

CHATHAM COUNTY HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION

**REGULAR MEETING
110 EAST STATE STREET**

ARTHUR A. MENDONSA HEARING ROOM

June 3, 2009

2:00 P.M.

MINUTES

CCHPC Members Present:

**George Cohen, Chairman
Vaughnette Goode-Walker, Vice-Chairman
Stephen T. Lindell
Pamela G. Lossing
Daves Rossell
Lisa L. White**

CCHPC Members Not Present:

**Jane A. Feiler
William Haynes**

CCHPC/MPC Staff Members Present:

**Thomas L. Thomson, P.E./AICP, Exec. Director
Ellen Harris, Historic Preservation Planner
Janine Person, Historic Preservation Admin. Asst.**

I. WELCOME

The meeting was called to order at 2:00 p.m.

II. INTRODUCTIONS

Mr. Cohen asked Commission members to introduce themselves. He said that Mr. Christian Sottile would no longer be on the Commission and would be greatly missed.

III. DISCUSSION OF COUNTY BUDGET IMPACTS

Mr. Cohen introduced Mr. Tom Thomson, Director of the Metropolitan Planning Commission, to speak about the impacts of the County budget.

Mr. Tom Thomson stated that the Chatham County Historic Preservation Commission is funded 100 percent by Chatham County in the Special Services District (SSD) Budget, which is tax revenue from unincorporated Chatham County. The Metropolitan Planning Commission (MPC) budget from Chatham County was recommended to be reduced by 20 percent. The part that falls within the SSD budget was reduced by 25 percent. He said that Ms. Melony West, the MPC's Budget and Finance

Director has presented a draft balance budget for the remainder of the 2009 budget year to the MPC Finance Committee, and that the MPC will address it at the June 16th meeting. Because the budget cuts were made by the County, they have to look at the County services being provided and cut them. There will also be some budget cuts by the City. The CCHPC is fully funded by the County's SSD funding and the CCHPC is being asked to change the meeting schedule to once a quarter. In order to keep the expertise of the staff, he has to fund them from a different part of the budget. There are transportation grants where he can do that and said that most of Ms. Harris' time will be shifted into transportation so that no one has to be laid off. Unfortunately, that means the staff services to the CCHPC will be slowed down and reduced. If there is something important happening, then staff will be there to address it and they will continue working on the Sandfly project. The budget is based upon a zero increase in the property digest. If the property digest comes in later this month lower than a zero increase, then the MPC will be back with more ideas about cutting. They don't know what the County Commission will do and there is a chance that they will be faced with whether or not to raise millage. The number of MPC meetings will be reduced to 18 a year instead of 30, the Board members will not be fed, the travel, training, and supply budgets have been reduced, and there is the implementation of the e-agenda that will save paper. There is also a vacant position that has been held open for a year. The MPC recently redid a contract that had a net gain. The MPC is always looking for a way to save money and there are some funds in reserve that is the staffs' cost of living increase, but staff will not receive that until the MPC finds out what the City will do. The MPC is trying not to lay off staff, they have the greatest staff, and he doesn't want to lose any staff members.

Mr. Cohen stated that they appreciated all that Mr. Thomson and the MPC does and knows that it cannot be easy.

Ms. Goode-Walker asked when it would start.

Mr. Thomson stated that it would be the second half of the MPC's fiscal year starting on July 1st, which is also the first part of the County's fiscal year. He said that the MPC is reducing the second half of their approved budget to match the cuts. It will also affect the first half of the next fiscal year because the City's fiscal year starts in January.

Ms. Harris stated that the implementation process for the change in the schedule requires the Commission to revise the by-laws. She stated that there are changes on page 4 that states that the regular meeting will be held on the first Wednesday of January, April, July, and October. On Page 7 it refers to the Commission establishing a Nominating Committee and that the committee would be appointed in July, submit a report at the October meeting, the vote will be in October, and the new Chairman will preside at the January meeting. According to the by-laws, it is being presented at this meeting and the Commission will vote on it at the next meeting on July 1st. The meetings thereafter will be quarterly.

IV. PRESENTATION: Historic Savannah Foundation, Daniel Carey, Historic Savannah Foundation

Ms. Harris introduced Mr. Daniel Carey, President and CEO of the Historic Savannah Foundation (HSF). She said that he was hired in December of 2008, coming to Savannah after service approximately 18 years in various field positions at the National Trust for Historic Preservation. He was

the Director of the southwest office in Fort Worth, Texas, served for ten years in the southern office in Charleston, South Carolina. He was born and raised in Louisville, Kentucky, and worked for five years in state and local government before joining the National Trust in 1991. He has a Bachelor's degree in American Studies from the University of Notre Dame and a Master's in Historic Preservation from Western Kentucky University. He earned a Certificate in Law and Public Policy from the University of Texas at Arlington.

She said that Mr. Carey has inherited a strong organization in the HSF with a membership of 900, an annual budget of 1.1 million, a staff of eight, an outstanding museum in the Davenport House, and a nationally recognized revolving fund. For five decades HSF has been the leader in the preservation movement and that Mr. Carey looks forward to leading it well into the 21st century.

Mr. Carey stated that since arriving in December that many people have asked him how he likes Savannah. He says it is lovely and he is enjoying it. Many are anxious to know what they are going to do at HSF, being the recognized leader of the preservation movement in Savannah. With Mr. McDonald leaving and Ms. Susie Clinard filling in, there was almost a year where the organization and preservation idled to some degree, in part due to the economy, but this is a good time to get good preservation work done. His presentation will be a retrospective on preservation that gives some context for the work that they do and what they will be doing in the future.

