



**CITY OF SOUTHPORT  
HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION  
REGULAR MEETING  
SOUTHPORT FIRE HEADQUARTERS EMERGENCY OPERATIONS CENTER  
1011 N. HOWE STREET, SOUTHPORT, NC 28461  
February 4<sup>th</sup>, 2026  
4:00 PM  
Minutes**

**Present Members:** Chair Charles Drew, Vice Chair Bonnie Bray, Jim McKee, Joanne Wesson, Alexis Gore-Graves, Tal West, Bonner Herring

**Staff Present:** Maureen Meehan, Planning Services Director; Penny Tysinger, Historic Preservation Planner; Scott Baillargeon, Deputy City Clerk

**Absent:** Katherine Hufham, Josh Cline McGee, Aldermen Lowe Davis, Commission Liaison

**A. Call to Order**

Chair Drew called the meeting to order at 4:03 p.m.

Chair Drew stated that the Commission would review revisions to the proposed Historic District Design Standards and address comments received from residents. He further noted that, prior to submitting the document for final approval to the Board of Aldermen, the Historic Preservation Commission would conduct a comprehensive review to examine the document in full detail.

**B. Invocation**

Ms. Gore-Graves provided the invocation.

**C. Pledge of Allegiance**

Chair Drew led members in the Pledge.

**D. Approval of Agenda**

Chair Drew shared that Item K. Board Liaison Comments/Update would be removed as the Board Liaison, Lowe Davis, was not present.

**A motion was made by Ms. Wesson and Seconded Mr. McKee to approve the change in the agenda.**

**The motion carried unanimously.**

**E. Approval of Minutes**

- a. January 7<sup>th</sup>, 2026, Historic Preservation Commission Meeting Minutes

**A motion was made by Mr. McKee and Seconded by Vice Chair Bray to approve the January 7<sup>th</sup>, 2026, Historic Preservation Commission Meeting Minutes with the revisions submitted by Vice Chair Bray.**

Ms. Bray noted two errors from the January 7<sup>th</sup>, 2026, meeting minutes of the Historic Preservation Meeting:

1. A correction is requested to Mr. DeSmedt's final sentence on page 2. The phrase "created more derision" should be revised to read "created more division."
2. On page 8, it is requested that "Unified Development Ordinance" be written out in full upon first reference, with the acronym "UDO" used thereafter. This clarification is intended to avoid confusion among readers, as the ordinance is sometimes incorrectly referred to as the "Uniform Development Ordinance."

**The motion carried unanimously.**

**F. Public Comment**

*Mr. Rich Alt, 6165 Cottage Creek Road*

Mr. Alt thanked the Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) for its work over the past several years and acknowledged the effort involved in developing the proposed Design Standards. He noted that the version currently posted online is dated December 2025 and stated that it should be updated, further commenting that the document contains some internal inconsistencies, though he characterized those as minor issues that could be corrected.

Mr. Alt questioned the effectiveness of the HPC's quasi-judicial authority, noting that demolition of historic properties may proceed after a 365-day delay following denial. He asked what value the process provides under this provision. He also raised concerns about potential requests to be de-annexed from the proposed Historic District Overlay, arguing that adoption of the Design Standards could be viewed as a taking that may impact property values.

Additionally, Mr. Alt expressed concern regarding the City's ability to defend against potential litigation, noting that a significant number of affected property owners may have the resources to pursue legal action. He referenced broader impacts of the down-zoning law, including challenges in coordinating with the County on the Howe

Street corridor, and questioned whether the City is prepared to expend resources to defend such actions.

Mr. Alt stated that, while he had previously supported the creation of the Commission, he is now seeking clarification on how these concerns will be addressed. He requested that the Commission or the Board of Aldermen provide a document or plan outlining how the City intends to respond to the legal and policy issues raised.

Chair Drew responded that the HPC is acting under direction from the Board of Aldermen and stated that the concerns raised regarding potential litigation, deannexation, and legal risks fall outside the Commission's purview and would need to be addressed by the Board of Aldermen.

