



Town of Sullivan's Island, South Carolina
Historic Preservation and Design Study Group
A Subcommittee of Land Use and Natural Resources Committee of Council

Thursday, March 3, 2022

Subcommittee met at 4:00pm, at Town Hall, 2056 Middle Street, all requirements of the Freedom of Information Act having been met. Present were,

Subcommittee voting members: John Winchester (Chair), Aussie Geer (Vice Chair), Eddie Fava, Elizabeth Tezza, Beverly Bohan, Rita Langley, Michael Daly, and Manda Poletti

Staff: Joe Henderson, Planning and Zoning Administrator, Max Wurthmann, Building Official and Pamela Otto, Study Group staff member

1. **Call to Order.** Chair Winchester called the meeting to order at 4:00pm, stating the press and public were duly notified pursuant to state law, and all voting members were present except for Christina Butler.
Media: None present
Public: Fourteen (14) members present, including Land Use and Natural Resource (LUNR) members Gary Visser, Scott Millimet and Pat O'Neil, as well as Planning Commission Member Mark Howard.
2. **Introduction of Study Group members.** Chair Winchester introduced the subcommittee voting members, mentioning that Christina Butler could not be present. The criteria of voting members were a member each from the Boards and Commissions (excluding Tree Commission), a builder, an architect, an historian, and residents who are familiar with renovating historic homes. He also mentioned the non-voting members who will add to the discussion. The non-voting members are Joe Henderson, Max Wurthmann, Pat O'Neil, Gary Visser, Roy Williams, Mike Walsh, Linda Perkis, Carlsen Huey, Mark Howard, Karen Coste, Kathy Heller, Hal Currey and Cheryl Clark. Chair Winchester then went through the Study Group

handouts, mentioning that they are available on the Town website on the Study Group page.

3. **Orientation and evaluation of existing conditions.** Chair Winchester spoke briefly about the conduct of the meetings, saying that public input is welcome, and communications can be emailed to Town staff. The agenda will be made available in advance to the public. The houses being discussed are to be discussed by address, not name. There will be a time for public input in the meetings and email correspondence will be put on the record. However, when it comes to motions and voting, discussion will be kept between voting members. Before the meetings are adjourned, there will be a discussion of the next meeting's agenda. It was asked if historic preservation in other communities will be studied, Chair Winchester said he felt it more important to see what Sullivan's Island wants. Ms. Tezza pointed out that Sullivan's Island is unique from other historic communities as it is bound by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), the South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control (SCDHEC) and critical lines. Henderson stated that it would be good for all members, voting and non-voting, to have ideas about where they feel the zoning ordinances are doing well and where they are not doing well. Henderson then showed how to navigate to the Study Group page on the website and where to find all the documents, maps, and resources. Mr. Millimet asked how the Group would approach their mission, as historic preservation and new build design are very different topics. Chair Winchester stated that historic preservation will be the first priority and then new builds will be addressed.

- A. **Study Group Process.** Henderson gave an overview of the text amendment process for an ordinance. He stated the goal of the Study Group is to study the existing conditions, mainly since 2005, of new construction on residential properties and also historic restoration projects. The Study group will develop a list of recommendations to send to Town Council via the LUNR committee. Town Council will then discuss them at meetings and workshops, and then send them to the Planning Commission, who will draft the language after study of the issues. Planning Commission will also hold a public hearing to allow public input, then send it back to Town Council for 3 readings.