He spoke about the seven women who saved the Davenport House in 1955, adding that preservation is almost always led by women, but not before losing City Market shortly before the save of the Davenport House. It could be that out of the ashes of City Market that they have the phoenix of the Davenport House. HSF is not just an advocate for preservation, but an organization that actually performs. They have been the voice for preservation but in an educational way by showing people that if they can do it, then the people can do it. The major phrase and component of the mission is community involvement and it is taken seriously; leading by example.

He displayed before and after photographs of preservation projects and spoke of the excellent work that has been done over the years by his predecessors, volunteers, and staff. He said that the history and architecture of the community should not lose sight of this, which is why they fight so hard to save the buildings, the Oglethorpe plan, the scale, and the uses to keep Savannah real and authentic. He hopes that HSF will be able to expand their work beyond the boundaries of the Landmark District into the unincorporated areas of Chatham County.

He created a membership survey that asked what members thought about HSF the state of preservation in Savannah, and why they were HSF members. Approximately 83 percent stated that membership is a commitment to preservation. The members did not know enough about the finances of HSF and he feels that they need to be more transparent. He spoke of some of the things that the members wanted HSF to become involved in like the Height Map, revisions to the Savannah Historic Preservation Ordinance, tax relief for historic property owners, restoration of the Berrien House, improvement on governmental relations, increasing tourism management, and securing a stronger Review Board. Tourism is an issue, as well as height and new infill construction and how they manage it.

He spoke about demolition by neglect that cumulatively adds up and there is a price to pay. He said when people think of Savannah they think of the Landmark District, River Street, the squares, and

canopy trees, but history is a continuum and each chapter needs to be presented and collected or there will be an abridged or selected history that doesn't represent everyone, time periods, or architecture. Things need to be looked at with fresh eyes and in new ways to appreciate new things. It is a great and terrific way to involve younger generations in preservation and people who might be drawn to preservation. Savannah is leading the state in recognizing the importance of properties from the recent past and that Drayton Tower is a great example. It was cutting edge technology and architecture at the time and an appreciation can be developed for it. It also puts an onus on us to make good decisions with respect to infill architecture in downtown.

He said they need incentives for preservation like tax credits, not spiking tax assessments, or penalizing them with a big tax bill. There is MASHH which is the Mayor's Alliance to Save Historic Houses that HSF is working in conjunction with the City and the MPC to build bridges and communicate to save properties from the 100 Worst Properties list and the Eyesore of the Week. He quoted Thomas Jefferson who said, "Delay is preferable to error." When something is demolished it's forever, but if you think about alternatives to demolition, it is time well spent.

The HSF has partnerships and has done work for Mrs. Jones at 640 West Victory Street as a part of Rebuilding Together. They came together with approximately 30 volunteers and spent a Saturday helping a stranger take care of something she felt was important. They have a solid corner that is protected and in good shape so that Mrs. Jones can continue to live there. That is what preservation is about – to use the place that they love and adore and to keep it maintained for other people to enjoy. He wants to learn more about the County, Pin Point, and what the Board wants to do. If the HSF can assist they will.

Mr. Cohen thanked Mr. Carey for being available and for getting out into the community. He is glad that everyone is taking a broader approach to why people come to Savannah. It goes to show that there is more to Savannah than just downtown, but the whole community. That is why the unincorporated areas are important to the Commission so they can save what they can.

Mr. Carey stated that if they stay to themselves then they will be a special interest group and a shrinking one and that they must make themselves relevant to new people. He encouraged everyone to get involved in the ordinance review because the Landmark District is the backbone and it is an opportunity that only comes once every 20 years or so.

Ms. Harris stated that if the Commission is interested that there is a website dedicated to public comments. She said the address is www.savannahdrc.org, and that there are links to it on the main page of the MPC website.

Dr. Rossell stated that he enjoyed the presentation and the comments about the connection with the City and the Mayor's alliance to save historic homes. He said that Operation Clean Sweep has been scary and he recently noticed that a two-story worker's cottage on Anderson Street had been completely demolished overnight. He offered his services as a professor in vernacular architecture where the students do field measured drawings of buildings. He has had success through Beaufort with having the classes look at the same kind of buildings there that Operation Clean Sweep is tearing down in Savannah. They have done measured drawings and are preparing the drawings and write ups for the

Tercentennial of Beaufort for 2011. He would like to do more of that in Savannah and said that it is great for student learning.

Mr. Carey stated that the MASHH program began with a grant from the National Trust for Historic Preservation to put a person from their office in the field more and to expand their service area. He said they are working in neighborhoods where they haven't been as active before and that Ms. Jessica Pedigo is the point person who is currently working with SCAD and Savannah Technical College. They have a Savannah Young Architects Forum through volunteer efforts that are currently doing measured drawings. He appreciates the offer and will take advantage of it.

V. COMMISSIONERS' ITEMS

Ms. Goode-Walker stated that she would like for the Commission members to attend the June 9th meeting at the Turner-Hodge-Young Community Center for the second meeting of the Gullah Geechee Corridor Commission. She said that they will be talking about and listening to the community about historic sites that need to be preserved, especially out in the County, that are related to the Gullah Geechee heritage within the corridor. It is from 6:30 p.m. until 8:00 p.m.

She also invited the Commission to the Telfair's Juneteenth Celebration on June 19th and 20th. She said that on June 19th at the historic Second African Baptist Church at 7:00 p.m. there will be a lecture with Naomi Tutu, the daughter of Desmond Tutu. The next day by the Owens-Thomas House in the square, Dr. Walter and Mrs. Linda Evans will jump the broom to commemorate their 15th wedding anniversary.

VI. MEETING MINUTES: April 1, 2009

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.

VII. ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business to come before the Chatham County Historic Preservation Commission, the meeting was adjourned at approximately 3:05 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Ellen Harris,
Preservation Planner

EH/jnp