



CITY OF SOUTHPORT
HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION
REGULAR MEETING
113 W MOORE ST
SOUTHPORT, NC 28461
August 6, 2025
4:00 PM

Minutes

Members Present:

Chair Charles Drew
Vice Chair Bonnie Bray
Jim McKee
Joanne Wesson
Katherine Hufham
Alexis Gore-Graves
Tal West
Josh Cline McGee

Members Absent:

Bonner Herring

Staff Present:

Maureen Meehan, Planning Services Director
Penny Tysinger, Historic Preservation Commission Planner

- A. Chair Drew called the meeting to order at 4:02 PM.
- B. Chair Drew gave the invocation.
- C. Chair Drew led everyone in the Pledge of Allegiance.
- D. **Approval of Agenda**
Chair Drew noted for the record that Mr. West and Ms. Hufham would be serving as voting members for the meeting due to absences.

Vice Chair Bray requested that a new item be added under Item G-New Business - discussion of a proposed letter to the editor for the State Port Pilot.

A motion to approve the amended agenda was made by Mr. McKee and seconded by Ms. Wesson. Motion passed unanimously.

E. Public Comment

Woody Wilson, 502 West Brunswick Street

Mr. Wilson introduced himself and explained that he was behind in following the Commission's work due to personal travel. After attempting to review the 197-page draft document, he expressed concern that its level of detail could lead to excessive oversight of homeowners' personal choices in maintaining historic properties. He referenced a similar attempt in the early 2000s to establish a historic district that was met with community resistance.

While supportive of preserving historic homes, Mr. Wilson cautioned against regulations that would control minor decisions such as paint color. He urged the Commission to avoid overreach, emphasized that many homeowners have responsibly maintained their homes without city oversight, and asked for clarification about the driving force behind the initiative. Chair Drew clarified that public comment was not a dialogue but assured Mr. Wilson his concerns would be addressed later.

Debbie Barnes, 425 West West Street

Ms. Barnes commended the Commission's effort and recognized the extensive work involved but cautioned that much of the draft appeared to have been borrowed from other jurisdictions and needed tailoring to Southport. She emphasized that homeowners already invest heavily to preserve their properties and often rely on modern, cost-efficient materials.

She expressed concern that rigid restrictions on "minor standards" could burden residents financially and discourage property sales. Ms. Barnes strongly advocated for:

- Converting *minor standards* into guidelines rather than mandates.
- Including a grandfather clause to protect existing homeowners from retroactive enforcement.
- Ensuring no future additional fees or HOA-like structures are imposed.
- Allowing residents of the historic district to have majority representation on the Commission and possibly a direct vote on adoption of standards.

Ms. Barnes stated, "I'd like to see the majority vote be done by people who are in this district. And I volunteer to be on the board, and I will also help protect and preserve this town." She reiterated that the focus should be on new construction and major renovations that alter the character of homes, not on regulating long-standing homeowners.

Kurt Sheetz, 314 East Bay Street

Mr. Sheetz agreed with Mr. Wilson and Ms. Barnes, noting that the Commission was formed in response to specific problematic properties but should avoid burdening current residents. He advocated for a grandfather clause and a 50% renovation threshold, meaning properties would only be subject to the new standards if renovations exceeded that scope. He stressed that homeowners had purchased their properties under different rules and should not face new restrictions retroactively.

Gibby Wilson, 416 West Brunswick Street

Ms. Wilson shared that her family had deep ties to Southport and that homeowners had already set a high standard for preservation through their own conscientious efforts. She argued that local guidelines could be developed to advise new property owners and those seeking major alterations, but that additional restrictive regulations would be unnecessary and burdensome.

Pete Haislip, 309 East Bay Street

Mr. Haislip expressed general support for preserving Southport's historic character and praised the Commission's work, but echoed the common theme of public concern. He stated that a grandfather clause paired with a 50% renovation trigger seemed to be a fair compromise that balanced preservation with homeowner rights.

