



CITY OF BIRMINGHAM

DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING, ENGINEERING & PERMITS

PUTTING PEOPLE FIRST

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Mayor

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Director

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BIRMINGHAM HISTORICAL COMMISSION

MEETING MINUTES

Tuesday, April 9, 2019
3:00 p.m.

Held at
Birmingham City Hall
710 North 20th Street, Room 220
Birmingham, AL 35203

Members Present:

Linda Nelson, Vice-Chairperson
Cathy Adams
Catherine Browne
David Fleming
Cherri Pitts
Lozea Brown, Councilor Hoyt's Assistant

Members Absent:

Sam Frazier, Chairperson
Nolanda Hatcher, Secretary
John Morgan

Staff Present:

Karla Calvert
Pamela Perry

Others Present:

David Schneider

In the absence of Chairperson Sam Frazier, Birmingham Historical Commission Vice-Chairman, Linda Nelson, called the meeting to order at approximately 3:20 p.m. The minutes of the March 20, 2018 Birmingham Historical Commission meeting were presented for approval. Linda Nelson stated that the March 20, 2018 minutes said that the Brownell building should be included in the proposed Magnolia Avenue South historic district, but the Brownell building actually is in the district; however, she noted that the actual Brownell name is not included on the inventory, and the building name should be included. Karla Calvert noted that the district had been listed in the National Register. David Fleming made a motion to approve the minutes with the noted change. Catherine Browne seconded the motion, and the motion passed unanimously.

I. Topics for Review and/or Discussion:

A. BHC vote on whether the following proposed National Register nominations meet the criteria for listing in the National Register of Historic Places:

- 1. The Bush Hills Historic District, Birmingham, Jefferson County, Alabama**
Karla Calvert stated that both the Bush Hills Historic District and the Birmingham Wholesale and Retail Historic District nominations would be presented at the April 25, 2019 Alabama National Register Review Board meeting. She stated that

the Bush Hills neighborhood had asked the City to apply for a grant that would be used to hire a consultant to prepare the National Register nomination. David Schneider of Schneider Historic Preservation was the selected consultant. Mr. Schneider presented the proposed district. He said that the boundary was based on the map given to him by the City for the survey and nomination project. David Fleming made a motion that the Bush Hills Historic District meets the criteria for the National Register and is eligible. Catherine Browne seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

2. The Birmingham Wholesale and Retail Historic District, Birmingham, Jefferson County, Alabama

Next, David Schneider began discussion on the Birmingham Wholesale and Retail Historic District. Linda Nelson stated that the district gets so sketchy to the north that it isn't a district. Schneider stated that with the 50-year review period, we're into the 1970s, and some things that previously weren't eligible, now are eligible. He said that he looks at the current National Register criteria, the physical inventory, and archival research, all of which are reviewed by current Alabama Historical Commission staff. He stated that the district is not the prettiest and doesn't hold together as well as most, but in Birmingham, sadly many buildings are being torn down. There is a lot of interest in the area because of Innovation Depot. Several buildings are being looked at for tax credits, and the National Register nomination is the best chance that some of the buildings have, because with the tax credit, many buildings would disappear. He noted that downtown, whole blocks are being torn down for mixed-use apartments, and this area could be next if some of the rehabilitations don't take place. Linda Nelson stated that it's not the modernity of the building, but after the war so much changed in terms of both how buildings were made, how they looked, and the neighborhood. She stated that the buildings don't hang together as a real district as well. The idea of a historic district is that it is a district. Instead, everything is historic and driven by tax credits. Schneider stated that in Charleston, there are 200 years of history, and there are houses from the early 1700s to fairly recent times, and they're all part of the district. He stated that from a National Register standpoint, the way the National Park Service looks at the nominations/districts, the district holds together pretty well. David Fleming stated that he echoes the concerns about losing more integrity than we are keeping. He emphasized the need to put in place as many tools as possible to preserve the historic fabric because we're losing that fabric despite all the successes. Schneider stated that REV Birmingham had hired him to conduct a survey of the downtown Birmingham historic districts, and if something doesn't change, some of the districts will go away. He said that there seems to be plenty of lots around the districts so that half of downtown doesn't have to be demolished. He noted that the smaller buildings are not valued because of the need for density as part of performance. There was mention of the Dr. Pepper Syrup building and the Denham Building. Fleming stated that as preservationists, our job is not done. We have to

be diligent with the tools that we put in place and with our intentionality in preventing the wrong ownership from having control of the buildings. Schneider stated that some people just don't know buildings are historic. Fleming spoke in support of the nomination and re-emphasized the need to have tools in place to preserve buildings.

Fleming made a motion for the Commission to support the nomination as meeting the criteria for the National Register. Cheri Pitts seconded the motion, and the motion passed with one denial (Nelson). Linda Nelson stated that she feels that the National Register process is corrupted by the tax credits, and that it's not the age but the integrity, because everything eventually becomes historic.

