

**HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION MINUTES (HPC)
THURSDAY, MARCH 8, 2018 9:30 A.M.
CITY HALL, COUNCIL CHAMBERS, VERO BEACH, FLORIDA**

PRESENT: Chairman Debra Atwell; Vice Chairman Steve Erickson; Members: George Childers, and Dan Ullian **Also Present:** Gayle Lafferty, Senior Planner; Kira Honse, Assistant City Attorney and Tammy Bursick, City Clerk

Excused Absences: Megan Hoots and Jeffery Ray

Unexcused Absence: Jessica Francis

1. CALL TO ORDER

Chairwoman Atwell called the meeting to order at 9:30 a.m.

2. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

A) February 8, 2018

The Commission members all received copies of the minutes.

Ms. Atwell asked that some changes be made to the minutes. She went over all of the changes that she asked be made (attached to the minutes).

Ms. Kira Honse, Assistant City Attorney, cautioned Ms. Atwell in making sure that the minutes reflect what discussion took place at the meeting.

Mr. Erickson felt that the clarification of the minutes was clear.

Mr. Ullian expressed that the minutes are not done verbatim. He said the recording of the full meeting is available. He said that the minutes as modified do meet the substance of the conversation.

Ms. Atwell said that she did not want to see any missed steps when it comes to the grant for the Historic Preservation African American Cultural Heritage Action Fund. She wanted to make sure that the project is given every opportunity to be well received and off to a good start. She would like to see them do something to commemorate that space (referring to the Dodgertown golf course).

Mr. Erickson made a motion to approve the minutes as amended. Mr. Ullian seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

3. PUBLIC COMMENT

None

4. OLD BUSINESS

A) Recognition of Outstanding Tributes to Local History, Utilization of Letters, Awards, Proclamation Inclusions

Ms. Atwell recalled that the Commission had talked about incentives and their biggest one is marketing their preservation concept and they talked about ways to do that. She had asked the Commission members to try and spend some spare time researching other city websites to see how inviting they are and if they have a more engaging way of the getting the public's attention in getting people on board in designating properties. She said in doing that they can discuss things like creation of awards, such as awards for renovations. She asked the Commission members to be thinking about that and as they are doing research on line looking at other websites they can see how other cities do this. She said the Commission's goal is to improve their brand, which is to brand local preservation. The ways to do that are to make their website as user friendly and inviting as possible. As far as their part on the City's website, the Commission needs to be available to the public and to endorse and educate. She said printed publicity is always good. She then passed out to each member a copy of the newspaper article that appeared concerning the Gifford House (attached to the original minutes). She emailed the person who wrote this article and told her that she hoped she would continue to write stories like this one. She said they can look at the article and say that the property owners made the decision not to designate this piece of property and could get sad about that. However, what she thinks is a better idea is to try and celebrate whatever triumph you get and for her that is when this property came up for sale and wasn't even mentioned as an asset. The Commissions' worst fear was that it was going to be torn down. Instead the home has been purchased by a loving couple and they are very aware of the house's history and are going to try to be sensitive to that. At some point the home could still be designated historic unless numerous changes are made. She said that when the property owner appeared before them they worked hard to talk to her and make her feel a part of the preservation family.

Mr. Erickson asked why the property owner did not take the next step.

Ms. Atwell commented that as they dig deeper into incentives for designation it is obvious if someone goes on line to submit the necessary paperwork it takes a lot of time and makes a lot of people balk. Also, there is the inferred intent that the property owner is going to be watched or policed in a way that will interfere with doing things the right and affordable way. She said even people who have never pulled a permit have the notion that it is not an easy process.

Ms. Honse explained that anyone can act as their own general contractor for a house that they are going to be living in themselves. However, if it is a commercial enterprise or more than one (1) family living in a dwelling then a licensed contractor needs to be doing the work.

Ms. Atwell felt that when you go on the City's website or most websites and start reading about the process of designation the first thing you think of is that it is too difficult and frightening. This would be part of their challenge to make this process easy, friendly, and streamlined. She told the Commission members if they start looking at other sites that are of interest to them to please pull them so that the Commission can study them. She said the City ad valorem tax is not a huge consequence particularly when there is a house that is not too expensive because the property owner is only getting the tax relief on the improvements to the original building and not on the whole thing. She said it is up to the Commission to try to drum up excitement and enthusiasm in doing this.

Ms. Atwell asked Mr. Ullian if he had time to look up the author of this story and see if he can encourage her to do other stories. Mr. Ullian said he would follow up on that.

Ms. Atwell commented that another thing when they start talking about their portion of the City's website they could even do something like before and after pictures of houses being renovated. It would show what these houses looked like before they had no value or promise and then have an architect take pictures of what the house looks like after. The Commission brought up Mr. Scott McCracken's house as an example.

Mr. Erickson reported that he went to between five (5) and seven (7) different websites and did not find any in Florida that were winning awards. He said the first ones he looked at it was hard to find historic designation sites. He said this City does a good job in being out front on that. The only city he found that was interesting to him was Ft. Lauderdale. He said that Ft. Lauderdale has an interactive map of their designated properties.