Drawing on his experience serving on another quasi-judicial board, he warned that excessive reliance on "minor" standards would create inconsistency and subjectivity, depending on who was on the board at the time. He encouraged the Commission to focus on clarity and specificity, and to define the desired *look and character* of the district rather than over-regulating specific materials.

Chair Drew addressed the audience to clarify misconceptions and provide background on the Commission's work. He emphasized that public comment was always welcomed and that the Commission had carefully considered and incorporated feedback throughout its three years of meetings.

Chair Drew noted that:

- The guidelines under review do not regulate interior work, paint colors, or prohibit materials such as Hardie plank. Instead, the focus is on *streetscape character and exterior preservation*.
- The draft was not copied from another town's standards; rather, Commissioners spent countless hours line by line tailoring the document specifically to Southport.
- Since its 1980 designation on the National Register, Southport's historic district has carried no actual protection, leaving significant historic structures—such as the Walker-Pike House (1800)—vulnerable to demolition.

He pointed out that developers, not homeowners, were the real concern, citing examples such as the "two shoe boxes" at the Yacht Basin that would not have been permitted under design standards. He stressed that without protections, even landmarks like the Brunswick Inn or the old courthouse could legally be demolished and replaced with modern structures.

Chair Drew also reviewed the history:

- An ad-hoc Aldermen's committee drafted the original preservation ordinance in September 2022.
- Commissioners were appointed the following month, several of whom live or own property in the historic district, while others are lifelong Southport residents with deep roots in the community.
- He expressed disappointment at suggestions that non-residents of the district were unqualified to serve, stressing that all Commissioners share the goal of protecting Southport's character.

He concluded by outlining recommendations being forwarded to the Board of Aldermen, which include:

- Removing many *minor* Certificate of Appropriateness requirements, particularly for landscaping, trees, and non-visible side or rear yard elements.
- Adjusting application timelines.
- Clarifying emergency provisions for items such as HVAC.

These refinements were drawn directly from public input at prior hearings and meetings. Chair Drew explained that while the Commission could not itself amend the ordinance at this stage, the Board of Aldermen could incorporate these changes without restarting the public hearing process.

Additional Commissioner Remarks

Mr. McGee warned that Southport has now been “discovered,” making it more attractive to developers. He expressed concern that if protections fail, investors will purchase properties, demolish historic homes, and replace them with structures that only meet basic building code.

Chair Drew added that Southport’s recent loss of its ETJ and possible de-annexations demonstrate that the City cannot assume its character will be preserved without proactive measures. He gave examples of properties currently facing de-annexation where large-scale development could occur if protections are not adopted.

Mr. McKee recalled that not long after the failure of the earlier preservation commission, he had authored a paper comparing Southport in 1999 with Southport in 2005, which documented how quickly historic properties were lost following the lapse in protections. He warned that when such failures occur, the loss is rapid and irreversible, emphasizing, “When it happens, oh, and it will happen, it will be fast. There’s not a bloody thing we’ll be able to do about it. I’ve seen it once. It failed only once—shame on you. Fool me twice—shame on me.”

Mr. McKee further reflected on his service on the commission in 2002, when a preservation attempt collapsed, leading to significant loss of historic structures within just a few years. While strongly supporting the need to act now, he also agreed with community members that the process must be done carefully and correctly, even if it takes more time, so that the final result is durable and widely supported.

Vice Chair Bray described the guidelines as a “living, breathing document” that can be continually updated in partnership with residents. She stressed that the Commission’s role was to listen and adapt, but also to provide a starting framework that the Board of Aldermen could refine over time.

Mr. West reflected on his prior experience serving in local government in Mecklenburg County, where unpopular regulations were later appreciated for protecting community character. He compared unchecked development in Charlotte, which erased most historic structures, to the risk Southport faces without protections. He urged looking decades ahead and commended the Commission for being responsive to residents’ feedback while holding firm on the need for enforceable standards.

