



C H A T H A M C O U N T Y
HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION

Arthur A. Mendonsa Hearing Room
August 1, 2012 - 2:00 P.M.
Meeting Minutes

August 1, 2012 Regular Meeting

I. Call to Order and Welcome

II. Approval of Minutes of Previous Meeting

1. [April 4, 2012 Meeting Minutes](#)

Attachment: [April 4, 2012 Minutes.pdf](#)

Board Action:

Approval. - PASS

Vote Results

Motion: Lisa L. White

Second: George Cohen

George Cohen - Aye

Jane A. Feiler - Aye

Vaughnette Goode-Walker - Aye

Stephen T. Lindell - Not Present

Pamela Lossing - Aye

Dr. E. G. Daves Rossell - Aye

Lisa L. White - Aye

III. Posting

IV. Consent Agenda

V. Regular Agenda

2. [Appointment of Nominating Committee](#)

The following members volunteered to serve as the nominating committee: Ms. Jane Feiler, Dr. Daves Rossell and Mr. George Cohen.

The nominating report is to be made at the October 3, 2012 meeting and the new officers will preside at the January 2, 2013 meeting.

3. ["Federal Cultural Resources Compliance on an Urban Lot in Historic Savannah, and Other Tales"-
Angus Sawyer](#)

Ms. Ellen Harris introduced the guest speaker for today, Mr. Angus Sawyer. Ms. Harris said Mr. Sawyer is the Owner/Principal Archaeologist at Archaeological Consulting of Savannah, LLC. Mr. Sawyer has extensive work experience in the area of archaeology. He attained a B. A. Degree in History from Wake Forest University in 1994 and a Master's Degree in Social Sciences/Historic Archeology from Georgia Southern University in 2008.

Mr. Sawyer thanked the Commission for inviting him to speak today. He said his presentation will involve mainly the project for the Chatham Area Transit (CAT) bus station expansion into the Greyhound facility.

Brief Background on the Project

Mr. Sawyer explained that he is a late comer in this project. But, as he understands it, there has been approximately a 15 year process with the site selection. The selection started with the Greyhound site, went full circle and then came back to the Greyhound site. The culture resources work is guided by Section 106 of the National Historical Preservation Act, which is triggered by the involvement of federal money through the Federal Highway Transportation Act. It is also under the National Environmental Policy Act.

Mr. Sawyer said, therefore, numerous sites were looked at and it was narrowed to this site. In March 2011, he was contacted by Mr. Larry Miles of Arrowood Environmental Group who asked if would be interested in monitoring the construction of this project as Section 106 review. Apparently, in a review of the memorandum of agreement (MOA) they found that a Phase I archaeological survey was not done. Mr. Miles asked him to conduct the Phase 1 survey. They began the Phase I archaeological survey in October 2011.

Mr. Sawyer said previously they dealt with the architectural component of the project. Although the bus station is not 50 years old, it was determined to be eligible for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places under the special criterion as well as the Thunderbird Lodge that is across the street (Oglethorpe Avenue) from the Greyhound Bus Station, as they relate to tourism during that period in Savannah.

Memorandum of Agreement

Mr. Sawyer said the memorandum of agreement was drawn to address adverse effects to the building that would take place. An addendum was attached requesting the Phase I archaeological survey which he undertook in October 2011.

Mr. Sawyer explained that the process of the Phase I archaeological survey involves upfront work to figure out the following basic questions:

1. What are they dealing with?
2. Where is it?
3. What is the likelihood of finding resources?
4. What types of resources do they anticipate?
5. What types of research questions would they be able to generate from the things that they might find?

The first step involved in this process was to define what were the project's parameters and the archaeological area of potential effect. What would be impacted on the sub-surface by this project. The next step involved looking at the environmental context. The land where the project is located has well-drained soils that are defined by the SDA and NCS as urban land complex. It is located on the edge of the bluff of the City of Savannah. It is an ideal spot for human habitation and has been for thousands of years. This is a place that they will have to look at extra carefully. He said that when they further look at the historical and pre-historical context, they will look at the surrounding area and pre-historic sites in the area which are very important locally, regionally and nationally are within five (5) miles of the site.

