



**Minutes**  
**HISTORIC SALUDA COMMITTEE**  
**Friday, February 9, 2024**

**Committee Members Present:** Ammie Weymer, Clara Carter, Billy Shand, Cindy Tuttle, Chair; Laretta Cook. *Quorum Present*

**At-Large Members Present:** Martin Anderson, Betsy Burdett

**Guests:** Jack Thomson, Preservation NC; Cat Chayet, Linda Bailey, Bonnie Bardos, Susan McRostie, James Hrynshyn, Elena Robson, Mary O Radcliffe, Marilyn Beckman, Marilyn Prudhomme, Dave Prudhomme, Camilla Luckey, Peter Eisenbrown, Glenn Franklin

**Welcome:** Cindy Tuttle welcomed everyone and called the meeting to order at 2:06 p.m. Cindy invited those in the audience to come to future meetings since it is uncommon to have such a large number of people in attendance. Cindy explained the structure and work of the committee, including the fact there is one opening on the 7 member panel that is appointed by the Saluda Board of Commissioners and 2 openings for at-large members. The chair may appoint up to 5 at-large members. Membership is defined per Rules of Procedure. The committee then introduced themselves. Nancy Pew's absence from the committee today was acknowledged with well wishes for healing. Cindy noted in Nancy's absence the meeting was being recorded and that she would be responsible for the minutes today.

**Minutes:** Minutes were reviewed. Laretta Cook moved to approve the minutes. Ammie Weymer seconded. Motion passed. Minutes stand approved.

**Finance Report:** Cindy Tuttle introduced the current Finance Report which is prepared by the City's Finance Manager, Julie Osteen. Current balance \$4,873.71. Cindy explained that the committee does not do a lot of fundraising and that the largest fundraiser is the home tour. Other proceeds come from merchandise, such as the book [Images of America: Saluda](#) and DVD film documentaries. Cindy credited the Saluda Historic Depot and Saluda City Hall with selling the HSC merchandise.

**Committee Reports:**

- **Oral History/Vlogs - Jerry Summey Interview:** Cindy Tuttle reported that no new interviews or vlogs have been conducted recently. However, the vlogs, conducted last fall, are very popular on YouTube. Cindy has revisited an interview conducted in 2021 with Jerry Summey. The full interview has never been released. Only a small snippet of the interview has previously been released which features Coon Dog Day. Jerry's father is Dewitt Summey one of the founders of

Coon Dog Day. The entire interview will be released soon on YouTube and covers many topics including making moonshine.

- **Step Back in History Series, Topic: Jack Thomson (Welcome) with Preservation NC and State Preservation Office Staff (Survey, National Register and Historic Districts):** Cindy Tuttle explained that the HSC conducts this quarterly series presenting topics relating to history. Cindy then introduced Jack Thomson with Preservation NC and stated one potential workshop is to bring in State-level representatives to Saluda to discuss how to protect Saluda's historic properties. One example, there is a difference between a historic district on the National Register and a zoning historic district. Included in this workshop may be an explanation regarding the recent survey of historic places in Polk County, including in Saluda. Jack Thomson explained, at this point, about his work of Preservation NC and stated the survey was a project of the State Historic Preservation Office. Jennifer Cathey is the representative for the SHPO office in Asheville. These architectural surveys are conducted at various times throughout the state. Representatives of SHPO identify properties of significance. There is a GIS survey map that identifies properties listed on the survey. Cindy Tuttle stated that this workshop may be one step to bringing others together to better understand what we can do to protect Saluda's historic properties and prevent situations like Crystal Springs from happening in the future. The survey may be an excellent start to begin identifying the properties that need protection. Cindy said several property owners received letters as a result of this survey indicating their property has been identified as having historical significance. The Ashley family received this letter for Crystal Springs. Jack explained that the survey is the first step toward identifying potential historic districts or individual historic properties for the National Register. Jack explained that Saluda has a historic committee and not a historic commission. Commissions have more power to protect properties. Jack further explained the work of Preservation NC and their interest as a private organization (non-profit) separate and apart from the state and national level work to save historic properties big and small. He gave an example of Nina Simone's house which is permanently protected with an easement.
- **Historic Saluda Home Tour - June 8, 2024:** Laretta Cook, Chair of the Historic Saluda Home Tour, provided a progress report, including a written report. Laretta provided a little of her background regarding her passion for historic preservation and the work she has done in other communities. She stated our work with oral histories is vital and says she is getting that currently from property owners as she meets with them about their homes being featured on the tour. Laretta explained that the tour is as much about the history of the families who resided in the homes, their stories, as well as the house itself. She stated that 7 homes are on the tour and reviewed the list of properties and locations. See the attached report. Laretta says she wants to find a common denominator with the properties, such as the year built, and somehow show what Saluda may have looked like during that time frame, especially on Main Street. Laretta stated we are having great responses from our sponsors, especially since we have never tried sponsorships before. So far, \$6,050 has been raised. Laretta was recognized for her great work.

