. The Commission has copies to take with them and look at them closely at the proposed changes, and if they have other changes they think should be made, to email the changes to Ms. Harris, and she would incorporate them during the next month's meeting. The Commission would have a formal vote on it and make a recommendation to the County Commission.

#### **V. UPDATE: PIN POINT HISTORIC DISTRICT STATUS**

**Ms. Harris** displayed a map of the proposed historic district. She said that the colors indicate the underlying base zoning districts which are R1, RMH (Residential Mobil Home), CM (Conservation Marsh), WI (Water Front Industry), and that they all have an environmental overlay. The design standards were prepared and sent to the County Attorney for his comments and he said that because the area zoned RMH allows for mobile homes as a use, that the design standards essentially prevent new mobile homes from coming in because they won't meet the design standards. Because the mobile homes in this zoning district are considered a use, design standards cannot prevent a use, as per the

Historic Preservation Act. The RMH area would need to be rezoned to a zoning district which doesn't allow mobile homes before the Historic District Ordinance could be put into place and the standards enforceable. She researched other zoning districts and the R1 district seems to be the most appropriate. All of the other development standards associated with it including setbacks, fence locations, and other uses remain the same, but with the new zoning district mobile homes would not be allowed. She went to Pin Point on July 27<sup>th</sup> and let them know about this, and they asked Ms. Harris to come back to a neighborhood meeting with more people in attendance so that more people could be made aware of it before they decide what they want to do. If they do go forward, then the existing mobile homes would become non-conforming and could stay or be replaced in the future if a hurricane came in and knocked them down. They could not be expanded upon significantly without going to the Zoning Board of Appeals. It could be a couple of months before it's resolved.

**Mr. Cohen** asked how many existing mobile homes they are talking about.

**Ms. Harris** stated that she had not counted but estimates between 20 and 25.

**Mr. Cohen** asked how many parcels they are referring to.

**Ms. Harris** believed that there are approximately 80 parcels in the Historic District and the number of parcels to be rezoned would be about 70.

**Dr. Rossell** asked Mr. Haynes if he wanted to speak about the modern options other than a mobile home for an affordable modular-like structure.

**Mr. Haynes** stated that some of the concepts available recently are new modular and paneled construction really look good. He wants to get with those living in the mobile homes and tell them this is their chance to speak. He is hoping they will have a majority to agree to it.

**Ms. White** stated that there is a long-term economic pressure on that area. She asked if most of the people who have the mobile homes rent the lot or own the property.

**Mr. Haynes** stated that most of the property is called "heirs" property that has been passed down since the lots were first purchased.

## **VI. GEORGIA ALLIANCE FOR PRESERVATION COMMISSIONS – FALL TRAINING October 10-11, 2008, Milledgeville, Georgia**

**Ms. Harris** stated that the Georgia Alliance for Preservation Commissions is having fall training on October 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> in Milledgeville, Georgia, and the MPC has funding to send one Commissioner to the training. She said if they would look at their calendars and let her know at the September meeting who would like to go. Milledgeville is approximately three hours away and the MPC reimburses for mileage, meals, and hotel.

## **VII. COMMISSIONERS' ITEMS**

**Dr. Rossell** asked if there are any Commissioners' items to discuss.

**Mr. Cohen** asked Ms. Reiter a few meetings ago about the status of the building on the Savannah River Landing site. He said he was curious and was told that they are going to destroy or tear down the old Turpentine building. Ms. Reiter did not know much about it but was going to look into it.

**Ms. Harris** stated that it is not within the local Historic District boundaries and there is nothing legally that the Historic Review Board could do. She said that she does not know what the plans are for incorporating it into the Savannah River Landings project.

**Mr. Cohen** stated that it is not good, not part of the plan, and did not know if there is something that could be done to move or save it. He said that he would talk with Mr. Sottile who might know more.

**Dr. Rossell** stated that the Commission has a list of very familiar historic resources in unincorporated Chatham County. He said that Ms. Harris has done a lot of work in contacting the organizations or individuals and has not received much interest. He and Ms. Harris are asking all of the Commissioners to utilize contacts with any organizations or sites within Chatham County that would be interested in what the Commission is doing. They need to keep getting the word out and keep encouraging people to use the new enabling capabilities. He said if anyone knows of contacts now to follow up on that he would encourage it. He asked what the Commission members think about it, asked if there are any contacts that they could follow up on, or if they see other ways to approach it.

**Mr. Lindell** stated that he was glad they have the list because it zeroes in on the projects the Commission should be concerned about.

**Ms. Harris** stated that as a follow up to the last meeting that Mr. Haynes was kind enough to contact Ms. Elizabeth Dubose who is the contact at the Ossabaw Island Foundation to see about their interest and status. She spoke with Ms. Dubose and the Ossabaw Island Foundation would support the endeavor, but they don't own the island. She said that she would follow up with the State on it.

She said that if you look at the list, the 2006 contact was a letter introducing the new Commission, stating what they are about, that they are eligible, a copy of an application, an informational brochure, that she would be happy to provide other information, and to let her know. The follow up in 2008 was the package that she put together with Dr. Rossell that was an update on the progress of the Historic Preservation Commission, that there is more information if they are interested, and to contact Ms. Ellen Harris who will speak to anyone or come to a neighborhood association meeting. It was typically in the form of letters with that content.

**Dr. Rossell** asked if anyone else has a strong feeling about a particular individual or area that it is time for the Commission to step up and to let people know. He said it is not a selling campaign but an educational campaign because they are not selling anything but helping people be aware of the resources and how the Commission can help them maintain the resources, which is educational.

**VIII. MEETING MINUTES: July 2, 2008**

**CCHPC ACTION: Mr. Cohen made a motion that the Chatham County Historic Preservation Commission approve the minutes as submitted. Mr. Lindell seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.**

**IX. ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business to come before the Chatham County Historic Preservation Commission, the meeting was adjourned at approximately 3:27 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Ellen Harris,  
Preservation Planner

**EH/jnp**