Mr. Sawyer said the Irene, Deptford, and the Bilbo Sites are probably the most prominent sites nearby. The site is located just outside of the boundary of the National Landmark District which led them to see that a high potential for finding significant prehistoric and historic period archaeological resources. They found that previous studies dating back to 1980 were done at this site, which included some grant funded research conducted by Dan Elliott on the Revolutionary War Park; thirteen (13) sites from this study were defined. Several were found to be determined to be eligible for inclusion in the National Register and some were determined not to be included.

Mr. Sawyer said the next step was to further define the area and be aware of what they might encounter. Some of the most valuable resources are maps. He showed the Commission two Revolutionary War maps from the Siege of Savannah. Some areas of concern surfaced.

Mr. Sawyer explained that where they really start to get into details and understanding of how this was used is when they started looking at the Sanborn maps. The earliest Sanborn maps available dated to 1888. In 1888 the lot is a series of small single and double room wood framed structures with the exception of one brick structure listed as residential. This was probably housing for workers in the city. What is interesting is how the development changes through the mid-twentieth century. Essentially, they see the development of light and commercial developments along with residential. Also, shown is more substantial and significant changes to the wood framed buildings from 1888 to 1898. When they get to 1950, they start seeing several churches here. Another significant aspect was the defining of the courtyard areas.

Mr. Sawyer stated that the next big question for him as it relates to the change regarding the nineteenth century into the twentieth century is, is there enough intact here that an archaeological study can be done to look at patterns of culture and change of these patterns through time. There is an opportunity with intact archaeological remains to really delve into these people's lives. To him, this is his focus of study and he was excited.

Mr. Sawyer explained that they try to understand before going into the actual archeology,

the digging, the criteria for eligibility for inclusion in the National Register. Archaeological sites in general fall under this category - is there enough information that a full blown study is going to add significantly to their understanding of prehistory or history? However, they are dealing with the City of Savannah. Not too many archaeologists look for specific events, but something as significant as the Siege of 1779 or the British occupation in itself is significant. Also, significant persons might surface if more research was done on the actual inhabitants. The aspects can be combined to recommend something as eligible for inclusion into the National Register.

Mr. Sawyer stated that eligibility gives the site value as far as the evaluation goes. It does not have to be listed on the National Register as long as it is eligible. It is an arduous process to get something on the National Register. This ensures the benefit of the doubt is given to the site and that it gets the protection afforded by the legislation.

Mr. Sawyer reported that the scope of the project was done in conjunction with the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) in Atlanta, GA. Thirteen (13) excavation units were placed around the site in a systematic fashion in order to get as large a sample of the project as possible. Two-by-two asphalt cuts were made. They took off the asphalt in these sections as well as the crush and run beneath as much as they could clearly define as field soil to get to the cultural layers.

He explained that what was found during Phase I investigation was that there is a huge amount of disturbance to the site from the 1963 redevelopment for the bus facility. The area was essentially graded from east to west. They found on one side of the site varying depths of very disturbed crushed, pushed cultural remains that had been compacted, graded and pushed across the site to level it. Although, it is not perfectly level, it is more level than it was in 1963.

Results of the survey

They completed thirteen (13) tests. They all contained artifacts. They took almost 2,100 non-brick historic period artifacts and documented almost 40 kilograms of brick and brick fragments. It was determined that, although there maybe intact elements within the site, there is not enough of the site in its entirety to answer any of the research questions at-large. There is not enough to really paint a solid cultural picture.

Mr. Sawyer said, therefore, he recommended to the state that the site be considered not eligible for inclusion in the National Register with the caveat that they were only able to dig so deep and it was systematic, that it be monitored so that anything else that might be turned up by the construction could be documented.

Mr. Sawyer stated that another aspect of disturbance deals with the widening of Oglethorpe Avenue. Essentially, the structures that fronted on Oglethorpe Avenue were lost. He said that the state accepted their recommendation.

