

MINUTES OF THE MEETING

ATHENS HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION

NOVEMBER 7, 2024

3:30 P.M.

COUNCIL CHAMBERS

ROLL CALL

MEMBERS PRESENT

Laura Lenoir
Timberly Guffey
Tyler Boyd
Jona Garrett
Justin White
Chairperson Shawn McKeehan

MEMBERS ABSENT

Jordan Curtis

OTHERS ATTENDING

Nora Cardin

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

1. Approval of October 3, 2024 regular meeting minutes

The minutes of the October 3, 2024, regular meeting were read and approved on motion by Justin White; seconded by Laura Lenoir; vote – unanimous

OLD BUSINESS

1. Brochure discussion

Mrs. Cardin said she does not think Chairperson McKeehan nor Mr. White have been assigned an area in the district to research for the brochure. The district was previously divided up and every member was given the same number of properties, give or take one or two. She presented them with the layout of the area that is sectioned off and color coded. Mr. White was assigned the properties in red, and Chairperson McKeehan was assigned the properties in yellow.

Chairperson McKeehan asked what they do for research.

Mrs. Lenoir said the idea is to ultimately have a brochure or have something electronic. The idea is to get a little information about the house; maybe who lived there, when it was built, architectural style, etc. They want to have careful research, not just ask somebody about the house. They research at the courthouse and if they can find an older picture of the house, that would be great; there are not a lot available. They discussed doing a few of the older houses and then decided to do

research on all the houses. One of the goals is to help people understand and appreciate the houses and then to share with the public.

Mrs. Cardin explained that the brochure started with a grant before covid. It was put on pause at that point. There is not a specific time frame as this is an ongoing project. She said she would send the map, the list, and the details of what they are looking for.

Ms. Garrett asked if they had discussed putting a plaque outside of the homes.

Mrs. Cardin asked if she meant putting the date it was built and the name.

Mrs. Garrett described what Cleveland has such as: original name, when built, and a little blurb about it.

Mrs. Cardin said they have not discussed that in depth.

Mrs. Guffey said they could have the name of the house, the date it was built, and who built it, and a QR code that could go to a website for people to find out more.

Mrs. Lenoir said in a brochure you could only get so much information but a website you could get more. Brochures are nice, but you have to have a place to get them.

Mr. White said they need something more digitized. He likes the idea of the QR code.

Mrs. Guffey said Mainstreet is working on walking tours, this may be something they can add to that. It could help better tourism.

2. Discussion of historic overlay downtown

Chairperson McKeehan said he had a question. The question was, "what role do they technically have here without a petition to do it?"

Mr. White said there is a lot of history down there that could be wiped away if someone remodels.

Chairperson McKeehan said he sits on the Advisory Committee, and they had a discussion with Mr. Casteel on this before. Based on state statutes, the Council can do this on their own. The Advisory Committee recommended that they get input from downtown businesses and then move forward with a petition. That petition would come to the Historic Commission. They would then recommend it to the Planning Commission. His understanding is that Council wants them to move forward without a legal petition. His question is what is their role in this.

Mrs. Lenoir said it is her experience that it can be opposed. Having survived that, she would really like to see them get input from the property and business owners first to make sure they are in favor of it before they start.

Chairperson McKeehan said he did talk to some people downtown. He said he thinks that 60% of the businesses in that downtown area would be supportive. Mr. Casteel told them in the Advisory Committee that they wouldn't have to have but 40% to get it done. Do they want to make a recommendation or let the Council move forward on their own accord.

Mrs. Lenoir asked if Main Street could ask the owners what they think. If there is a way to get the public, property and business owners excited about it then it might not start a fight.

Mrs. Cardin said she can get with the Main Street director and ask them to send a survey to business owners or they can have an open meeting and invite all the downtown property and business owners to it, so they feel they have some input.

Mr. White said anytime you tell anyone what they can do with their property that they own or run a business out of, you know what their response will be. He is not of the opinion that what one person thinks is best is beyond what everyone else thinks. At the same time, if they have 60%, a majority follows a majority. If they get the support of 60%, the rest are going to follow pretty quickly.

Mrs. Lenoir said they have the guidelines for downtown. They were done with the guidelines for the residential area.

Chairperson McKeehan asked if they were considered recommendations now.

Mrs. Lenoir said yes.

Mr. White said a lot of people will think they have to be followed. He said it does not; it is a guideline, a recommendation.

Mrs. Lenoir said they have to have the information out there rather than say what do you think about it, because if they do not know about it, they don't like it. Are there any funds to hire someone like the gentleman that came and spoke before, to come to a public meeting.

Mrs. Cardin said she did not know if there were any funds, but another option would be to have someone from the state come because they are a certified local government.

Mr. White asked if they could ask the Council for funding from the hotel/motel tax because this is basically tourism.

Mrs. Cardin said they would have to request the funds for it.