Ms. Atwell expressed that they don't have to look at just Florida sites.

Mr. Erickson continued by saying that Plant City has a photo archive service that they provide.

Mr. Erickson asked if there was a Public Relations office in the City.

Mrs. Tammy Bursick, City Clerk, explained that at one (1) time the City did have a Public Relations Officer, but at this time they do not. She said anything that her office can do to help with publicity they would be happy to. She said most Commissions appoint someone on their Commission to handle publicity.

B) Review 2018 Commission Goals

This item was heard earlier.

C) National Trust for Historic Preservation African American Cultural Heritage Action Fund

Ms. Atwell reported that she has not heard back from the Trust yet. She has met with a couple of community leaders about the worthiness of this project to see if they have any interest in including fundraising. She wanted to get a little more information so that when she takes the proposal to City Council she is able to say that there may be some possible funding through outside fundraising opportunities. She did not stay for the last Recreation Commission meeting to discuss this item because it appeared that meeting was going to be very long and it would not have been the right time to introduce this new idea.

5. NEW BUSINESS

A) Marie Stiefel, President LRJF to speak

Ms. Atwell introduced Ms. Marie Stiefel, President of Laura Riding Jackson Foundation (LRJF), who was at today's meeting to talk about the Laura Riding Foundation.

Ms. Marie Stiefel thanked the Commission for allowing her to come and speak to them. She said that she was here along with two (2) other Board members, Ms. Barbara Gillferd and Ms. Susan Board. They wanted to give an update to the Commission on this property. They showed a model of the home. The home was constructed around 1910 when the region was a wilderness. It is a good example of Florida's historic "cracker" style of vernacular architecture with the deep porches and large windows for cross-ventilation. The center portion of the home is made of Florida pine. The Jacksons added the north bedroom and bathroom and installed indoor plumbing. Until 1989, Laura Jackson lived in her home without electricity using kerosene for heat and light and propane to cook. After her death in 1992, a group of concerned individuals created the non-profit Laura (Riding) Jackson Home Preservation Foundation to save the home as a focal point for the study of literature, history architecture and the environment. The Jackson home was moved in August, 1994 to the grounds of the Environmental Learning Center (ELC). Restoration and ongoing preservation of the home were major goals of the Foundation. Although damaged in the 2004 hurricanes, the home has been repaired and is open for public tours. The home is registered as a Friends of the Library USA National Literary Landmark and is listed on the Florida Literary Map. The house dates to the days of steam trains and the days before electricity. Wabasso (originally where the house was located) was a pioneering settlement in a sparsely settled frontier. Laura (Riding) Jackson believed the purpose of words is to express transcendent human truths. A prolific writer with many published works, she is recognized in *Who's Who in 20th Century Literature* by Martin Seymour-Smith as "the most consistently good woman poet of all time." In 2016 they had Indian River County established poetry laureate who is Shawn Sexton. They recently opened their writing center, which is located on 14th Avenue as a homebase for writers in Vero Beach. The center is open every weekday and sometimes on Saturday. In 2017 the Jackson home was designated by Florida Trust as one (1) of 11 homes that needed to be saved. Ms. Stiefel explained because of the condition of the home they cannot take a large amount of people through the home at one time. They are now faced with the decision that ELC does not want to renew their lease so the house will need to be moved. She hoped that the HPC would help them in preserving the building so that future residents experience what a cracker home looks like and learn about Laura Riding Jackson. She invited the Commission members to attend the 8th annual Poetry & Barbeque on Sunday, April 15th from 3:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m. at the home on the campus of the ELC. She then passed out a packet of information concerning the Foundation to the Commission members (on file in the City Clerk's office).

Mr. Childers asked what date is the lease up.

Ms. Stiefel stated that the lease expires in December, 2018.

Mr. Ullian asked where was the original location of the home.

Ms. Stiefel explained that it was in Wabasso off of 510 on the other side of the railroad tracks. She said that the property was purchased by the Schlitt family, but it was never developed.

Mr. Ullian asked if there is a risk in moving the home again.

Ms. Stiefel explained that they have talked to a mover who feels that the home can be moved. They would have to take it apart like they did before when they moved the home in 1994. There is a big cost to move the home. It will cost close to \$100,000 and at this time they have no property to move it to.

Ms. Atwell asked if there are any places being considered.

Ms. Stiefel explained that they have been talking to different institutions such as the College. Some of the Board members would like to have the house in town because of its historic nature. They would like to have an acre to sit it on like what they have now. She said they have talked to the County, but things seem to be moving slow. She said all this takes time and they are running out of time.

Ms. Atwell asked her if she had a preference of where the home is relocated to.

Ms. Stiefel explained they have a Board set up to research this and they are looking at different options.

The Commission agreed that it would be advantageous to have the home located in the downtown historic district, but parking has to be a consideration.

Ms. Stiefel agreed having the home in town where there are a lot of people would help their foundation, but they realize that parking is also an issue.