The Beginning of Construction

Mr. Sawyer said the construction began with the removal of the underground storage tank and they stripped off the asphalt shortly thereafter. Gradually as the ground surfaced was

exposed things started popping up. The asphalt removal was exceptionally gentle. He had the opportunity to scrape some of the areas and do some probing. As it turned out, they found six additional features. His initially recommendation was to try to preserve all of these in place, if possible. Some of them were already impacted by footers and he knew it would not be possible. But, two of the features seemed like good candidates for preservation in place. The problem was to get to the proper grade, he would have to remove eight (8) to twelve (12) inches of the tops of the features.

The state viewed this as an adverse effect and decided that they rarely get to see these types of features in the City of Savannah. Therefore, they decided to bisect, excavate and document them. The excavation was done in ten centimeters so they could get an idea if there was a change in content. At the base, they could see some of the rubble from the intentional fill. They found about a half dozen bottles all the same styles, brown glass; half-pint whiskey bottles. They found one Morgan silver dollar dated 1888. They examined the well. Once he began to define the builders trench, everything he found dated to the 18th century or very early 19th century.

Mr. Sawyer said he made an erroneous mistake that he carries to the very end which is that he believed the structure was going to be sound enough to support the excavating of the wall to its entire depth. The soil in this area has no adhesion. There was a lot of rain and things began to loosen. They dug constantly, but had cave-ins. However, he still maintained that the structure would hold up, that they would be able to get to the bottom despite the fact that they expanded the hole about 40 feet. They found some bottles that dated to 1880 to 1890, but nothing of real age that would coincide with his theory that this is an 18th century well; they never got to the bottom. They started to see a lessening of the density of the architecture debris more settlement; this in conjunction with the fact that they saw the builder's trench tapering got them excited that they were nearing the bottom and may get the answers of how the bottom was constructed. Was it constructed on a frame or how exactly was it built? What artifacts would be at the bottom which would give them a better idea. Unfortunately, it gave way. With hindsight being 20-20, he would have excavated this differently with sections from the top and documenting as he went down rather than looking for the perfect profile.

Mr. Sawyer, pointing to a section, said it is now safely preserved. He contacted the state again and told them that it was not safe and is not practical for them to expand the hole 100 feet by 100 feet. The bottom will be preserved for future generations. This is where it stands now. Phase I is near completion. This was the area of the project that he thought was least likely to contain significant findings. He was surprised to see the intact features and how many there were based upon the level of grading that he had estimated. On the western portion of the tract, he saw a greater depth of deposit. There is a poured floor and there were no impacts underneath during the 1963 excavation. Therefore, he expects that they will find more features. The project is ongoing and they will document more.

NOTE: Mr. Sawyer had on display some of the handmade compass bricks along with some other artifacts.

Question and Answer Period

Ms. Goode-Walker stated that the area where the Greyhound Bus station is located was

known as Oglethorpe Ward. This was the only ward in the city that had no squares and it was predominately where the urban slaves lived during the 1800s. She said that Mr. Sawyer talked about the American Revolution and we all know that this was a road into town. She asked Mr. Sawyer when he spoke of the row houses that were in this area if he knew this was during the time of the urban slaves.

Mr. Sawyer answered that he can certainly see that the small dwellings would have continued from the early 19th century. He knows also that Savannah had a sizable free Black population before the war.

Ms. Goode-Walker said the population was here and the free Blacks were living on the east side of the city. She believes that there were 500 structures reported in the 1820s and five (5) of them were brick. One of them was the home of Andrew Marshall. She believed Mr. Sawyer said this was Williams Street. This population lived and worked anywhere they could in this area. She said also Mr. Sawyer spoke of a settlement near Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard. She asked him what was the name he mentioned.

Mr. Sawyer said it was the New Leads Settlement.

Ms. Goode-Walker said she was not familiar with this name, but she knows that earlier what is known now as Oglethorpe Ave and Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard, was known as the Orangeburg Settlement.

Mr. Sawyer said the New Leads Settlement was slightly south and was an area that was started by John Gardner as a light industrial area. This grew into a community of people. He believes this started about 1780.