*Mr. Carl Ward, 231 N. Caswell Avenue*

Mr. Ward addressed comments and questions raised during the previous meeting regarding the demolition of houses within the proposed Historic District. He shared that, many years ago, he was contracted to renovate a home in the business district that had been severely damaged by termites and long-term neglect.

Mr. Ward noted that many homes on the west side of Southport are in significant disrepair and stated that current generations often lack the financial resources or interest required to restore them. He further commented that not all individuals who demolish homes intend to rebuild.

He discussed the high costs associated with renovating homes, particularly historic properties, and expressed concern that adoption of a Historic District Overlay could increase maintenance expenses. He referenced the costs of maintaining historic windows and noted that insurance premiums for such properties can also be elevated, sharing an anecdote regarding rising insurance costs and their impact on property owners.

Mr. Ward additionally stated his understanding that there are currently no provisions preventing the construction of a glass or steel house in the Yacht Basin area. He noted that this question has been raised previously and, in his view, the answer has remained unchanged over the past three and a half years.

*Sherol Lappala, 316 W. Brunswick Street*

Ms. Lappala reiterated comments previously made by Mr. Ward regarding the Yacht Basin area, noting that it represents one of the largest undeveloped tracts within the proposed Historic District. She stated that the area is currently governed by the City's Unified Development Ordinance (UDO).

Ms. Lappala referenced an image circulated on the Facebook page “Southport Locals” depicting a container home on the property, accompanied by a caption suggesting such development could occur if the Historic District Overlay were not adopted. She reported that, after contacting Planning Services Director Meehan for clarification, she was informed that the UDO already establishes guidelines for residential construction.

She discussed a cottage she owns on Lord Street within the proposed Historic District, which she previously renovated. She noted that the home retained six original windows from the early 1900s that were not double-paned, resulting in high heating and cooling costs. She explained that she replaced the windows with hurricane-rated vinyl rather than wood, stating that wood replacement windows with original panes were approximately fifty percent more expensive. She also compared siding materials, noting treated cedar at approximately four dollars per linear foot versus Hardie plank at approximately one dollar per linear foot.

Ms. Lappala further discussed rising insurance costs associated with historic homes and expressed concern that requirements for specific building materials could make renovations prohibitively expensive. She reported that her insurance agent advised that his company would not insure the home due to its classification within a Historic District. She also shared an anecdote regarding a homeowner attempting to sell historic property, noting that high renovation costs could make demolition a more feasible option.

She addressed the quasi-judicial process required for HPC decisions, explaining that decisions must follow established standards to be legally defensible. She noted that appeals would be made to the Board of Adjustment and must be based on procedural errors in applying standards, rather than disagreement with a decision. She expressed concern that while flexibility had been incorporated into the standards to address residents’ concerns, such flexibility could create complications.

Ms. Lappala stated that the matter ultimately falls outside the HPC’s purview and indicated her intent to raise the issue with the Board of Aldermen. She concluded by suggesting that a voluntary, collaborative approach through an advisory commission may be preferable to a regulatory framework to address preservation concerns and avoid potential litigation. She also noted that, based on a conversation with an attorney referenced earlier by Mr. Rich Alt, adoption of the Historic District Overlay could constitute a form of down-zoning.

*Mr. Paul Swenson, 107 N. Atlantic Avenue*

Mr. Swenson stated that he had several questions for the HPC and clarified a remark he had made at a previous meeting in which he suggested he could demolish his home on Howe Street and replace it with an igloo with an ice cream cone on top. He

explained that the comment was intended to illustrate concerns regarding the extent of design control.

Mr. Swenson noted that he has long supported architectural guidelines for commercial development, particularly since the construction of Walmart, but emphasized his belief that such standards should remain advisory rather than regulatory. He expressed concern that commercial development along the Howe Street corridor poses a significant risk to the character of Southport, while stating that his concerns are less focused on residential construction, which he believes has generally been of good quality.

He referenced several neighborhoods that, in his view, have not experienced significant issues related to residential construction. Mr. Swenson also commented that he believes the creation of the HPC was in response to a specific home constructed on stilts at the end of E. Bay Street that had drawn community criticism.

