

North Carolina Historical Commission

Conference Call Minutes

September 23, 2020

The North Carolina Historical Commission (NCHC, Commission) met via conference call on Wednesday, September 23, 2020. The following commissioners were in attendance: Dr. Valerie Ann Johnson, Acting Chair; Dr. Mary Lynn Bryan; Dr. David Dennard; Samuel B. Dixon; Dr. Malinda Maynor Lowery; B. Perry Morrison Jr.; Susan Phillips; W. Noah Reynolds, Barbara B. Snowden; and Dr. Darin Waters. Absent was Commissioner David Ruffin, Chair.

Others in attendance included: Dr. Kevin Cherry, Deputy Secretary, North Carolina Department of Natural and Cultural Resources (DNCR); Ramona Bartos, director, Division of Historical Resources (DHR) and Supervisor, State Historic Preservation Office (HPO); Dan Becker, Hurricane Grants Manager, HPO; Michele Patterson McCabe, Grants Coordinator, HPO; Jeff Adolphsen, Senior Restoration Specialist, HPO; Beth King, Architectural Survey Coordinator, HPO; Kristi Brantley, Certified Local Government Coordinator, HPO; Annette Stone, Hurricane Grants Specialist, HPO; Dr. Mary Beth Fitts, Assistant State Archaeologist, Office of State Archaeology (OSA); and Parker Backstrom, Office of Archives and History (OAH) Administrative Assistant and Recording Secretary for the NCHC.

Call to Order

Because NCHC Chairman David Ruffin was unable to attend the meeting, Dr. Valerie Johnson served as the Acting Chair. Dr. Johnson called the meeting to order at 10:02 AM and took a voice roll call of commissioners by asking each to introduce herself and himself for the record. The chair noted that a quorum had been achieved and the meeting commenced.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The commissioners, having had a chance to review in advance materials pertaining to the day's business, were asked by Dr. Johnson to state whether any of them had concerns about an actual or potential conflict of interest. She herself noted a potential conflict of interest and stated that she would recuse herself from any actionable business pertaining to possible grant funding for the Bellamy Mansion. No other concerns were voiced. Dr. Johnson expressed her appreciation for those attending and emphasized the importance of providing financial assistance to applicants to help them recover from damage resulting from Hurricanes Florence and Michael.

The Awarding of Hurricane Sub-Grants

Dr. Johnson asked Ms. Bartos to provide an overview of the business brought before the NCHC today. Ms. Bartos began by noting that she will summarize from the report prepared for and made available to the commissioners in advance of the meeting.

Ms. Bartos explained that a bipartisan agreement in the United States Congress in 2019, championed by North Carolina Congressman David Price, resulted in \$50 million being appropriated from the Federal Historic Preservation Fund for hurricane recovery for historic preservation needs in six states in the southeastern quadrant of the United States plus the territory of the North Mariana Islands. This included North Carolina, the first time such funding has been provided to the state for this purpose. The state's share of the full appropriation was \$17 million, to be administered by the North Carolina HPO. The HPO's plan designates over half of that figure—\$9.25 million—to constituent sub-grants. This level of funding for these purposes, she said, is extraordinary. The HPO's federal agency partner for this endeavor is the National Park Service (NPS). Ms. Bartos noted the massive effort put forth by staff in the HPO and the OSA to push out this program in the throes of the Coronavirus pandemic.

Ms. Bartos explained that there were three key eligibility requirements that applicants had to meet to be considered for bricks-and-mortar sub-grants: there had to have been documented damage to property from Hurricane Florence, Hurricane Michael, or both, and the property had to be situated in one of the 61, storm-related Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)-declared counties in the state; and the properties for which sub-grants are being sought must either already be listed on the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) or be eligible for listing on the NRHP; and the applicant had to be either a local government or a non-profit organization.

The HPO received 26 applications; the list of applicants was included in the packet of materials made available to the commissioners in advance and made available to the public on the NCHC website. Explained Ms. Bartos, the NCHC's role today is filling a federal, peer-review requirement for the North Carolina State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO), Dr. Cherry, before the program can move forward. The Commission is being asked to review the work of a five-person sub-grant review panel made up of staff members from the HPO and the OSA, supported by other OAH personnel in different regions of the state, before forward that panel's recommendations to the SHPO. She introduced those panel members, all of whom are in attendance today and are listed in the roster of attendees at the top of this set of meeting minutes. Following the NCHC's recommendations to the SHPO, explained Ms. Bartos, Dr. Cherry will make his selections then direct HPO staff to submit the projects to the National Park Service for its vetting and final approval. Ms. Bartos told the commissioners they were free to accept the report as written by staff or make modifications as they see fit. She seeks to solicit the commissioners' feedback through two separate motions: their recommendations to Dr. Cherry as SHPO, based upon staff recommendations; and their approval for the HPO to prepare a report to the NPS based upon their recommendations to Dr. Cherry. She then introduced Mr. Becker to describe the sub-grant review board selection process.

Mr. Becker explained that the availability of sub-grant funding was announced to the public on May 27 through a general media release and targeted announcements to historic preservation programs and similarly interested entities and parties. The number of grant application packets mailed out ended up numbering 117. The deadline for submission of applications was August 14. Mr. Becker explained how staff reviewed and scored applications, which numbered 26. Two did not meet eligibility requirements leaving 24 eligible applicants, for which the reasonable cost for the scope of work needed to meet or exceed a grant minimum of \$25,001. Mr. Becker directed the commissioners' attention to the scoring template made available to them in advance of the meeting then explained how staff scored the various applications. In the end, the two lowest scoring

applicants did not receive funding due to the consumption of available funding by the 22 higher scoring applicants.

Dr. Johnson opened the floor to questions from the commissioners about the applications and scoring process, but none were forthcoming.

Based upon the concern of a potential conflict of interest voiced at the outset by Dr. Johnson, Mr. Morrison moved that the report, less the application from the Bellamy Mansion, be accepted as one slate as recommended by OAH staff and forwarded to Dr. Cherry. This motion was seconded by Ms. Phillips. A roll call vote was taken, and the motion passed unanimously. Dr. Johnson then asked for a stand-alone motion on the Bellamy Mansion portion of the report. Mr. Morrison moved that the Bellamy Mansion funding be approved as recommended by staff and forwarded to Dr. Cherry. That motion was seconded by Dr. Dennard and passed unanimously on a voice vote, with Dr. Johnson abstaining.

After receiving clarification from Ms. Bartos on the required second vote, Mr. Morrison moved that the NCHC authorizes HPO staff to prepare a report reflecting the Commission's recommendations to Dr. Cherry for state approval of sub-grant applications, for forwarding to the NPS for its vetting and subsequent final approval. This motion was seconded by Ms. Snowden, and the motion was carried unanimously via voice roll call vote.

Dr. Cherry thanked the NCHC for its peer review of this hurricane sub-grant process, and expressed his appreciation for the excellent work done by OAH staff in creating the program from scratch and implementing it during an especially challenging time in our state and nation. Dr. Johnson echoed this appreciation on behalf of the commissioners.

To conclude, and at the request of Ms. Bartos, Mr. Becker laid out how the remaining \$7.5 million of the \$17 million hurricane recovery funds not being directed to constituents is slated to be used at the state level. That money will be used, he said, to help conduct county surveys of historic buildings, properties, and cemeteries, as well as for construction and renovation projects and disaster planning, training, and response initiatives.

Adjournment

With business concluded, Dr. Johnson adjourned the meeting at 10:43 AM.

Respectfully submitted,

*[A final post-edited version will be
supplied for a signature]*

Kevin Cherry