Ms. Wesson emphasized that while perspectives differ between historic district homeowners and other residents, the shared goal is preservation. She stated that the draft guidelines are lengthy but necessary to provide enforceable protections. She reminded the public that commission terms are staggered, and residents of the historic district are welcome to apply for future openings to ensure continued representation.

Ms. Hufham added her personal history, noting her family’s 233-year ties to Southport and her ownership of a historic district property, underscoring that many Commissioners and participants have deep, vested interests in preservation.

Chair Drew closed the discussion by reiterating that the Commission has incorporated public feedback and is forwarding recommendations for changes to the Board of Aldermen.

F. Old Business

1. Review of Public Hearing Comments from 7/10/2025 Board of Aldermen Meeting
Chair Drew opened discussion by asking if any additional items needed to be added to the Commission's recommendations. Director Meehan noted that she wished to review the list of recommendations in detail to ensure accuracy, as there were discrepancies between the draft she prepared and the version circulated by Vice Chair Bray.

Director Meehan began with concerns raised about requiring a *minor Certificate of Appropriateness (COA)* for changes to landscaping, fencing, or features in rear or non-visible side yards. She reported that the recommendation was to remove all such requirements from the site and setting chart on pages 15–16 of the guidelines.

Chair Drew confirmed that the intent was to eliminate minor COA requirements for work in rear yards or non-visible side yards.

Ms. Tysinger suggested using the phrase “publicly visible” rather than “from the street” for greater clarity.

Vice Chair Bray emphasized that the intent was to clearly remove guidelines for rear and non-visible side yards, noting that the current wording could be confusing.

Mr. McKee stated that the Commission should “stay out of the landscaping business.”

Mr. McGee recalled making the original motion to eliminate landscaping oversight, which had been seconded.

Chair Drew confirmed agreement but stressed that language needed to be precise, clarifying that the change would not affect building permits or UDO requirements, only HPC review.

Motion: Ms. Bray moved that the Commission recommend removal of guidelines related to property areas not publicly visible in rear or side yards. Ms. Graves seconded the motion, and it passed unanimously.

Application Timeframe for COAs

Director Meehan reviewed the recommendation regarding the timeframe for Certificates of Appropriateness (COAs). The original draft required applications to be reviewed and acted upon within a “reasonable time not to exceed 180 days.” She explained that concerns were raised this could result in delays for smaller projects, with six months becoming the norm rather than the exception. After consulting the City Attorney, it was determined that the timeframe could be shortened.

The Commission agreed to recommend reducing the review period to 90 days, with the option for extensions if both the applicant and the Commission consent. Members expressed appreciation for this adjustment, noting that it would balance timely approvals with flexibility when additional time is needed.

Historic District Boundary

Director Meehan reviewed questions about differences between the Local Historic District overlay boundary and the National Register boundary. She explained that the Yacht Basin

and Kingsley Drive areas were excluded from the local boundary because research concluded that their historic integrity had been compromised through demolition or unsympathetic alterations. These areas, however, remain within the National Register district.

The Commission confirmed its recommendation that the 2010 study area and study area boundary be removed from official maps. Going forward, maps will show only the National Register District and the Local Historic District. Director Meehan clarified that if additional properties were ever to be added in the future, the process would require starting over, including Planning Board review and a public hearing before Board of Aldermen action.

Membership Requirements

Director Meehan also noted that concerns were raised about some HPC members living outside the district. She explained that membership requirements are established in the City's Code of Ordinances, and only the Board of Aldermen could amend them. Chair Drew stated that the matter should remain under the Board's authority. Commissioners observed that the current membership includes several who either live in or own property within the district, and others who are lifelong Southport residents, which they felt represented a balance of stakeholders.