Mr. Swenson posed questions regarding how the proposed regulations would affect property owners seeking to renovate or redevelop their homes. He asked about the legality and potential restrictions associated with renovating a one-story cottage, demolishing it, or replacing it with a two-story structure. He questioned whether a design deemed incompatible with surrounding historic homes could be prevented by the HPC and reiterated his concern regarding whether the Commission would restrict the demolition of one-story structures in favor of taller homes.

He stated that he does not believe the community should be “frozen in time,” describing the City as a fluid and evolving community. Mr. Swenson concluded by asking how difficult it would be for a property owner or developer to demolish an existing structure and replace it with an updated two-story home under the proposed framework. He further stated that he identified 10-12 homes that should be demolished within the proposed Historic District.

Chair Drew stated that he would like to circle back to the question later to ensure that what is shared is the correct answer. And he asked the Commission for additional comments.

Mr. Swenson read a sentence from the Design Standard:

“Applicants shall demonstrate to the HPC that an addition with different height, scale, size, and massing from the existing structure is congruous with the historic district (Section 2.5.9, page. 65 of the Historic Design Standard)”;

and noted that the sentence is found numerous times throughout the document, and shared that he could not obtain a real understanding as a homeowner or developer.

*Ms. Debbie Barnes, 425 W. West Street*

Ms. Barnes stated that the November minutes did not accurately reflect her comments, noting that the minutes indicated her support of the document as written, which she did not. She clarified that changes were being made and that her comments regarding HPC membership—specifically that a majority of members should live within the proposed Historic District—were not included.

She further clarified her remarks on including architectural or construction expertise on the Commission, noting that such expertise may or may not always be necessary. For this reason, she suggested that Commission alternates could live either within or outside the district and possess specific skill sets. Ms. Barnes also addressed trust related to the Duties and Responsibilities section, emphasizing the need for initial and ongoing training for Commission members, particularly on the quasi-judicial process, to ensure hearings are properly understood and conducted.

While all members support historic preservation, Ms. Barnes expressed concern that the current 365-day delay for demolition allows historic homes to ultimately be demolished, which she believes does not adequately protect them. She stated that the City should have sufficient time to consider relocating such houses. She further advocated for stronger provisions in the UDO to preserve more of Southport, including areas outside the proposed Historic District, while noting that the proposed Historic District is currently functioning well.

Ms. Barnes questioned whether the Historic District Overlay is being pursued primarily to obtain grants for the City and raised concerns about the fairness of imposing additional restrictions and fees on property owners who have maintained their historic homes. She referenced questions raised by Alderman Marc Spencer regarding charging fees to owners already maintaining historic properties, as well as inquiries from Alderman Rebecca Kelly regarding how grandfathering provisions would be identified, tracked, and enforced. She noted concerns about inventory management, receipt documentation, and the practicality of maintaining records, emphasizing the importance of public education to ensure timely and accurate logging of receipts.

She noted that the Design Standards reference Certificates of Appropriateness (COA) for items such as temporary greenhouses, which should be explicitly included due to their common use. She also expressed concern about the lack of clarification regarding grandfathering of signage, including parking signs, and whether a COA would be required to relocate such signs. Additional concerns included routine maintenance, distinctions between minor and major work, and handling issues such as diseased trees and fences.

Ms. Barnes emphasized that the Design Standards should be corrected prior to approval and advocated for the HPC to function in an advisory rather than regulatory

capacity. She concluded by stating her support for guidelines rather than enforcement authority.

Chair Drew stated that many of the items previously discussed, including routine maintenance actions and minor work, had already been removed from the draft document.

Ms. Barnes responded that after reviewing the document, she still found inconsistencies. She explained that when comparing the "Routine Maintenance" section with the COA requirements, there appeared to be conflicts.

Mr. Alt stated that pages 12 and 14 (of the Design Standards) are in conflict.

Ms. Barnes clarified that items such as diseased trees, which appeared to be struck in one section, were still reflected elsewhere. She also pointed out that fence installation and removal continued to appear under routine maintenance while also being referenced under minor works, creating confusion.

Mr. Alt directed the Commission's attention to additional inconsistencies, specifically noting lighting (including exterior lighting) and landscaping. He referenced Page 14, where landscaping provisions appeared to overlap with other sections.

