

CHATHAM COUNTY HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION

**REGULAR MEETING
110 EAST STATE STREET**

ARTHUR A. MENDONSA HEARING ROOM

December 3, 2008

2:00 P.M.

MINUTES

CCHPC Members Present:

**Daves Rossell, Chairman
George Cohen, Vice-Chairman
Jane A. Feiler
Stephen T. Lindell
Pamela G. Lossing
Christian Sottile
Lisa L. White**

CCHPC Members Not Present:

**Vaughnette Goode-Walker
William Haynes**

CCHPC/MPC Staff Members Present:

**Thomas L. Thomson, P.E., AICP, Exec. Director
Ellen Harris, Historic Preservation Planner
Janine Person, Administrative Assistant**

I. WELCOME

The meeting was called to order at 2:05 p.m.

II. INTRODUCTIONS

Dr. Rossell asked everyone to introduce themselves.

III. GUEST SPEAKER: Bob Ciucevich, "Post WWII Development in Savannah"

Ms. Harris stated that Mr. Bob Ciucevich was a graduate of the University of Georgia who received a Master of Historic Preservation in 1988, worked as a Preservation Planner for the Middle Georgia Regional Development Center from 2000-2003, and began Quatrefoil Consulting in Savannah in 1995, a private historic preservation consulting firm specializing in historic research surveys. They have completed over 30 surveys throughout Georgia which include the Ardmore subdivision in 1997, Eastside and Midtown neighborhoods in 1998 and 1999, and Tybee Island in 1998.

Mr. Bob Ciucevich stated that he began working with the Fairway Oaks neighborhood approximately two years ago because they wanted to be listed on the National Register. He said that there was hardly any information on the 1940's and 1950's development in Savannah. The National Register nomination required research on all development from Ardmore all the way up to DeRenne Avenue. He has been working with Mr. Richard Cloues at the Historic Preservation Division who has developed ranch and mid-modern contacts for the state of Georgia. Fairway Oaks will be among the first mid-modern neighborhoods to be listed on the National Register in Georgia.

He said that before the beginning of World War II, the last significant residential developments in Savannah were Ardmore, Gould Estates, and Lee-Olin Heights. He displayed the map from 1945 where the subdivisions were situated just inside of city limits. The subdivisions continued the traditional grid plan pattern that had always been used in Savannah, and most of the houses in the developments were typical of pre-war America with bungalows, English cottages, and later on American Small House types with styles like Craftsman, Tudor, and Colonial Revival.

Following the end of World War II, Savannah was faced with a severe housing shortage and they entered into a decade-long building boom with aid from the Federal Housing Administration (FHA). It resulted in the establishment of several new subdivisions and the expansion of city limits from 60th Street to DeRenne Avenue on the south, and from Bee Road and the Casey Canal to Skidaway Road on the east. The houses were very small and were closer in proximity to the street with sidewalks and street trees. In 1953 the area had grown with a lot of development.

The Savannah real estate community was influenced by national trends and broke with traditional development patterns by adopting more contemporary practices, marking a transition between pre-war development and the Cold War Era subdivisions of the early 1950's. Building lots were larger, houses were set back farther on lots, and sidewalk construction was discontinued. The Poplar Grove/Ridgewood subdivision was built around the mid to late 1940's, and was one of the first developments to offer larger building lots. These homes were called "Post War Housing", and the Historic Preservation Division is now calling them "American Small House", which were FHA approved designs. The FHA greatly influenced the subdivision development as well as the building design.

Abercorn Park was developed in 1949 and was another of the first subdivisions to offer larger lots. It started east from Bull Street, crossed Abercorn and extended two-thirds of the way to Habersham Street. These houses were individual in architecture and built with FHA specifications. The development was small with 34 home sites, but it was significant because it set a precedence by offering a variety of larger lot sizes. The expanded width and depth of the lots were ideal for the sprawling design of the ranch house, and by 1950 two similar subdivisions were established along Abercorn Street immediately south of Abercorn Park: Abercorn Heights and Manor Estates. This area represents one of the earliest concentrations of ranch houses in Savannah.