Application Fees

Director Meehan summarized public concerns about potential additional costs of Certificates of Appropriateness (COAs). To address this, the Commission recommended that all COA applications, whether minor or major, be processed at no cost at this time, with the fee schedule to be revisited during future budget sessions. Commissioners expressed agreement with this approach.

Clarification on Minor COAs

Discussion returned to the COA tables in the guidelines. Vice Chair Bray reiterated that page 15 of the draft should be revised to remove all minor work requirements related to landscaping and non-visible areas (rear yards or non-public side yards). Commissioners agreed with this clarification, emphasizing that the intent is to restrict review to publicly visible alterations only.

The Commission continued its review of the remaining sections of the proposed design standards, focusing on the items that would still require Certificates of Appropriateness. Director Meehan walked members through the list, noting that minor COAs would continue to apply to features such as air conditioning units, window fans, exterior lighting, signage, sidewalks, parking areas, docks, piers, chimneys, storm doors and windows, porch railings, temporary accessibility ramps, swimming pools, patios, and small accessory structures. She also explained that demolition of non-historic additions and safety-related utility work would remain under review.

Mr. McKee questioned whether temporary items, such as storm doors and exterior lighting, should remain within the Commission's purview since they do not permanently alter the historic fabric of a structure. Several members countered that while technically temporary, these features could significantly impact the visible character of historic homes, and therefore still warranted oversight.

Chair Drew reminded the group that these types of applications would continue to be handled administratively, without charge to the applicant, and would often be reviewed alongside required building permits.

Conversation then turned to the topic of potential boundary expansions. Chair Drew noted that members of the public had raised questions about protecting historic cemeteries, such as John N. Smith Cemetery, or other sites on the edges of the current district. While commissioners expressed interest in preserving these areas, it was agreed that the priority for now was adoption of the proposed standards. Any discussion of district expansion, they concluded, should occur after the guidelines were in place and functioning.

Another recurring concern from the public involved the concept of a “grandfather clause.”

Mr. McGee and Vice Chair Bray explained that some residents feared they might be required to retrofit existing features to meet new design rules. Chair Drew clarified that the standards are not retroactive; no existing home or feature will be required to change. The standards only apply to new construction, alterations, or renovations occurring after their adoption. Even so, Commissioners agreed it might be wise to include a clear non-retroactivity statement in the ordinance itself, and they recommended that the Board of Aldermen and the City Attorney consider adding such language for clarity.

The discussion then shifted to materials. Commissioners noted that concerns had been raised about limitations on fiber cement siding, such as Hardie board, particularly in visible areas. Director Meehan pointed out that the draft language does allow for substitute materials where appropriate, provided they resemble historic appearance, and clarified that while vinyl and aluminum siding are prohibited for new construction, they may be maintained where they already exist. The Commission agreed that the proposed language struck the right balance between protecting historic character and allowing for reasonable modern alternatives.

Chair Drew raised a concern about the phrase “major renovation” in the draft standards, questioning how the Commission would define it. He noted that without a clear definition, the HPC could face disputes from applicants claiming they were “grandfathered in” or not required to comply.

Mr. McGee clarified that the draft only required compliance when new construction or major renovation occurred. Vice Chair Bray observed that any major renovation would already trigger a building permit, which would alert staff and the Commission to review the work. She also stressed that the standards focus on exterior appearance, not interiors, though the public often misunderstands that distinction.

Mr. West urged the group not to delay the document with too many revisions, warning that sending it back could push adoption past the election cycle, when new officials might not support the project. “We might have to redo the whole thing again,” he said, encouraging the Commission to move it forward while there was momentum.

The conversation then shifted to materials, specifically the use of fiber cement siding such as Hardie board. A member of the public, Ms. Barnes, pointed out that section 2.2.11 restricted its use to new or non-historic structures, or to additions not visible from streets or waterways. She argued this was too limiting, given that some historic houses already have Hardie board siding that is visible, and that the material is valued for its durability.