- B. Comprehensive Plan Objectives.** The Comprehensive Plan (in Land Use policy 6, Land Use objective 6.1) recommends the formation of a task force to review Zoning Ordinance regulations to ensure that future construction is respectful of the Island’s traditional mass-height scale proportional to lot size, neighborhood compatibility and historic resources. Land use objective 6.2 recommends taking a look at design guidelines and other accessory usage. Henderson then went through the regulatory framework used to process building permits. Any permit must have 3 factors considered before issue, those are historic districts, Zoning maps and FEMA flood maps.
- C. Historic Districts.** Sullivan’s Island has three (3) local historic districts and four (4) National Register historic districts. A National Register historic district is adopted on a federal level. The local historic districts, Moultrieville, Sullivan’s Island, and Atlanticville, gives the Town the authority to protect structures within these districts. National Register historic districts do not give any authority for protection of structures. The Design Review Board (DRB) uses these districts to determine where they can be more flexible with massing, scale, and contemporary design. There is also a historic structure overlay that identifies historic structures outside of the districts.
- D. Zoning map.** This also regulates development on Sullivan’s Island. Most of the island is zoned Residential but there is also a commercial district with split zoned lots and a Public Facilities zoning district. Henderson also discussed the new FEMA flood maps issued in 2019 and the drastic change it can make to the Island’s built environment. No longer do homes have to be built eight to ten (8-10) feet from grade, they can now be built two (2) feet from grade. This makes neighborhood compatibility a very important concern for the elevation of homes as well.
- 4. Establishment of Mission Statement.** Chair Winchester stated the task of the Study Group is not to review the ordinances, but to review the built environment and the success or failure to protect historic structures. The implied task is to solicit public input and make recommendations that

address and support the vision of the Comprehensive Plan. The Study Group should also make recommendations for changes that will ensure the protection of historic structures and address the new FEMA guidelines.

- 5. Discussion of next meeting's business.** Chair Winchester asked for comments for the next meeting's agenda as he wanted a rough idea of what to include. Mr. Howard wants to include how flood maps change the approach to historic structures and how high they can be built. Mr. Millimet asked the percentage improvement to require adherence to FEMA guidelines. Henderson answered that it was fifty percent (50%). Ms. Coste asked if the mission statement included fencing. Chair Winchester stated that they could very well be covered.

Mr. Visser stated that some current incentives to protect historic structures might not be doing the job. Ms. Tezza supports the current incentives but was not sure if certain homes could still be considered historic. Ms. Heller asked if lowering the building limits has resulted in an increase in the construction of garages. Henderson stated that allowing a garage was an incentive to build lower. Ms. Poletti agreed, saying it was an issue when this came before the Planning Commission, that if you let people build lower there will be an increase in separate garages.

Ms. Poletti asked if the next agenda could include a discussion of the Department of Interior standards for historic preservation. Ms. Bohan said any who come before the DRB should be using these guidelines as they are very specific. Ms. Coste asked if the Study Group will emphasize to the members of the Boards and Commission what their purpose is and make sure they are properly trained. Chair Winchester hopes the Study Group will be able to enact changes in the ordinances that better guide the Boards and Commissions. Ms. Tezza said the members are trained and are restricted by the ordinances.

Mr. Millimet asked what qualifies a structure as historic. He also wants to know what can be done to tighten up the existing regulations so there is no room for broad interpretation, size and mass are an issue. Mr. Fava feels that the incentive that allows a property owner to build a larger structure if attached to the historic structure has the opposite effect that it intended, it encourages larger mass.

Chair Winchester wants to broach the Schneider Study and discuss it. The next agenda is to cover the Schneider Study, Town standards and processes

for a restoration project to include Board training, the height-mass-scale of historic properties (including the special exception) and accessory structures. Henderson wants to touch on two (2) sections of the ordinance that effect historic projects in his opening to the next meeting, one is the historic special exception, and the other is the fifty percent exemption. He will show some off island examples and then discuss the incentives on island.

Mr. Walsh said there was more than one study. Henderson said Schneider came to update his study multiple times, initially in the mid-1980s, again in 1988 and in 2005. During those updates, properties were removed and added. Mr. O'Neil was glad to see the value placed on historic preservation and thanked the Study Group for their time and effort.

6. **Adjourn.** There being no further public discussion and no new business, the meeting adjourned at approximately 5:21pm.

Motion: A motion was made to adjourn by Ms. Langley, seconded by Ms. Tezza; motion passed unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,

Pamela Otto