Chair Drew acknowledged the issue and agreed that those items would need to be removed or corrected to eliminate duplication and conflict. He noted that the Commission is grateful for the extra set of eyes to identify inconsistencies in the document, and shared that the Commission will work to ensure those items are addressed.

Ms. Barnes emphasized the need to ensure that the document is carefully vetted before moving forward to adoption. Chair Drew agreed.

## **G. Old Business**

### **a. Updated Historic Preservation Commission Design Standards**

Chair Drew opened the floor to Commission comments.

Mr. West had no comment at this time.

Ms. Graves raised a question regarding the use of the term "mandatory", stating she did not recall that term being explicitly included in the document.

Ms. Bray addressed the comments made by Ms. Graves, stating that she did not recall the word "mandatory" being explicitly used in the document;

however, she noted that phrases such as “this shall not be allowed” were included in certain instances and carry a similar effect.

She further explained that, since the January meeting, numerous revisions have been made to soften the language, replacing more rigid requirements with terms such as “if possible” or “if there is no other option,” while retaining a limited number of necessary prohibitions. And she addressed landscaping:

- “Landscaping and changes to natural features such as trees, creeks, creek banks, and riverbeds are also subject to HPC review (page. 12 of the Design Standards).”

and noted that the language had been struck through from the updated Design Standard.

Ms. Graves sought clarification regarding the use of building materials in the updated standards. She stated that her understanding is that property owners are not required to use materials that are no longer feasible or readily available and emphasized that the standards are not intended to be mandatory in that regard.

She provided examples such as traditional materials like Hardie Plank or similar historic materials, noting that provisions have been made to allow for alternative materials where appropriate.

Ms. Graves then referenced window replacements, recalling prior discussion that windows could be changed, and asked for confirmation that nothing in the standards would prevent property owners from replacing windows.

Chair Drew acknowledge that was correct.

Planning Services Director Meehan noted that the language Ms. Bray shared had been struck from the latest version of the Design Standards. And shared that the latest version of the Design Standards has been uploaded on the website and reflects all the changes.

Chair Drew shared that, due to public requests, the Design Standards would be shown on the projector behind the Commission for public viewing.

Ms. Barnes commented on Section H. concerning diseased trees under Routine Maintenance.

Chair Drew confirmed that Section H. had been struck.

Ms. Bray spoke about the changes made to (page 51 of the Design Standards) concerning the removal of the language to Section 1.5.7., noting that it was rewritten to support the language as stated:

- “Freestanding signs in the Central Business District are not allowed.”

HP Planner Tysinger read page. 51 of the Design Standards. She noted that the sentence had been struck.

Ms. Bray spoke to the Design Standard’s Section 3.2.2 (page 76 of the Design Standards), which restated the language for new residential construction, and noted a place where it does talk about color. She asked if Section 3.1.7 (page 75 of the Design Standards) that also mentions color, should be struck through.

Chair Drew noted Section 2.7.2 (page 68 of the Design Standards) that also discusses exterior color and shared that it too needs to be struck. He noted Sections 3.2.2. (page 76 of the Design Standards), and 3.1.7 (page 75 of the Design Standards), Ms. Bray referenced, also need to be struck, and stated that he had wanted discussion concerning Section 2.3.9 (page. 62 of the Design Standards):

- “It is inappropriate to paint masonry surfaces that were not painted historically. When painting masonry that has been previously painted, use acrylic latex paints for best durability.”

and shared that he would like to see that struck as well.

Ms. Bray asked for clarification whether the language was in reference to the damage of the brick or the overall esthetic of the brick.

Mr. McKee explained that concerns related to brick primarily stem from potential damage caused by certain treatments. He stated that brick manufactured after approximately 1930 is typically high fired, making it more durable and less susceptible to damage. While he does not recommend painting brick, he noted that modern brick is generally less affected by it.

Mr. McKee said that while painting brick is not the preferred approach, it can be done, and in some cases may not cause significant harm depending on the type of brick and materials used.