B. Consideration of a letter of support for a Certified Local Government (CLG) grant to hire a consultant to conduct a historical survey and complete a National Register nomination for the Norwood neighborhood

Calvert stated that the City applied for a CLG grant that would allow the City to hire a consultant to conduct a historical survey and complete a National Register nomination for the Norwood neighborhood. (The survey and nomination process had been undertaken but not completed by a prior consultant who was hired by the neighborhood association.) Cathy Adams made a motion that the Historical Commission write a letter of support for the grant. Catherine Browne seconded the motion, and it passed unanimously.

C. Update on the Local Historic District Designation for the South East Lake Area

Calvert stated that the potential South East Lake Local Historic District would be composed of four National Register historic districts, and combining the districts would leave about three holes in the boundary of the district. She mentioned that one of the residents suggested that those areas also be included, so she and Commission member Linda Nelson did a windshield survey of those areas. Calvert distributed mps showing the four districts and how they could be combined to form one large local historic district. Catherine Browne asked why the structures weren't included by the consultant who surveyed the districts for the National Register. Nelson stated that the structures were on the edge of the district. She noted that there are three houses that aren't that different from the other houses in the district. They were just on the edge and left out, but there's no reason to not include them even if they're considered non-contributing. She also noted that nothing except the new school in the middle of the area is different, and there also is a service station on the edge that is different from the other structures. Cheri Pitts also questioned why the consultant did not include the structures. David Fleming asked whether the City has the authority to put the properties in the local district even though they weren't in the National Register district. Calvert stated that the City's historic preservation ordinance states that one of the requirements for local historic district designation is that a historical/architectural survey has to be done, so a survey of the additional properties would need to be done, and survey forms would need to be submitted to the Alabama Historical Commission. She mentioned that the

South East Lake Historical Committee wants to include the additional properties within the local historic district for their neighborhood. Linda Nelson stated that the school property would be a large non-contributing property in the middle of the district. David Fleming stated that he could see how there could eventually be problems if holes were left in the district, and he would be supportive of including those areas. The Commission questioned when the school was built. Pamela Perry stated that the school was built in the 1990s. Calvert stated that the South East Lake Historical Committee also wanted to include the East Lake Cemetery located around Division Avenue, which adjoins the South East Lake Historic District. She noted that, if the local historic district were designated, all the properties in the local historic district would be subject to design review.

David Fleming made a motion to allow the properties, including the school, to be included in the proposed local historic district. Cherri Pitts seconded the motion, and the motion passed unanimously.

Calvert stated that the next step other than the individual survey of the additional properties would be to present the design guidelines to the neighborhood for feedback, to incorporate the changes, to present the Historic Preservation Plan and design guidelines to the Birmingham Historical Commission, and then to schedule the public hearing. Staff would send out notices of the neighborhood meeting to review the Plan. Those notices aren't required by ordinance, but staff prefers to notify the residents as a point of procedure and so that all the residents will be aware of the efforts.

D. Update on a National Trust for Historic Preservation grant award for a project entitled "Birmingham Historic Structure Reports for African-American Historic Resources"

Calvert informed the Historical Commission of a \$100,000 grant award and a \$22,500 grant award from the National Trust for Historic Preservation. Both awards would be used to prepare historic structure reports for the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church Parsonage, St. Paul United Methodist Church, and Bethel Baptist Church and Parsonage. She said that the application was submitted and approved last year. Hopefully other buildings that were included in the original grant application could be included in a future grant effort. There was an RFP Committee that reviewed the proposals. The work of the potential consultant would include architecture and structural engineering work.

E. Update on Historic District Street Sign Toppers for the Anderson Place, Cullom Street, and Phelan Park Historic Districts (Five Points South Neighborhood) and Update on a proposal for a Street Sign Topper Program for the City's Historic Districts

Calvert showed the Commission members pictures of historic district street sign toppers that had been installed in the Five Points South neighborhood. She said that calls and emails had been received from other interested neighborhoods, and that it is

desired to make this city program where the neighborhood associations could use their neighborhood funds to purchase the sign toppers. Linda Nelson observed that it seemed like the name of the district would have been large. Cherri Pitts and Karla Calvert stated that the sign wasn't designed that way in order to avoid confusion between the street name and the district name. Calvert stated that she was working with the legal department on the details, and that a resolution for the program might be placed on the Council agenda.

In miscellaneous matters, Calvert asked the members if a certain Tuesday of the month was better in terms of a meeting date. Catherine Browne suggested that the Avondale library was a good meeting location if needed.

II. Adjournment

With there being no further discussion, at approximately 4:13 p.m., the meeting was adjourned