TOWN OF BOONE
HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION
MEETING MINUTES
JUNE 10, 2025, 3:00 PM
Planning & Inspections Department & WebEx Video Conferencing

Historic Preservation Commission Members Present: Vardell Smyth-Chair, Bettie Bond-Vice-Chair, and Ayden Basinger

Council Liaison Present: Virginia Roseman (via WebEx)

Planning Staff Present: Brandon Wise-Deputy Director, Jessica Mitchell-Advanced Planning Specialist, Amy Snider-Commercial Zoning Administrator, Alyson Wuagneux-Customer Service Specialist, and Brenda Henson-Board Clerk

Other Town Staff/Representatives Present: Laney Wise-Grants Coordinator/Communications

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Call to Order

Chair Smyth called the Boone Historic Preservation Commission meeting to order at 3:03 p.m. The meeting was held in the Planning & Inspections Conference Room at 680 West King Street and via WebEx.

Adoption of Agenda

Commission Member Basinger made a motion to approve the agenda as presented. Vice-Chair Bond seconded the motion.

Vote: Aye – 3
Nay – 0

The motion passed.

Case A25-0169 Rivers House Trail – Certificate of Appropriateness

The Town of Boone submitted an application for a Certificate of Appropriateness for Major Work for the parcel adjacent to 150 Clay House Drive (WT0530 R. L. Clay House), designated as a Historic Landmark within the Town of Boone for the construction of 4,786 feet of trail that will become the southern terminus of the Northern Peaks State Trail, installation of 128 stone steps near the State Champion Sugar Maple Tree, Baby, and for the historical review and recommendation on the addition of Trailhead Signage.

Laney Wise, Grants Coordinator/Communications for the Town of Boone, and Jordan Sellers with Blue Ridge Conservancy, were sworn in by Chair Smyth.

Ms. Wise noted that she had helped Mr. Sellers with the grant for the trail. She provided a handout depicting the typical Northern Peaks Trail sign that was proposed for the Rivers House Trail **(Exhibit 5, permanently on file).** Ms. Wise stated that the Town Council had adjusted the location of the trailhead to be on Moretz Drive by the Daniel Boone Monument instead of on Rivers Street. She said that the contract had to be approved by Nature Trails, LLC before a complete design for the project could be done, so the plans in the HPC packet were not completely accurate.

Chair Smyth reiterated that the Historic Preservation Commission's scope of review for this project was limited to tree removal and signage.

Ms. Wise stated that the trail project did not include the installation of parking spaces. She explained the trail map to members of the public who were present. Ms. Wise noted that the Town's Public Works

Department would build and erect the sign when time allowed. Chair Smyth asked where the sign would be placed. Mr. Sellers replied that the most logical location would be near the Daniel Boone Monument. Chair Smyth asked if there would be a sign on the Rivers House. Ms. Wise said they would not touch the house with this project.

Chair Smyth invited public comment.

Keith Gair of 202 Grandview Heights asked how the trail would be constructed. Mr. Sellers replied that the trail would be hand and machine-built. Mr. Gair asked if the big and broken trees would be cleaned up from the area. Mr. Wise replied that the Town would clean up any construction debris. He noted that Ms. Wise was working on a grant to help pay for additional cleanup outside the trail project's scope. Mr. Gair expressed concern that trail users might try to access it from the Grandview Heights neighborhood.

Susan King of 176 Moretz Drive stated that she bought her house in 1990, which abutted the Rivers property. She noted that an amphitheater was shown on the plan. Ms. Wise replied that a plan was designed in 2019 that included an amphitheater, and an amphitheater was not part of this proposed project. Ms. King asked if the trail would be natural or graveled. Mr. Sellers stated that a short section of the trail near the monument would be an aggregate material so that people with mobility issues could access that section. The remainder of the trail would be a natural surface.

Ms. King stated that when the property was deeded to the Town, it was supposed to be green space, a natural forest not inhabited by humans. She asked if the trail was supposed to connect to another trail. Mr. Sellers replied that the trail was ¾ to 1 mile on the property and would be part of the Northern Peak State Trail system. The trail was intended to meet a demand and desire for public recreation in the Downtown area.

Ms. King expressed concern that the trail would ruin the greenspace, increase litter, invite people experiencing homelessness, and allow the public to see into neighboring houses. She feared for her safety. Ms. King stated she had hoped the Rivers House would become a museum for local history. She asked who would keep the property clean and what would happen to the wildlife. Ms. King stated that the Coffeys did not want the land to be disturbed, and she felt the trail would infringe on their agreement.

Ms. King noted that the Rivers House used to have a slate roof, but it was replaced with a shingle roof, which was not historic.

Mr. Wise reminded everyone that public comment was not a time for back-and-forth questions and answers. He encouraged the members of the public to make their comments, and the Staff would try to answer any questions afterward.