Ms. Bray clarified that the Commission’s role is not to serve as technical experts on brick preservation or to regulate materials at that level of specificity, but rather to provide general design standards guidance.

Mr. McKee shared that some of the houses will be using recycled old brick. He shared methods to identify lime-based clay mortar, or lime brick. He noted the tinting used with lime-wash. And he shared that Fort Johnston was whitewashed in a lime-based coating and can be tinted to any desired color.

Ms. Bray asked what impact regulating brick treatments would have on the proposed Historic District, which is the Commission's primary focus. She emphasized that the Commission is not tasked with serving as technical "brick protectors," but rather with protecting the overall character of the district.

Mr. McKee shared that paint would damage brick but agreed to have it struck from the Design Standards.

HP Planner Tysinger responded that protecting existing historic materials is an important component of historic preservation.

Ms. Bray then questioned whether the standards should be that specific, particularly regarding distinctions such as pre- and post-1930 brick.

HP Planner Tysinger noted that the purpose of the hearing process is to bring forward those types of details, allowing the Commission to make determinations on a case-by-case basis.

Mr. McKee shared that it would be a simple determination to identify the difference in brick using a brass key and stated that mortar is more important than brick to maintain. He shared that there were other things to preserve as well.

Ms. Bray returned to the central issue, asking whether the Commission should adopt highly specific standards, such as requiring lime-based paint for certain types of brick, or instead remove the provision entirely. She expressed concern about regulating the longevity or treatment of bricks based on how it is painted.

She further noted that the Commission has consistently communicated to the public that it does not regulate paint colors and expressed concern that restricting whether brick can be painted at all could be perceived as inconsistent with that position. She suggested that the provision be removed from the standards.

Mr. McKee added that identifying the type of brick is relatively straightforward, stating that a brief visual inspection is often sufficient to distinguish high fired brick from older materials.

Chair Drew reiterated this concern, emphasizing that the Commission has publicly stated it would not regulate paint colors, and noted the potential inconsistency in prohibiting painted brick. He stated that his inclination would be to strike the provision, while leaving the decision to the Commission.

Mr. McKee suggested an alternative approach, stating that rather than regulating the practice, the Commission could offer recommendations when applicants inquire, such as encouraging the use of lime-based paint, while avoiding strict requirements.

Ms. Wesson stated that the homeowner would know what year the brick was fired. She further stated that they would be interested in preserving the brick.

HP Planner Tysinger asked Chair Drew to repeat the Commission member's recommendation for Section 2.3.9 (page 62 of the Design Standards).

Chair Drew, (and the Commission), agreed to have Section 2.3.9 struck, and proposed that the Commission consider removing provisions from the Design Standards that are already addressed in other regulations. He stated that the intent was to avoid duplicative regulations where requirements already exist in the UDO, the Code of Ordinances, or the Building Code.

And he further suggested removing language related to items such as fences and walls, exterior lighting, driveways and off-street parking, signage, docks, decks, landscaping piers, boardwalks, cemeteries, and floodproofing, noting that these matters are already addressed in the UDO, and stated that, if the Commission agrees, these provisions could be removed from the Design Standards. He emphasized that the Commission's focus should remain on architectural design standards for residential and commercial structures and archaeological features.

HP Planner Tysinger asked Chair Drew to repeat the list so Staff could accurately record it, and Chair Drew restated the items for the record.

Chair Drew stated that many of these items are already addressed through existing regulations and removing them would simplify the document and reduce redundancy.

HP Planner Tysinger advised that, based on her recollection of the State's approval letter, there was a section recommending the inclusion of floodproofing and related provisions, and noted that portions of that section may need to remain.

Chair Drew noted that if floodproofing provisions are required by the state, they may need to remain in the Design Standards.

HP Planner Tysinger further clarified that lighting provisions had previously been discussed and are already addressed under applicable statutes.

Ms. Bray stated that the document previously submitted to the State had already been approved and questioned whether changes made by the Board of Aldermen would require the document to be resubmitted.

HP Planner Tysinger stated that she was unsure at this time and shared that Staff is currently in discussions regarding the matter.

Ms. Bray asked whether the proposed removals would affect how the State evaluates the document.