## Old Business

- **Historical Marker:** Cindy Tuttle explained the committee's work to install a historical marker honoring Dr. Lesesne Smith's legacy and his work in pediatrics in Saluda. Billy Shand chairs this project and so far, it looks like there is approval to place the sign at McCreey Park during Phase 2 of the park renovation. Cindy recognized Billy's hard work with this project.
- **HSC Website:** Cindy Tuttle stated the HSC website needs to be updated. Currently, there is a search to find the right webmaster to work with for the redesign.

## New Business

- **Crystal Springs:** Cindy Tuttle introduced the topic of Crystal Springs and acknowledged that most guests in attendance were there to discuss this topic. Though it is under New Business at this time, Crystal Springs has been on the agenda many times in the past but was taken off the agenda in recent months. Cindy stated that she is inviting, on behalf of the HSC, a polite conversation and to listen to opinions and reminded everyone that this a private home. She explained that the role of the HSC is limited. The HSC's role is to listen, advocate, consult with others such as experts in the field, advise, and help develop solutions if there are any. However, the HSC alone does not have the authority to stop the destruction of Crystal Springs and as far as what's known, the City of Saluda may not either, but if they do, the HSC alone does not. Saluda does not have a historic commission in place and there are no policies to stop the destruction of historic places. The goal for today is to come up with a few positive steps. Cindy prefaced this to say the bulk of the HSC's work was done on the front end of this issue. There were two meetings with the 3 heirs to the property on two different days with Preservation NC and the State Historic Preservation Office where preservation easements and protective covenants were discussed at length. There was a split among opinions with the heirs and nothing was put in place. Cindy stated that it is often hard to understand how the options presented work and there is a cost involved. Cindy expressed her opinion that Crystal Springs may be the single most historic property left standing in Saluda. It was built around 1899, was one of the two first properties to have running water in Saluda, it has a 3 sided fireplace. The late Jack Coates, Martha Ashley's brother, once told Cindy that the house was built by her great grandfather, OB Garren, a contractor who built many homes on Henderson Street and around Saluda. Cindy has no verification of this. Cindy then turned it over to the guests to state their opinions. Cindy asked that everyone be polite and speak one at a time.

Peter Eisenbrown opened the conversation identifying himself as living across the street from Crystal Springs. He asked for more information on the background. Cat Chayet, spoke up as the real estate agent representing the buyers. She stated the current owners did 3 months worth of due diligence and were given all the resources necessary to make an informed decision. Cat stated that the buyers are experienced in home restoration and currently live in California in a home they restored. The buyers checked with the City to see if they could turn it back into a boarding house or a four-plex and were told no. The cost to restore is over \$1M to bring it back to a 4,000 sq. foot home. Cat stated the home is riddled with termites causing major damage to