Mr. Childers asked Ms. Stiefel if she has approached the County about using the old space where the County Administration building used to be located. He said the land is not being used and there is a ton of parking there. He said the property resides in the historic area of the City and might be an avenue for them to explore.

Ms. Stiefel said they have not spoken to the County about that site, but would look into it.

Mr. Childers expressed the foot traffic that takes place these days downtown and that this area would be more accessible than the ELC. He doesn't know for sure whether it would draw more traffic or not.

Ms. Stiefel expressed that the problem that they have is they do not have the \$100,000 to move the house. She hopes that ELC will provide them some time to move the home from their property.

Mr. Ullian stated that he could not give legal advice but what he would say vaguely is that he thinks the most important thing is finding the right place for the home that is not a temporary solution. He said if it takes a little bit longer to do that, and come mid-November they have something that they are working on but can't move the house in December he would say good luck to ELC on getting them off of the property on the date that their lease expires. He said there are a lot of steps they have to take and a lot of things that the LRJF can do to keep the ELC from bringing out the torches. He said that he would not view that date as the time to start ripping off pieces of wood and start moving them somewhere else. He said if LRJF could show the ELC a date certain before their lease expires they will probably give them a temporary extension on their lease. He wants the LRFJ to find the right date instead of focusing on that date as the deadline that they have to have the home moved by.

Mr. Childers agreed that LRFJ was doing due-diligence, which cannot be denied and this would be a strong argument.

Mr. Ullian said that ELC would probably do what they could to accommodate them.

Ms. Atwell said that they could look at this as a positive thing. She said if they could position the home in a historic neighborhood or someplace else it would be much more appropriate.

Ms. Brown said that every 4th grader in the County goes through the house to show them how pioneers used to build homes environmentally, which is within the ELC's mission.

Ms. Atwell told the ladies she was so happy that they came to talk to the Commission today and was also happy that the house is going to be saved.

6. MEMBER'S MATTERS

Mr. Childers mentioned that one (1) of the thoughts he had when he first came on this Commission was to take his house and designate it and use it as a guinea pig on how this can be done. However, the Commission has been talking about designating properties, but has never come up with the mechanics or procedures to accomplish this designation.

Mr. Atwell commented that it has been important that the first step that they have to take is to do the survey. They talked about how they were going to solicit interest and didn't want to offend people by sending out a mailing when there was no building at the location at all. She said that Mrs. Anna Brady has done terrific work in obtaining the grant money to do this survey in order to get them started. She said what they can do is be personal advocates, have a website, put out propaganda that will invite interest and then once they have the survey in place they can look at it to see what buildings are eligible. Then they can go through them and pick the ones that represent Vero Beach and at that point with the property owner's permission they may want to start featuring these homes to get the ball rolling. She said their basic tool is to have the updated survey.

Mr. Childers explained the point that he was making is if someone comes to them and would like their house designated, where do they go from there. The Commission has never decided how they are going to go and visit the home, etc.

Ms. Atwell explained that the procedures are all on line and it starts with the Planning and Development Department. She said the application is filled out in order to find out whether or not the house is eligible and if it is then it comes to the Commission.

Ms. Gayle Lafferty, Senior Planner, added that the applicant provides the documentation and photos and the Planning and Development Department does the review and then brings it to the HPC for their approval.

Ms. Atwell expressed that they are a Regulatory Commission.

Ms. Lafferty said that it is all spelled out in the Code how to designate a piece of property.

Ms. Atwell said one (1) of their challenges is not to direct people to the website because it may seem overwhelming to them. She knows there is a way that these procedures could be paired down and put on the website in a way that it would get people started in the process and not feel that they are going to be subject to every line item.

Ms. Lafferty expressed that it was an easy process for someone to go through. She said that the application is only one (1) page and there is not a fee.

Mr. Erickson asked if this process was done with the old Diesel Power Plant. Ms. Atwell answered yes. The job of this Commission is to make recommendations to the City Council and they make the final decision.

Ms. Atwell brought up Mr. Scott McCracken and said that he came in on his own asking that his home be designated.

Mr. Erickson brought up the lady that owns the Gifford home who came in to talk to the Commission and decided that the process was too much for her.

Ms. Atwell explained that property owner was worried about finances and did not want to commit to something that would put them in a position that they would not be able to shoulder the expense at some point.

Ms. Honse addressed some of the restrictions that apply when going historic and said that sometimes makes people scared because they think that they are locked in and cannot make any changes to their home without permission.

Mr. Erickson asked what is the relationship between the National Designation and their Designation.

Ms. Atwell explained it is very different. She said that the HPC created their own criteria and then because they are a Certified Local Government they kind of manage their historic properties. The Historic Designation's criteria is very different. They have a very different tax credit system set up. She said a lot of the buildings that are National designated are buildings open to the public.

Mr. Erickson asked if a site could have both designations.

Ms. Atwell answered yes. She gave an example of the old Diesel Plant site having both designations. She said many sites have both.

7. CHAIRMAN'S MATTERS

8. STAFF MATTERS

9. ADJOURNMENT

Today's meeting adjourned at 10:38 a.m.

/tb