

**HISTORIC PRESERVATION ADVISORY BOARD (HPAB)
MEETING MINUTES**

Location: Clerk of the Court Conference Room, Fourth floor, Pinellas County Courthouse (315 Court Street, Clearwater, Florida)

Date: Thursday, August 21, 2008

Time: 10:10 a.m.

Attendees: Commissioner Karen Seel (presiding), Brian K. Smith, Ellen Babb, Sam Casella, Wally Clark, Terry Fortner, William Heinig, Kimberly Hinder, Vinnie Luisi (representing Deborah Kynes), Becky Nielsen, Stephanie Oddo, Robert Ray, Cyndi Tarapani, Marcel Mohseni, and Colleen Tracy

- I. **Call to Order** – Chair Karen Seel called the meeting to order at 10:10 a.m. Introductions of attendees were made around the room.
- II. **Minutes of Friday, April 11, 2008** – It was moved that the minutes be approved; motion was seconded and carried.
- III. **Final Report of the Historic Preservation Task Force (HPTF)** – This report documents the activities during the lifetime of the HPTF. It was approved and will be filed with the Pinellas County Board of County Commissioners (BCC). The Task Force has now “morphed” into the Historic Preservation Advisory Board (HPAB) since the passage of the Historic Preservation Ordinance No. 08-11 at the February 19, 2008, BCC meeting.
- IV. **Program Activity Chart and Related Work** – This chart provides a checklist of what is covered and defined under the ordinance. Brian reviewed the tasks listed and their proposed timeframes. He emphasized two items on the task list that deal with demolition issues: (1) develop a process to identify threatened historic resources and place them on hold while alternatives to demolition are explored; and (2) research and develop an ordinance within the year to restrict demolition.

Commissioner Seel commented that the demolition restriction issue was one of the critical items brought up during her presentations to the local municipalities. Municipal feedback questioned who is going to apply for that designation. Is the city going to put it on the property owner, is the property owner going to apply for that, and what criteria will be used in the process? The cities were hesitant to put that designation on a property and would prefer that the property owner make the application.

The cities feel hesitant to put such a designation on a property because the property may be “borderline,” and the owner may feel that the designation is not proper. Such a designation puts responsibility on the homeowner to maintain and preserve the property as historic, which can be very expensive. On the other hand, unless the cities have some power in applying the designation, valuable historic resources could be destroyed at the

whim of the property owner or someone who has a contract to buy the property. The Belleview Biltmore is a good case in point. There is a need to strike a balance where designation does or does not apply. Where it does apply needs to be a municipal decision, and the property owner should have no ability to veto that decision.

Discussion ensued regarding whether research has been done to see if and where demolition ordinances are in place across the country. Obtain examples of such ordinances. Then present the cities with a range of things (least restrictive to most restrictive) that have been done nationally. Let the cities decide what their values are concerning resources that should be protected. Most local cities named as Certified Local Governments (CLGs) do have demolition restrictions within their historic preservation ordinances. The countywide ordinance to restrict demolition would protect those resources historically significant to the county as a whole – not just those within municipal boundaries – especially if the municipality can not or may not have a means to provide historic preservation protection.

Another question was raised: Does the countywide ordinance apply to every municipality or would they opt in? The demolition language in the county historic preservation ordinance was weakened due to the opting in/opting out issue. Commissioner Seel suggested presenting direction to the county's legal staff via two choices. Do we want to have model ordinances ranging from least restrictive to most restrictive accompanied with a public relations campaign? Or should the county do a model countywide demolition program (perhaps with a review board consisting of technically knowledgeable members), and then the cities would opt out?

Consensus was that it would be best to approach the municipalities, do the public relations, and build support. In an advisory role, provide an information package to municipal staff dealing with preservation issues. If communities could not or would not be able to provide historic protection at the local level, then there would be the county to fall back on and rally support for preserving historically significant resources. Perhaps the State Preservation Office should determine what is really significant for the county. Have that office do a determination of eligibility for the National Registry listing or something like that.