the foundation. Her opinion is that it needs to be taken down to the ground and rebuilt. Cat informed the group that the property owner is upset about receiving an anonymous phone call yesterday saying that he should be present at today's "public forum about his house." Cat reminded the group that this is her client's personal residence at this time. They obtained quotes from Darrell Russell, who is a contractor and a fireman, regarding the cost to restore. He suggested to "donate" the property to the fire department to burn. The cost of demolition is high, so burning was the best option. The buyers have made a large donation to the fire department to burn plus the donation of the house. Cat confirmed that 2 of the 3 acres are under an easement, including the pond. The burning of the house is to take place in March or April. Then the buyers want to make it a park-like setting with a memorial to the Ashley family. The buyers want to rebuild a house similar to Crystal Springs and plan to use as many salvageable materials out of the house as possible, including the Crystal Springs sign. She stated the house is basically condemned and uninsurable. Peter Eisenbrown and others expressed concern over the long due diligence process and why the property owners moved forward with the purchase knowing they would have to destroy it. Cat denied that the family bought it knowing they were going to have to tear it down. Guests in attendance expressed great concern over the idea of burning it down and the possible repercussions of doing so. Lead paint is a concern for all and the environmental impact of it. Cindy Tuttle stated she had spoken with Darrell Russell, the fireman/contractor who stated that all tests had been done and the SVFD had ruled out issues with lead or asbestos. Peter Eisenbrown asked for more reassurance that all the environmental tests have been done. Peter expressed concern that the tongue and groove wood and other assets of the house have to be left in tack in order to burn it. Cindy stated she had a statement from Jennifer Cathey with the State Historic Preservation Office that she has seen properties in much worse condition than Crystal Springs that were restored. Jennifer has visited the home. Dave Prudhomme spoke about living next door to Crystal Springs, is a member of the Saluda Community Land Trust, and a member of the Community Garden, an organic garden, and his extreme concern with lead paint and its impact on the neighbors. Calling the burning of Crystal Springs a disaster. Dave suggested that the local attempt to burn it should be halted. Cindy Tuttle called it a reprieve. James Hrynshyn stated the City may have a role after all. A burn permit has to be issued and if it comes from the City, then they do have role. He recommended attending Monday night's Board of Commissioners (BOC) meeting to ask questions. He feels this has to be resolved at the municipal level. Laretta Cook stated the frustration of this community is that the buyers purchased the home after doing extensive due diligence and bought it anyway. Perhaps if they had backed out of the purchase, someone else may have stepped up to purchase it and properly restored it. Marilyn Prudhomme expressed concern about the lead getting into the stream and flowing down the street into downtown. She stated the idea of burning the house in their neighborhood was untenable. Elena Robson gave an example of how the City of Durham recently faced issues with lead when a house was burned with lead paint. Later the City of Durham had to settle with those who were affected by the lead paint that leached into their environment. The discussion then went to the large Poplar trees in the yard. Cindy reported that members of the SVFD reported to her those trees were coming down since they were at the end of their lives. Discussion ensued that a tree expert should be

brought in for another opinion. Peter stated the Tryon Fire Dept. Chief has indicated to him that his crew would be on site if it is burned. Others questioned why the homeowners, who live in California, want to live in Saluda and change it. Concerns were raised that if this kind of thing is allowed, then it opens doors for others, especially those out of state, to come in and do the same. This could completely change the landscape of Saluda.

Glen Franklin with the Planning Board stated that this could be used as a painful example of how the Planning Board, the Historic Committee and the City need to think about these things. Her example was the work they did to protect buildings downtown from destruction through city ordinances. She was unsure what could be done in residential but stated this is a push to get us all on the same page to explore options. She recommended a collaborative effort to put proper steps in place to protect properties. Cindy once again encouraged folks to attend meetings and to be educated about the work of the HSC. Cindy clarified that a listing on the National Register does not prevent a property from being destroyed. It is more honorarium but does allow for tax credits when property owners wish to do proper restorations.