HP Planner Tysinger proposed that once the Commission completes its review and determines that no further changes are needed, Staff be given the opportunity to conduct a final, comprehensive review prior to forwarding the document to the Board of Aldermen. She explained that this review would allow Staff to:

- Ensure internal consistency and eliminate redundancies.
- Confirm that no provisions were removed that must remain due to legal or statutory requirements.
- Identify any issues that may need to be revisited by the Commission.

She further stated that if any concerns arise during Staff's review, those items would be brought back before the Commission; otherwise, the document would proceed to the Board of Aldermen. Ms. Tysinger noted that this process may take more than one month due to the scope of revisions being considered.

Chair Drew agreed, stating that the Commission is not yet prepared to move the document forward and stated that the Commission is taking a deliberate, detailed approach to ensure accuracy.

HP Planner Tysinger emphasized that urgency is not the priority, and that provisions removed during the review process could be revisited and potentially reinstated if necessary to remain consistent with statutory requirements. She noted that this review process may require multiple iterations.

Mr. McKee expressed support for moving forward with removing the identified sections and recommended that Staff then determine what must remain or be reinstated.

Chair Drew shared that the Commission may want to have the Design Standards be reviewed by the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO). And

he discussed the training Commission had received including a mock Quasi-Judicial hearing.

HP Planner Tysinger asked whether the Commission intended to include provisions related to archaeology within the standards.

Chair Drew stated that archaeological considerations should remain, but questioned whether provisions related to cemeteries are necessary, noting that cemeteries are already addressed within the Code of Ordinances.

Ms. Bray noted that the intention is to avoid overlapping language and asked what mechanism would be in place to ensure that the Design Standards remain separate if something later added to the UDO overlaps with them.

Chair Drew noted that the UDO cannot address design standards and shared an example of another North Carolina city that attempted to control design standards through the UDO but was not permitted. He stated that the only way to regulate architectural design is to establish a Historic District.

HP Planner Tysinger added that, under current law, the UDO has limited authority over architectural design unless there are legislative changes.

Chair Drew further stated that, based on his understanding, architectural and design standards for both residential and commercial properties can only be enforced through a designated Historic District.

Planning Services Director Meehan shared that there is more leeway on the non-residential side, but not to the extent specified by the Historic District Design Standards.

Chair Drew asked the Commission if they had any issue with the suggested amendments to the Design Standards, there being none, he asked Ms. Wesson for any additional input.

Ms. Wesson emphasized the importance of protecting the existing inventory of historic structures, noting that approximately half of the buildings within the proposed Historic District date from 1885 to 1905. She stated that the Commission is tasked with preserving these structures.

Ms. Wesson expressed appreciation for public input and stressed that the Commission will continue working collaboratively to develop responsible Design Standards. She noted that the guidelines should be made available to the public and indicated her support for allowing additional time to refine the language, if necessary.

She shared her personal experience with replacing windows in her historic home, stating that the cost was significant. However, she explained that, despite the expense, the decision aligned with her goals for the property and was ultimately her preferred course of action.

Ms. Wesson concluded by stating that the Design Standards are intended to function as guidelines rather than strict regulations, ensuring that property owners have options for moving forward.

Mr. Herring stated that all members of the Commission are serving for the right reasons and that the document provides valuable guidelines that are widely appreciated. He expressed appreciation for the work completed by the Commission and cautioned against adopting strict regulations that could create a slippery slope or place a disproportionate burden on certain residents.

Mr. Herring noted that many members of the public have expressed opposition and stated that their concerns should be carefully considered. He emphasized his support for establishing a Historic District, while also sharing that he was the first in five generations to leave Southport with the goal of returning, noting that he does not want preservation efforts to negatively impact residents.

He stressed that the Commission should encourage residents to “buy into” the Design Standards rather than rely on strict enforcement. Mr. Herring also stated his belief that tax dollars would be better spent addressing community needs rather than defending potential legal challenges in court.

He further commented that the City faces larger issues, including dredging the Yacht Basin, addressing stormwater concerns, and evaluating the potential impacts of deepening the river channel. Mr. Herring concluded by stating that, in his view, the HPC is not solving a problem but may instead be creating one.