Local citizens often feel violated when government makes determinations that they feel infringe on their property rights. It will require finesse to determine important historical resources and those that are only marginal. Perhaps even some marginal resources could be saved by offering homeowners alternatives (over a 6- to 12-month period) to preserve those properties. That's where tax incentives can play a part in resource preservation. Another comment was made that whichever government entity made the determination would be the one at risk for lawsuits. If the county takes over the legal obligations of designation, then the matter is out of municipal hands, so to speak. They would only have to deal with those resources of countywide significance.

Additional legal review is needed. On one hand, the county is suggesting home rule – not control – and at the same time indicating the cities will be responsible for legal defense.

They may prefer some one else going to court! The ordinance could perhaps be tweaked to accomplish that.

Commissioner Seel referred to such helpful initiatives as the tool box and state and national incentives. An overall information package could also include examples of modal ordinances and tax deferrals. The cities would not have to be involved with implementing tax deferrals – with the tax situation being what it is today.

Tax deferrals/incentives are important because an older house involves more expensive upkeep as an historical resource. Even business owners with commercial buildings of historical significance need tax incentives. There are many structures within the approximately 19 Community Development Areas (CRAs) countywide that would be eligible for financial assistance. Tax incentives/tax abatement measures are being proposed or are currently in place among local jurisdictions. Discussion also touched upon property appraisement values regarding historic properties. It is important to determine what caps, abatements, and so forth are to be written into the financial incentives that will truly provide necessary assistance.

The Pinellas County ordinance adopted in 1992 provides financial incentives for designated historic properties. This involves exempting building fees, rezoning, parking exemptions, and so forth. Some of the Community Block Grant (CBG) money in cooperation with the Community Development Department has been used to offer low interest loans for designated historic properties over the past few years. Most of monies were used for businesses in downtown Palm Harbor with approval obtained from the State Historic Preservation Office (SHIPO). The parking ordinance in Belleair allows leeway with parking in historic areas.

- V. Final Report on Consultant Project – (Recommendations from the Consultant) –** A loose end involves determining that the CD file of properties received from the consultant will work with the county GIS program. Members then commented on the recommendations.

Regarding Goal 5 on page 5, the third bullet needs rewording to the effect: “Assign” a preservation planner or professional cultural resources management position “within the county to work with” a “designated municipal contact.”

On page 4, under Strategies for Educational Outreach, there is a bullet regarding developing a theme-based curriculum of Pinellas County for local schools. Change wording to “Continue to develop ...”

On page 4, regarding the Historical Marker Program: Discussion generated around the suggestion of a Historical Person Marker Program. Apply for a Convention and Visitors Bureau (CVB) grant in order to do this. It could be marketed as a historic program to visitors, and so forth. Does Heritage Village have the staff resources to write such a grant and monitor its progress? What things do we mark with the markers – how descriptive? Ideas have to be discussed and developed. The two different types used in the State

Marker Program were also discussed. The Marker Program could become part of a centennial project for the county. This recommendation from the consultant is general enough, so that more things can be done with it.

On page 17, the last bullet on the bottom of the page: The neighborhoods referred to as local historic districts are not yet designated as such. Final conclusion was to use the words: “potential historic districts.” This needs to be done throughout the whole section on St. Petersburg as well as in the other municipal descriptions.

On page 8, top of the page, the paragraph just under Belleair: What does “surveyed” mean? Does it mean “listed”? It means that Florida Master Site File (FMSF) has been completed for the state, and it is referring to items in the state inventory, 50 years or older. Would this be an appropriate place to indicate the cities’ preservation lists? Comment was made that this might be an appropriate place to add a bullet regarding local registries.

