

Minutes
Regular Meeting of the Historic Commission
City of Chattahoochee Hills
April 12, 2021
6:30 p.m.

Call to Order

Allison Duncan called the meeting to order at 6:33 p.m. Present were Allison Duncan, Gene Griffith, Brian Gross, and Amber Lightsey. A quorum was represented. Not present was Lila Rhyne. Kim Taylor-Cloud joined at 6:47.

Approval of Agenda

There were no changes to the Agenda.

Motion: Brian Gross

Second: Gene Griffith

The motion passed unanimously.

Approval of Minutes

1. Approval of the February 8, 2021 Meeting Minutes

Motion: Brian Gross

Second: Gene Griffith

The motion passed unanimously.

2. Approval of the March 13, 2021 Meeting Minutes (Summary of Cochran Mill Tour)

Motion: Gene Griffith

Second: Brian Gross

The motion passed unanimously.

Items for Discussion

1. Campbellton Master Plan (CMP) Recommendations

Duncan enumerates the CMP areas for consideration by the Historic Commission: collecting unwritten history; wayfinding and technology; courthouse square and placemaking; restoring Beavers House and property; and designating a historic district. Duncan asks for feedback. Griffith recognizes the good in these ideas as well as the need for funding. Duncan agrees and reiterates that focusing on wayfinding and the Beavers house is a good start for the Historic Commission thus far.

2. Comprehensive Plan Update Recommendations

Duncan asks for feedback on whether or not the Historic Commission should draft a Historic Preservation element to include in the Comprehensive Plan update, so it is a part of the larger policy document. Duncan would provide a draft for the May meeting and look for input and feedback from the commission. Historic Preservation is an optional element of a Comprehensive Plan; however, its inclusion would provide documentation of what the Historic Commission is prioritizing over the next five years or so. The commission approves and supports

Duncan drafting the Historic Preservation element for consideration and possible inclusion in the city's Comprehensive Plan.

Kim Taylor-Cloud joins the meeting at 6:47.

3. Varner House Landscape Survey Update

Griffith updates the commission on his early spring findings at the city-owned Varner house and property, describing the semi-circle of trees surrounding the house, along with the perennial herbaceous material, as rather unremarkable, noting that the plant material may not need any special consideration from the city crews when mowing. Griffith identifies a Ginkgo tree along the fence and property line; he recommends the tree be cleaned up and saved. Griffith also mentions Crepe Myrtles that form an entrance to the Varner cemetery, planted around the 1840s-50s. Duncan remarks that these natural elements provide clues to spatial patterns and how things worked there historically. She notes the deliberately planted flowering bulbs on the property, including a long line of old variety daffodils, as well as bluebells and a banana shrub. These popular, heirloom varieties were planted in the early-to-mid 1900s. Duncan suspects the Varner house's renovation around 1930 would have been the time plantings were added.

Since the Riverlands study includes the Varner property and its structures, along with a trail system, Lightsey walked the property with the study in mind, and described the less traveled southwestern end of the property, noting a natural pathway with a large oak as a landmark at its entrance. The old roadbed curves around and down to a cliff-like outcropping that provides a sweeping view of the river. She observed the heavy flooding that occurs on the property as well, noting this would need to be considered if a walking/riding path is installed.

Duncan notes that the rock elements used in the landscaping around the house are very similar to the rocks found in the outcroppings, suggesting they were dug up on the property and deliberately placed in the formal or planned garden. She also notes that the tombstones in the Varner family cemetery reflect a variety of trends over time. Perhaps this isn't worthy of a national register, but it is certainly of relevance to our community.

The commission's work and findings at the Varner house and property will be written up in a formal document along with photographs to be presented to Mayor and Council in the future.

Doug Cloud, of the Chatt Hills Conservancy, toured the Varner property with the Historic Commission members, and he expressed excitement at its potential. He is uncertain how the city-owned Varner property across the road will tie into the project.