Ms. Goode-Walker said she knows of Orangeburg because the mother of George Washington Owens of the Owens-Thomas House had a bar in this area.

Mr. George Cohen stated that he was curious of what difficulties they might have experienced while trying to do their work while the construction was going on.

Mr. Sawyer said a lot of things came into play. There were three construction groups here while their work was going on. They immediately adjusted what they were doing to allow them the space and time to do their work. There was an occasion at one time that they only had an hour and forty-five minutes to complete as a bus leaves and a bus comes. This was their schedule every day. Everyone on the project has been helpful and accommodating. However, he is sure that there has been some concern about time frames.

Ms. Pam Lossing asked if in the future this area will be excavated further or paved.

Mr. Sawyer answered that it will be paved, but will it be developed in 100 years. Is it going to be redeveloped in 50 years? Will this type of work occur then? If so, there will be a record of his work and an indication of what was excavated in 2012. Someone should be able to say let's see what is at the bottom of that well. Mr. Sawyer said he believes that if it can be conclusively confirmed that this was built in the 1750s or 1760s, it would probably be one of the earliest water structures in this area.

Ms. Goode-Walker asked Mr. Sawyer if based on his conclusion, could he recommend that this be designated as a historic site. What happens to the site?

Mr. Sawyer stated that the project will continue. It has a state site number and all of his information whether it be in summary or the actual final reports will be sent to the state to archive. However, it is now listed as a site. It will not be afforded the protection. The tipping factor was that there has been so much alteration to it.

Ms. Harris asked if the archaeological monitoring continues.

Mr. Sawyer answered yes.

Ms. Harris asked if there is a possibility of turning this into a historic site if significant findings were discovered, or has the determination been made conclusively and could not change.

Mr. Sawyer said when they get to the western end and possibly underneath the paved area, if structural remains start to jump out and defined living spaces become much more apparent, they will have to revisit this possibility. This will be done in consultation with the state. This will probably involve the state archaeologist coming to examine the site and data. This will be a huge process and a huge reversible.

Ms. Harris asked if there was an addendum to the original memorandum.

Mr. Sawyer explained that Phase I archaeological survey was an addendum to the MOA. The original MOA called for the archaeological monitoring. He believes, however, that an error was made when this was drawn and someone did not realize this. There was a previous Phase I archaeological survey done on the last two sites. One was the list of road sites. They, however, did not do any sub-surface testing. He believes that someone finally realized this at the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) and at the last minute said they needed to add this as well as it was not done during the Phase I.

Dr. Daves Rossell commended Mr. Sawyer on the details of his study. This is enlightening for this particular area and the history of Savannah. He said he wonders about the ultimate placement where the objects might go and where the story might be interpreted as public history for Savannah.

Mr. Sawyer said as a part of the MOA and the mitigation for the architectural impacts to the building, a display will be set up in the building. The story of this project will be incorporated with that as well as some of artifacts. The rest of it will be archived. However, this is available for future researchers. He said it also depends on what CAT wishes to do further. They may say they want to do something else with the artifacts.

Mr. Sawyer told Ms. Goode-Walker that he would like to find out more about the resources she spoke of because in doing his research, there was a gap from 1800 to 1850.

Ms. Goode-Walker told Mr. Sawyer that she would be happy to give him the resources. She thanked Mr. Sawyer for his presentation.

VI. Request for Extensions

VII. Staff Reviews

VIII. Other Business

IX. Notices, Proclamations and Acknowledgements

X. Adjournment

4. [Adjourned](#)

There being no further business to come before the Commission, Ms. Goode-Walker adjourned the meeting at 3:00 p.m.

The next meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, October 3, 2012 at 2:00 p.m. in the Arthur A. Mendonsa Hearing Room, MPC, 112 East State Street.

Respectfully Submitted,

Ellen Harris
Cultural Resource and Urban Planning Manager

EH:mem

The Chatham County - Savannah Metropolitan Planning Commission provides meeting summary minutes which are adopted by the respective Board. Verbatim transcripts of minutes are the responsibility of the interested party.