Jack Thomson with Preservation NC stated he is grieving for the recent loss of his 34-year-old niece who passed away in a terrible accident, but he came to our meeting today anyway because he is passionate about this topic. Jack recommended that the community establish a list of endangered properties that need attention that could lead to outreach to the property owners, recommended that the committee put together a series of programs such as how to restore your windows, how to make your home more thermally efficient, etc. These are small steps that we can take. He does not agree with burning the house down saying the best remediation for lead is encapsulation. Jack questioned whether the property had actually been condemned. Jack suggested that the local media needs to be contacted to get the word out. At that point, he stated that Preservation NC was ready to make an offer on the property today. Billy Shand stated that it is obvious what the consensus is in the room but that the true power may rest with the Saluda Board of Commissioners. Cindy stated that Preservation NC is prepared to make an offer and that might be the true solution to this situation, depending on how receptive the new owners are to this. Jack confirmed that they were prepared to make the offer. Betsy Burdett, who is also with the Saluda Community Land Trust, stated SCLT might be willing to buy the two acres and the pond and protect it through their easements. This would give the new owners income to help restore the house.

James Hrynshyn stated the Planning Board may be looking, down the road and though speculative at this point, modifying the residential zone (R1) which is single-family. They are thinking about large properties, an acre or two, that may allow people to put more units in. Steve Orr, the City Manager, has already gone through and identified those potential parcels. There are not many but Crystal Springs is one of them. This will take time and some will not want to see increased density. If this could get passed, which may take a year or two, it might benefit Crystal Springs, if they could hold off. This is a long-term solution but one possible avenue.

Camilla Luckey mentioned one possible way the property owners could generate income for the property and that is to bottle the spring water for sale. Concerns were expressed about the current water flow of the springs.

Mark Ray suggested that more detail needs to be determined about the burn permit in light of environmental concerns. This in itself might halt the process. Mark and Peter then raised the issue of a potential conflict of interest with the fireman Darrell Russell who is also the contractor to rebuild the house after it is burned. Martin Anderson asked for clarification on this. Cat said it was not intentional to create a conflict of interest. Martin asked that Cat relay this information to the property owners. Cindy also clarified that this meeting is not a special called public forum specifically for Crystal Springs. This is the regular monthly meeting of the HSC with other agenda items.

Cindy recommended that a preservation architect/contractor give another opinion about the restorability of the property. Jack stated that this is not inexpensive. Jack described the process of purchasing the property through PNC. They use an option to purchase contract. Then they work in a specific niche market to try to find owners to purchase and restore the home. Preservation NC would make sure an easement or covenant is placed on the home before it is sold.

Cindy warned that the SVFD has been given the green light to do practice drills. This could destroy important features of the home. Action should be taken now to stop this. Cat said that the house has some of her furniture in it and that the fire department won't burn anything until she gets this out. Cat stated that she is helping to take door knobs and other salvageable items out of the home so that the property owners can use them in the new house.

Jack recommended an award celebration to recognize property owners who have taken good care of or restored their historic property.

Summation of concerns and suggested solutions presented:

- Major concerns were presented about releasing lead/asbestos into the air and groundwater, especially from those who live in close proximity.
- Concern that the McNamaras' decision to burn the house has come too hastily and perhaps with a conflict of interest among one of the contractors who is a volunteer with the Fire Department.
- Determine if a burn permit is required and who is responsible for approving that. Ask that the burn permit be denied.
- Request that the City ask the Fire Department for info on their protocol regarding Crystal Springs and clarify who is liable for possible contamination. Copies of the

environmental test results should be shared with the community. Ask the question, who is responsible for any long-term consequences as the result of this burn?

- Recommendation to ask the McNamaras for a reprieve and take no steps at this time to destroy Crystal Springs, including practice burns.
- Support Preservation NC in its efforts to purchase Crystal Springs, etc. who will place an easement or covenant on the property to ensure its preservation.
- Moving forward, the City, Planning Board, Historic Saluda Committee and any other relevant entities should work collaboratively together to create policies and solutions to prevent this from occurring in the future.

**City Report** - None given

**Adjourn** - Billy made the motion, Ammie seconded. Motion passed.