Chair Drew read the section aloud, while Ms. Tysinger clarified that the restriction applied only to additions, not full replacement on historic homes. Director Meehan referred to section 2.2.10, which allows substitute materials when they better match the original appearance, giving the Commission discretion to consider alternatives.

Ms. Graves noted that Hardie board had been discussed in previous hearings and was generally accepted when it replicated historic siding. Mr. West added that newer versions of the product closely resemble wood, and future materials may provide even better options.

Chair Drew spoke on the draft design standards, noting that Section 2.9 prohibits the use of vinyl or aluminum siding. He clarified that existing vinyl or aluminum siding may continue to be maintained or replaced, a clarification added to avoid confusion. He stated while vinyl and aluminum siding are prohibited for new construction, existing installations can remain and be replaced. He reassured the public that no homeowner would be forced to remove siding already in place. The Commission agreed that the draft, as written, gave them adequate authority to review materials like Hardie board on a case-by-case basis.

Ms. Tysinger confirmed that all requested changes were incorporated into the draft and asked for a formal motion on the fully amended document. Chair Drew called for a motion.

Motion: Mr. McKee made the motion on the recommendations to the Board of Alderman for changes and it was second by Ms. Wesson. Motion passed unanimously.

2. Discussion on Additional Public Comments Received

Chair Drew then reported that additional comments received from Alderman Carroll had been addressed, and others pertained to things in the Unified Development Ordinance (UDO), outside of historic preservation. The commission agreed to proceed forward.

Vice Chair Bray proposed submitting a letter to the editor of *The State Port Pilot* to clarify the Commission's recommendations and encourage continued public engagement ahead of the Board of Aldermen's vote scheduled for August 14th. She emphasized that the letter would highlight changes already incorporated, stress that the document remains a living and amendable standard, and thank the residents who participated in the public hearings.

She noted her concern that, because she is running for office, the letter should not appear political and inquired whether it could be submitted in the name of the full commission. Members expressed general agreement with the idea, though it was noted that *Pilot's* guidelines may require a single signatory. Chair Drew offered to have the letter signed under his name as Chair of the Commission. The commission agreed that the language should be updated to reflect the latest meeting, with revised bullet points added, and that the letter should project a positive and educational tone.

G. New Business

There was no new business.

H. Other Business

Chair Drew announced that the Board of Aldermen will consider the design standards at its meeting on August 14 at 6:00 p.m. in the Community Building. He encouraged commission members to attend, noting the Board's prerogative to approve, deny, or extend action. The commission's next regular meeting will be held on September 3rd.

I. Announcements

Ms. Tysinger informed the commission that the building will be undergoing renovations in the near future. She explained that the process is currently moving into pre-bidding this month,

followed by bidding and contract award. Depending on the construction timeline, the commission may need to relocate for one, and possibly two, of its upcoming meetings. She assured members that the public would be properly notified of any changes and stated that, in consultation with Public Works, it was most likely that only one meeting would be affected, though two remained a possibility.

J. Adjourn

Chair Drew offered concluding comments, drawing upon his personal background as a minister of 36 years. He reflected that just as scripture can be taken out of context and misapplied, the commission must avoid treating the design standards as rigid or absolute. Instead, he stressed that the guidelines must remain a “living, breathing document” subject to amendment as circumstances require.

He emphasized that while the document may not be perfect, it provides necessary protections and a starting point for the preservation process. Chair Drew reminded members that the commission’s purpose is not to place burdens on businesses or citizens, but to “protect, preserve, and promote”—the three pillars of preservation identified at the outset of the process. He underscored that education and continued dialogue with the public are key to ensuring the standards are understood and supported.

A motion to adjourn was made by Mr. McKee and seconded by Vice Chair Bray. Motion passed unanimously.

Adjourned at 5:45 PM.

Charles Drew
Chair

Tori Deviney
Deputy City Clerk