Ms. Bray stated that she took offense at the suggestion that the Commission was targeting anyone.

Mr. Herring acknowledged that he had previously used imprecise wording and clarified that he was referring to individuals with sufficient financial resources to challenge the action. He emphasized that such challenges could result in significant litigation costs and stated that he does not want tax dollars to be used to fund legal disputes.

Ms. Bray stated that the Commission was not formed to initiate conflict, but rather to develop a set of standards for public discussion. She noted that the Design Standards are intended to help prevent the demolition of historic homes and expressed concern about future applicants to the HPC who may seek to make significant changes. She further noted that the City currently lacks a mechanism to enforce protections for historic areas.

Mr. Herring expressed appreciation for the Commission's time and effort and emphasized that it is acceptable to have differing viewpoints. He reiterated his concern that the Commission's actions could impact individuals with the financial means to challenge them. And he again stated that he does not want tax dollars used to fund legal disputes.

Ms. Bray affirmed Mr. Herring's comments but noted that any building within the proposed Historic District could be impacted.

Mr. Herring disagreed with that assertion.

Ms. Bray stated that the City has no mechanism to enforce the historic character of buildings within the proposed Historic District.

Mr. Herring asked if, in her opinion, the City is currently facing a problem with poorly renovated historic homes.

Ms. Bray responded that such issues have not occurred and noted that current property owners have demonstrated responsible stewardship of their historic properties. She stated that while the current Commission is acting appropriately, future Commissions may not and emphasized that many historic homes are currently for sale, raising concern that new owners could make significant alterations. She expressed concern regarding the lack of mechanisms to prevent demolition or regulate subsequent use of such properties.

Mr. Herring acknowledged that future property owners may act unpredictably and emphasized that guidelines should be encouraged rather than enforced. He highlighted the importance of welcoming newcomers to the City and introducing them to the culture of Southport.

Ms. Bray stated that property owners who act responsibly would not be negatively impacted by the proposed Design Standards and emphasized that the standards represent the least restrictive approach possible while remaining compliant with state requirements.

Mr. Herring stated that he had previously demolished a historic home due to prohibitively high renovation costs and expressed some regret regarding the decision. However, he noted that the cost of restoration was not feasible and that he now experiences lower utility costs as a result.

Ms. Bray reiterated that if residents have historically acted as responsible stewards without formal Design Standards, the proposed document should not adversely affect them.

Mr. Herring responded that the document does not appear to reflect that perspective. He shared that he knows a resident who renovated a historic home and could serve as a positive example, but who has expressed opposition to the Design Standards and indicated an intent to sell the property if they are adopted. He added that he has heard similar concerns from another historic homeowner.

Ms. Bray stated that these discussions have taken place over several months and that the current draft reflects the least restrictive standards achievable. She emphasized the importance of ensuring that homeowners understand this.

Mr. Herring acknowledged the Commission's efforts to reduce restrictions on historic homes and shared that his father owns a home built by his great-grandfather and intends to renovate it. He expressed concern about the requirement to obtain COA and Commission approval for renovations, stating a preference for his father to have the ability to proceed independently. He added that, in his view, his father would complete the renovations in a manner consistent with the Commission's intent without such requirements.

Ms. Bray indicated her agreement with Mr. Herring's comments.

Mr. Herring stated that the Commission has performed important work in preserving historic structures throughout the City and emphasized that determining what is appropriate for Southport is critical. He noted that most homeowners intend to act responsibly but cautioned that, over time, future Commission members could seek to exert authority in ways that may not reflect the community's culture. He stressed that such an approach would be inconsistent with the character of Southport and expressed a desire to avoid negative publicity for the City.

Mr. Herring clarified that his concerns are not with the HPC itself, but rather with broader issues that may need to be addressed by the Board of Aldermen. He concluded by stating that adoption of the Design Standards could place the City on a "slippery slope."

Mr. West referenced a historic home on Pitt Street in Charleston, South Carolina, noting that increasing costs led to its sale for approximately \$3 million and that similar properties have since been divided among multiple families due to financial pressures. He expressed concern that comparable outcomes could occur in Southport over time, potentially requiring financial supplementation and displacing residents on fixed incomes. He emphasized that the Commission has a responsibility to consider long-term impacts.