Laurie Searle says there are no plans for the additional property as of yet. She says there was a Varner ferry at one time, and that there are still Varner family members living on Jones Ferry Road.

Gross asks about the Varner property, wanting to know if the property continues over across the river; it does not. Gross asks about the origins and age of the Gingko, and Griffith says it would have come from a nursery and is about 50 years old or so. Gross asks if the cemetery had a fence; the consensus is no, there was no fence, but Crepe Myrtle trees were planted as an entrance.

4. Introduction for request for cemeteries from Councilmember Searle

Searle spoke with Kenneth Booster, a family member of someone buried in the city-owned St. Paul Cemetery. He requested a sign be erected identifying the cemetery. Searle would like to include this and the other city-owned cemetery in the wayfinding effort. Searle wants to organize a cemetery clean-up day in the fall or winter, and thought the Historic Commission may want to do some historical research on the church cemetery.

Griffith notes that the property surrounding the cemetery is for sale. Duncan thinks a cemetery clean-up would be a good thing. She thinks a professional archaeological approach would be interesting to explore, especially since there are approximately 160 graves. Taylor-Cloud suggests the use of specialized detection equipment could be used to detect or identify plots. Griffith notes there is a hand-dug well near the cemetery area. The cemetery is surrounded by woods and not well delineated. Lightsey asks if perhaps the AME would want to be involved at some capacity, which could defray costs potentially.

Duncan proposes keeping this on the agenda for next month; however, if the city needs to move on this in the meantime, she trusts they will do so appropriately.

Updates

1. Beavers House Historic Structure Report

The Georgia State University team will make a presentation at the May 4th Mayor and Council Meeting between 5 and 6 p.m. Love says students are wrapping up the assessment portion of the survey, and Joe Smith is completing the measurements. They will be including in the report a portion of feasibility and use options.

2. Development Proposals

Taylor-Cloud has no new information to report.

3. Cochran Mill Park Interpretive Master Plan and Public History Day at Cochran Mill Park

Duncan will be sending out a final draft of the Master Plan that will include some updates from Ken Langley's feedback. Public History Day will be moved to the fall.

4. 200th Anniversary of Campbell County

Duncan announces that 2028 will be the 200th anniversary of Campbell County. This could be a target date for some of the Campbellton Plan Recommendations and fundraising for the Beavers House.

5. Signage: Parks and Historic Sites

Duncan states that the Historic Commission will follow the city's wayfinding sign concept for parks and historic sites signage. Laurie Searle says the city wayfinding design has been decided on, a simple black wooden sign with white letters (similar to the city's gateway sign). Duncan suggests that historical markers should stay simple, with content backed up digitally. A Tourism Product Development grant could possibly assist with the digital component of historic markers. Taylor-Cloud adds that Foxfire uses a QR code for their added content along with a brochure. Searle suggests that when an area can be walked and toured on foot, such as Campbellton, a visual sign, like a kiosk with brochures, would be appropriate. Searle adds that hotel/motel funds would be available. Gross says an app for the digital content could be both android and iPhone-friendly and controlled by the city and would have features such as alerting users to nearby historic markers. Duncan suggests the Historic Commission may want to begin working on the content for the app and will contact Parks Commission Chair Diana Wilson about the TPD grant process to assist with the cost of an app.

Commission Member Comments/Suggestions

Gross announces that Lila Rhyne's mother, Betty Ann Hargis, has passed away. She was a local repository of history and helped many people with their genealogical pursuits, and she was one of the founding members of the Campbell County Historical Society. Preserving the church cemetery was one of Betty Ann's greatest passions. Donations may be made to the Friendship Baptist Church Cemetery.

Adjournment

Motion: Brian Gross

Second: Gene Griffith

The motion passed unanimously.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:54 p.m.

Approved this 10th day of May, 2021.

Allison Duncan, Chair

Attest:

**Dana Wicher, City Clerk
(Seal)**