Chairperson McKeehan said if they ask the state to speak usually there is not a problem.

Mr. Boyd said if there is public comment, there are rules to follow.

Everyone agreed.

Mrs. Lenoir asked if they have the same opportunity with the state historical.

Mrs. Cardin said that is who they would be with, the Tennessee Historical Commission.

Mr. Boyd said he had some thoughts on public meetings and if business owners and property owners get together. If there are public comments, there are rules that are strictly followed and whoever is in charge lays down the hammer on that. Also, he thinks it would be reasonable to require deeds so that they may know who owns the property.

Mrs. Lenoir said she assumed they would have to have signatures, and she thinks it would be covered by the signatures.

Chairperson McKeehan said with that in mind, they could do this with Main Street. They could host it, and they could pay some of the costs and the Historic Commission could provide guidance and someone to chair the meeting. He asked what they thought.

Mrs. Lenoir said she thinks it would be good to have them as a partner.

Mrs. Cardin said she can talk to Main Street.

Mr. White said another thing they have to deal with is taking pictures.

Mrs. Lenoir said they have pictures.

Mr. White said they are older; they need to update them or find someone who can do it to have the most current information.

Chairperson McKeehan asked why not just do the downtown square. That would be easier.

The area they talked about was from Green Street to College Street down to Park Street, all the way to Hill Street.

Mrs. Cardin asked if they were talking about White over to Park Street, up Hill Street, all the way over to College Street.

The answer was yes.

There was more discussion about where they thought the downtown district should be.

Mrs. Cardin said if they want to make a recommendation to the City Council, they need to nail down the location of the district. If they want to get input from downtown business and property owners first, then they don't have to nail it down right now.

Mrs. Lenoir asked if they could tell the Council that they are interested and they are exploring how to present it to the public.

Mrs. Cardin said to her knowledge, it will be a recommendation to the Planning Commission.

Chairperson McKeehan asked Mrs. Garrett what the Planning Commissions' thoughts were on this.

Mrs. Cardin said the Planning Commission has not talked about this.

Mr. Boyd said it sounds like boundaries could be College, Hill, Madison, and if they were to include the Rice House, they could go to Long. It would be a lot smaller.

There was more discussion.

Mr. Boyd asked how many blocks it was from Madison, Hill, College, and Green. He asked if that was 15 blocks.

Mrs. Lenoir said they are going along the streets, but they have to go along property lines.

There was more discussion on the boundary lines.

Chairperson McKeehan asked if they want to have the informational session and have input before it goes up. He said he thinks there is a desire by the Council to do this sooner rather than later.

Mr. White said the way he understood it is Council can just do it.

Mrs. Lenoir asked why they were in a rush.

Mr. White said they should tell Council they are all for it and let them pass it. There will be some people upset, but it will not hurt his feelings.

Chairperson McKeehan asked if they were going to do the joint information session with Mainstreet.

Mrs. Cardin said it would take some planning, and it may take a little time to organize.

Mrs. Lenoir said at least they would be thorough.

Chairperson McKeehan said he thinks they may need a motion to hold this.

Mrs. Cardin said if they are going to continue the discussion there doesn't necessarily need to be a motion. She wants to know what they want her to do. Are they wanting to hold a separate public meeting or use the next regular meeting as the public meeting and just send it out to the business and property owners?

Mr. White said that he is all for that, but he is with Mr. Boyd, it needs to be the owners themselves. Someone invested in making a decision for the property.

Chairperson McKeehan asked if they wanted to bring a person in from the state.

Mrs. Lenoir said yes. They need to know what they are talking about. Right now, they are talking about the streets and outlines, not what the guidelines say and how it will affect them. They have to know what they are talking about other than just "we are going to do it this way."

Mr. Boyd said chop off the residential side of the guidelines and let them see the commercial portion.

Mrs. Cardin said they would plan for next month's meeting to have the person from the state give a presentation. She asked if the person that is over the CLG for the state cannot come, do they want to move forward with that plan and just have the Commission present the information.

Mr. Boyd said push it another 30 days if the state cannot attend.

Mrs. Cardin said she needs to contact the state before she goes to business and property owners.

Chairperson McKeehan said if they make a designation like this, that area might be open to apply for certain grants.

Chairperson McKeehan said they cannot sign minutes until the minutes have been corrected.

MOTION: To amend the motion until the minutes are corrected by changing Clark to Park.

MADE: Laura Lenoir

SECOND: Justin White

VOTE: Unanimous

MOTION PASSED

There was some discussion on the time for the next meeting.

Chairperson McKeehan suggested seeing if the state can do the presentation by Zoom.

Mrs. Lenoir said they might want to have a brief introduction on the history of what they are trying to preserve downtown.

Mrs. Garrett made the motion to adjourn.



Shawn McKeehan, Chairperson



Timberly Guffey, Secretary