Lamara Heights was developed in 1949 and was the largest and most significant subdivision development of the late 1940's, featuring 150 large wooden lots. Located between 60th Street and 65th Street on the north and south, and Reynolds and Habersham Streets on the east and west, this subdivision was located in the heart of Savannah's post war area of development. It was developed by the Lamara Company which was formed in 1949 by C. H. Mason, Jr., J. J. Rauers, Jr., and William

Lattimore, the same group who developed Abercorn Park. The Lamara Company was organized to “undertake land development and simultaneously pursue an active construction program”, and was the largest subdivision development in ten years. A portion of the new subdivision was deeded to the City for the Jacob G. Smith Elementary School (circa 1950). A park area, as well as a suburban business district was established in the upper northwest corner of the development. The Lamara Heights Shopping Center, now Habersham Village was built between 61st and 63rd Streets creating a commercial corridor along a section of Habersham Street. He said that the Lamara Company was one of the first land developers in Savannah to embrace FHA principles by taking a multiple-use approach in planning residential subdivisions, and the first to tie in the suburban shopping center into a residential subdivision plan. They added a multiple family dimension to the multi-use development through the establishment of the FHA approved Lamara Apartments, a large multi-unit, 30-acre complex of duplex bungalows that were located on the corner of DeRenne Avenue and Habersham Streets, along with the Abercorn Terrace Apartments which were built in 1947, and the Nelson Apartments. The Lamara Apartments provided affordable housing for young, growing middle class families within a convenient suburban environment. They featured the first three bedroom apartments in Georgia with five playgrounds located within a few blocks of the new school. Each bungalow had a spacious yard and a porch and was eight-tenths of a mile from Hunter Field that was to become an Air Force Base.

Savannah’s post war expansion coincided with the advent of the Cold War Era and the birth of the military industrial complex. The establishment of Hunter Field in 1951 into the home of the 38th Air Division of the Strategic Air Command (SAC) brought 4,600 officers, airmen, and their families to Savannah, as well as civilian defense workers. The number increased to 7,000 with the addition of a second bomb wing in 1952. With the close proximity to the base, schools, and shopping, Lamara and Nelson Apartments provided ideal and convenient housing alternatives for military families living off-base, and the newly relocated civilian defense workers. Abercorn Terrace apartments had one and two-bedroom townhouses and were popular with single officers stationed at the base. It was also one of the first FHA-approved apartment complexes in Georgia.

After 1950, Savannah’s real estate developers accepted a new standard for residential development that broke the traditional pre-war mode of planning because they did not continue the standard grid pattern of landscaped streets and uniform lot sizes. The developers adopted the FHA’s preferred pattern for subdivision development offering new subdivisions with large wooded lots of varying shapes and sizes set among a series of curvilinear streets. The subdivision patterns roots are from the mid 20th century and did not become widespread throughout the country until the late 20th and early 21st centuries. The first golf course subdivisions followed the pattern and it continues today. One of the exceptions was the Forrest Hills subdivision, which was a neighborhood of basic American Small Houses that were developed in 1947, and was located on the northwest corner of Skidaway Road and DeRenne Avenue just within the city limits. Forrest Hills was the first example in Savannah of a subdivision utilizing the FHA’s approved subdivision pattern.

He said that Fairway Oaks and Groveland (1950), Kensington Park (1951), and Magnolia Park (1953), were the first upscale subdivisions in Savannah to adopt the FHA’s subdivision model, and were located adjacent to each other between Abercorn Street and Skidaway Road. These subdivisions were developed to fulfill a widespread demand for large wooded home sites in a suburban setting, where each site was planned for the maximum scenic affect and its outlook on the winding streets. They shared many common characteristics, and were marketed in a similar way.

Fairway Oaks was the most exclusive and featured some of the most well-appointed houses displaying the latest in modern domestic design during the 1950's. It was the first subdivision developed south of DeRenne Avenue, and the earliest upscale subdivision in Savannah to feature large wood lots of varying shapes and sizes, set among a series of curvilinear streets. Location outside of the city limits provided the illusion of country living, and the development being adjacent to the Live Oak municipal golf course at Bacon Park provided a country club atmosphere. The Fairway Oaks name derived from the location being adjacent to the fifth hole of the course on the southern border of the subdivision and overlooked the houses situated along Bacon Park Drive. It was considered one of the most modern, progressive communities of its era and home to some of the most significant business and civic leaders of the 1950's and 1960's.

He said that Savannah had early ranch development on vacant lots in Ardmere, Ardsley Park, Chatham Crescent, and other neighborhoods. Some had pressed metal tin roofs and metal casement windows, or were built with Savannah Gray brick with the same setbacks as the 1920's, 30's, and 40's bungalows. He said that the triangular front gable design was located in every subdivision, and that Greenview and Fairway Oaks has a higher percentage of the most architecturally designed buildings. While writing the National Register Nomination, he had listed most of the 1960's era as non-historic and was surprised when he was told that everything up to 1965 would be considered contributing.