Mr. West also mentioned an example involving painted brick, stating that the finished appearance represented an improvement. He cited a quote attributed to Winston Churchill, "to be perfect is to change and change often," and noted that he believes the Commission has applied this principle in responding to public input. He further expressed concern that the Yacht Basin was not included in the proposed Historic District and that only one side of Brown Street was included while the other was excluded.

Chair Drew asked if there was any further discussion regarding Old Business. He expressed partial agreement with concerns raised by Mr. Herring regarding the potential long-term impact on Southport over the next twenty-five to thirty years. And he emphasized the importance of adopting standards with future generations in mind and noted the need to formally establish a Historic District, stating that one does not currently exist.

He further stated that the City Attorney, Brady Herman, had advised that, in order to be legally binding under state law, the City must adopt enforceable standards rather than advisory guidelines.

Mr. Herring responded that he had received differing legal advice from another attorney, who indicated that the City may not be able to proceed in the manner proposed.

Chair Drew responded that any individual has the ability to file a lawsuit.

Mr. Herring noted that the attorney who authored the legislation is the same individual that some opponents of the proposed Historic District had attempted to retain to challenge the City.

Chair Drew stated that he had received feedback from other legislators indicating there may be concerns related to the attorney who drafted the bill.

Mr. Herring reiterated that he does not want tax dollars spent defending a lawsuit. And Chair Drew agreed, stating that he likewise does not want tax dollars to be wasted.

Ms. Bray inquired about the potential implications if the Board of Adjustment were to be sued in relation to its quasi-judicial decisions.

Planning Services Director Meehan responded that she was not aware of any lawsuit having been filed against the Board of Adjustment.

Chair Drew shared that appeals of Board of Adjustment decisions are heard in Superior Court.

HP Planner Tysinger requested that the Commission restate the proposed revisions to ensure Staff could accurately document them.

Ms. Bray addressed questions previously raised by Mr. Ward.

Chair Drew stated that he would follow up with Mr. Swenson to address his questions and noted that a motion would be needed to determine next steps.

HP Planner Tysinger advised that the motion could incorporate the revisions discussed during the meeting.

Chair Drew summarized the proposed revisions for clarity, stating that the Commission intends to remove references related to color or paint, as well as other non-architectural language. He further noted that the remaining standards would focus on architectural design elements for both residential and commercial properties. This includes removing language related to fences and walls, exterior lighting, driveways and off-street parking, signage, docks, piers, boardwalks, cemeteries, decks, and floodproofing. He also noted that all references to landscaping would be removed and that the revised document would be submitted to the State for review.

**A motion was made Mr. McKee by and seconded by Ms. Wesson to remove any reference in the standards to color or paint, removing all verbiage except for architectural designs for residential and commercial properties, inclusive of fences and walls, exterior lighting, driveways and off-street parking, signage, docks, piers, boardwalks, cemeteries, decks, and flood proofing, as well as all references regarding landscaping with the recommendation that it be submitted to the state for review as well.**

**The motion carried unanimously.**

#### **H. New business**

None

**I. Other Business**

None

**J. Announcements**

Chair Drew spoke to an upcoming event hosted by the Southport Historical Society at the Southport Community Building on February 6<sup>th</sup>, 2026, in relation to Black History Month, and the Black History Symposium on February 7<sup>th</sup>, 2026, and the History Gospel Festival will be held on February 8<sup>th</sup>, 2026.

Ms. Bray shared details of the February 6<sup>th</sup>, 2026, event, and said that the event is by reservation only and informed the Commission that those tickets had sold out.

Chair Drew shared he had two tickets he would give to anyone as he could not attend.

**K. Board Liaison Comments/Updates**

None

**L. Adjourn**

**A motion to adjourn by Mr. McKee and seconded by Ms. Bray to adjourn the meeting.**

**The motion carried unanimously at 5:38 p.m.**

X 

Charles Drew  
Chair

X 

Scott Baillargeon  
Deputy City Clerk