Commissioner Oddo indicated that there are approximately 40 items listed on Belleair’s local registry. Would this be an appropriate place to add a bullet? The response was that this survey only identifies what has already been surveyed at the state level, meeting those criteria. However, this paragraph does indicate that Belleair has a local preservation ordinance. The recommendations are basically giving a snapshot of what each city has done so far. Brian raised the question: say 40 rather than 7? Commissioner Oddo indicated almost 40 on the city list are locally designated. But are they in the state system? Commissioner Oddo indicated that she was not sure. Another comment was “apparently not.” However, the second bullet under the paragraph does state: “Transition pre-existing Belleair cultural resource survey inventories to FMSF database.” That would be where the 40 properties [are]. Commissioner Seel requested that the number be obtained and then use this sentence: “Transition 40 pre-existing ...” (or whatever the number is).

Suggestion was made to provide a definition of the acronyms...a glossary. Any further comments should be e-mailed to Brian or Marcel by Friday, August 29.

- VI. State Certification** – This involves pursuing a Certified Local Government (CLG) designation on a countywide program basis, which has not been done before. Discussion is ongoing right now. Items submitted to the state by Marcel include: history and composition of the Task Force, copy of the ordinance adopted in 2008, the 1992 County Preservation Ordinance, and the historical property ad valorem exemption ordinance. The Department of State Division of Historical Resources will be looking at three items: local ordinance, potential local board, and the designation procedure. Marcel spoke to Mike Zimney this morning; Mr. Zimney will probably give his opinion by end of next week, Friday, August 29.
- VII. Committee/Subcommittee Schedule** – It was suggested the full Advisory Board convene every other month with the subcommittees assembling those months the Board does not meet. Commissioner Seel indicated the importance of establishing an Education

and Tool Box Subcommittee, as well as Demolition/Financial. The Education Subcommittee was later changed to the Program/Education Subcommittee during this meeting. These subcommittees will be working through the next year. Membership was determined for the three subcommittees.

Bob Jeffrey was “volunteered” for the Tool Box Subcommittee because the Tool Box had been his particular project previously. Other members include: William Heinig and Kim Hinder. Program/Education Subcommittee members include: Commissioner Seel, Vinnie Luisi (in case Deborah Kynes cannot serve), Stephanie Oddo, and Cyndi Tarapani. Demolition/Finance Subcommittee members include: Sam Casella, Wally Clark, Marcel Mohseni, and Becky Nielsen. Commissioner Seel will ask that staff from the County Attorney’s Office be assigned to this committee.

Ellen Babb offered Heritage Village as a public program space for Advisory Board activities. Commissioner Seel suggested having a storyboard or presentation about the current ordinance at the Country Jubilee on Saturday, October 25, 2008.

VIII. Other Business – Becky Nielson is working with Pinellas County, City of Dunedin, and the Trust for Public Land to acquire a historic property in the Weaver tract to become a city park. The property was owned by a Dr. Willis Stanley Blatchley, a world renowned naturalist in the early 1900s, who had his winter home in Dunedin. The city is acquiring this property to renovate the house and make it an educational center and museum. Becky’s role has been to work out the real estate transaction. The landowner has had very strong opinions and some valid points about not wanting this property designated due to possible decrease in value. Respect for personal property rights has to be considered. This project will hopefully be successfully concluded by the end of fall; the City Commission has been unanimous in its support. Pinellas County is matching State Historic Trust funds; the city does not have to raise monies, except for rehabilitation and long-term maintenance. In addition, Pinellas County is looking at buying a vacant parcel just north of there. Commissioner Seel has asked that the stone house situated on the Trail be turned into restrooms, using Trail monies, instead of tearing it down. Preservation of the Blatchley house would be a good example for the Tool Box. It demonstrates the economic benefits of historic preservation and the subsequent increase of property values in the surrounding area. The old County Road 37 also will be preserved.

Commissioner Seel said that an expedited review has been requested in order to reach a settlement in the Belleview Biltmore lawsuit. She also mentioned a discussion she had with Clearwater Mayor Hibbard about the South Ward Elementary School, which has closed. Mayor Hibbard would certainly welcome input from Advisory Board members as he is looking at potential uses for the former school. Resources and materials are out there that can help determine new uses such as a museum or cultural center. Furthermore, Commissioner Seel will talk with the School Board about its intentions for this property.

Commissioner Seel adjourned the meeting at 12 noon.