He said that Juan Bertoto, who was born in Argentina, was an architect in Savannah who graduated in 1959 from Georgia Tech, was a SCAD professor in the early 1990's, and his designs favored the walled courtyard and the gabled element with the glass ends for lighting. Modern architecture occurred throughout the city and he displayed photographs of buildings like Drayton Tower, the St. Joseph School of Nursing, the Broughton Street Municipal building, the Red Cross building, the Bull Street Baptist Church annex, and several other mid-modern office buildings and shopping centers.

Mr. Cohen asked about the latest on Fairway Oaks.

Mr. Ciucevich stated that Mr. Richard Cloues was personally working on it, that it might have already been forwarded to the Park Service, and that it has been taken from the State to the Federal level.

Ms. Reiter asked about where Bertoto's drawings are located.

Mr. Ciucevich stated that they are at the Georgia Historical Society for everything post Thomas and Hutton. He said that he called Thomas and Hutton and asked for the drawings, and they said they had returned the drawings to the owners. Apparently Benedictine has their drawings and he assumes that the County has Bertoto's designs for whatever was designed for them.

Dr. Rossell stated that Mr. Ciucevich has done a real service by showing the Commission the cutting edge of historic preservation in the nation. He said that the buildings they were looking at is part of the great nation's fabric, and that the introduction was strong because it showed historical roots with war efforts and building booms of the mid-century and post war era. Toward the end of the presentation there were more aesthetically intriguing buildings with lots of interesting details, but it is striking how little they know about some of them and how casually they are treated. He stated that the Georgia National Guard building was a stunning design that was cutting edge and has been completely obliterated. It is shameful how the recent past is disregarded because it doesn't fit with the current

historical appreciated styles. He encouraged Mr. Ciucevich to forge ahead and push an awareness of the true part of history that the buildings contribute.

Mr. Ciucevich stated that he agreed. He said he has been a preservationist for a long time and that he thinks it is something they all could understand through education, even if it is a hard sell to others.

Dr. Rossell stated that he has taken his 20th Century students to St. Benedictine for about a decade, and the 20th Century professors at SCAD used to drive to Atlanta because they assumed there was nothing in Savannah to look at.

Mr. Ciucevich stated that he is writing a National Register Nomination for St. Benedictine, is excited about it, has been sending information to the State office, and they are excited about it.

Mr. Sottile stated that it is fascinating to see buildings they live with every day in a slide show. He said that it separates you from them to look at them as individual buildings and that Savannah needs to understand that they do have landmarks.

Mr. Ciucevich stated that he agreed. He said that when he drives around town he is just as surprised when taking the pictures, and hopes that he will report back in a year or so on St. Benedictine.

IV. ELECTION OF CHAIR AND VICE-CHAIR

- A. George Cohen, Chair Nominee
- B. Vaughnette Goode-Walker, Vice-Chair Nominee

Dr. Rossell stated that the Nominating Committee submitted their report and recommended George Cohen as Chair and Vaughnette Goode-Walker as Vice-Chair. He asked if there were any other nominations. There were none.

CCHPC ACTION: Mr. Lindell made a motion that the Chatham County Historic Preservation Commission accept the Nominating Committee's recommendation for Mr. George Cohen to serve as the Chair and Ms. Vaughnette Goode-Walker to serve as Vice-Chair for a period of one-year beginning in January 2009. Mr. Sottile seconded the motion and it was passed unanimously.

V. UPDATES

- A. Pin Point Historic District Status

Ms. Harris stated that Pin Point went through the rezoning process at the MPC meeting, the MPC recommended approval, and that it will be placed on the County Commission agenda with the date to be announced later. She did not expect any problems and said that Commissioner Helen Stone spoke in favor of it at the MPC meeting. If it goes forward in December with no issues, she anticipates the Historic District application for Pin Point to come before the CCHPC in January, but that it could get pushed back.

B. Revisions to Chatham County Historic Preservation Ordinance

Ms. Harris stated that there is a technical question for the attorney regarding whether it is a zoning-related issue that needed to go before the MPC first, and then on to the County. She said that she hopes it would go directly to the County, but that she is waiting to hear back on the legal determination.

VI. COMMISSIONERS' ITEMS

There were none.

VII. MEETING MINUTES: November 5, 2008

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

VIII. ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business to come before the Chatham County Historic Preservation Commission, the meeting was adjourned at approximately 3:00 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Ellen Harris,
Preservation Planner

EH/jnp