Chair Smyth stated that the Historic Preservation Commission had no say over the allowance of the trail, but only over the signage and tree removal. He encouraged members of the public to address their concerns over the installation of the trail to the Town Council.

Marcia Gair of 202 Grandview Heights expressed concern about people blocking access to residences because there was no parking for the trail. She also had concerns that the homeless population would increase and wildlife would decrease. Ms. Gair noted that she would be able to see the trail from her porch and wished it would be farther away from her house. She asked if there were future projects that would provide parking for the trail.

Ms. King stated she had read that there was a plan to turn the garage into handicapped accessible bathrooms. She noted there was a small amount of parking space there. Ms. King added that she had walked the Rivers property many times, and it was not as big as it seemed on the plan. She stated she would like to attend a Town Council meeting to voice her concerns.

With nothing further, Chair Smyth closed the public comment portion of the meeting at 3:34 p.m.

Brandon Wise, Deputy Director of Planning & Inspections, was sworn in by Chair Smyth. Mr. Wise explained that there were restrictions for the property on the deed, and one of those restrictions was that the property be used for recreation. The trail would be considered a recreational use. He stated that the deed restrictions allowed parking only on the front parcel. Mr. Wise noted that there would be minimal tree disturbance, explaining that the trail would wind around most trees. He confirmed that Public Works would maintain the property and suggested that the homeless population could decrease due to the increase in people on the property. Mr. Wise stated that the amphitheater shown on the plan was not in this project's scope. He felt that if this were a future project, the Town Council would have to consider it later. Mr. Wise informed the public that the next Town Council meeting would be held tomorrow, Wednesday, June 11, 2025, at 9 am in Town Council Chambers, 1500 Blowing Rock Road, where public comment was allowed near the beginning of the meeting. Mr. Wise reiterated that the trail project would not involve the Rivers House parcel, and "Baby," the sugar maple, would not be touched.

Chair Smyth asked if there would be hours of operation for the trail. Mr. Wise felt that closing the trail at dusk would be reasonable.

Vice-Chair Bond stated that the HPC had worked for years to preserve the historical importance of the Rivers House, and she felt they had made significant progress. She mentioned that making the trail more accessible could encourage people to be kinder and more respectful of the property. She also suggested including educational components to engage the public with the property's history. Vice-Chair Bond emphasized that the disability entrance was required by law, and she believed it would allow people to visit the property who otherwise would not have that opportunity. She added that the slate roof on the Rivers House was replaced with a shingle roof because slate was not readily available.

Motion and Vote:
Vice-Chair Bond made a motion, seconded by Commission Member Basinger, that the proposed development is congruous with the special character of the Downtown Boone Local Historic District because of the evidence presented in the meeting and the meeting packet. The COA is approved subject to the following conditions:

- Where there is a conflict between the application information and the plans (submitted March 5, 2025, and revised May 28, 2025), the plans control. Insignificant deviations may be permitted to comply with the requirements of the UDO.
- Any commitments and representations concerning the proposed exterior modification made by the applicant or its representatives at the public hearing shall also become a condition of the permit and a basis for a stop work order and/or permit revocation if violated.
- The applicant shall submit the necessary applications, plans, details, and specifications which meet the requirements of the Town Code, UDO, Building Code, and any other applicable codes for review and approval necessary to issue Zoning and Building Permits.

Vote: Aye – 3
Nay – 0

The motion passed.

<u>Approval of Meeting Minutes</u>

Commission Member Basinger made a motion, seconded by Vice-Chair Bond, to approve the May 13, 2025, Historic Preservation Commission quasi-judicial meeting minutes.

Vote: Aye – 3
Nay – 0

The motion passed.

Vice-Chair Bond requested that the word "it's" in the third line of the Project Description on page 22 of the meeting packet be changed to "its".

Approval of Written Decisions

Commission Member Basinger made a motion, seconded by Vice-Chair Bond, to approve the Written Decisions for Case A25-0213 Mellow Mushroom, Case A25-0215 Chai & Chutney, and Case A25-0216 Shoppes at Farmers.

Vote: Aye – 3
Nay – 0

The motion passed.

Other Matters

Jessica Mitchell, Advanced Planning Specialist, provided Commission members with a handout containing the HPC's suggested changes from the June 3, 2025, Advisory meeting, to the Stoneman's Raid interpretative panel draft text and Civil War Trails (CWT) revised draft text incorporating HPC's suggestions **(copy on file)**. Commission members agreed that the revised language from CWT looked good. Ms. Mitchell stated she would send the revised draft text to the Town Council for their consideration at the July Town Council meeting. She said she would share the text with the Watauga County Historical Society and the Downtown Boone Development Association as the funding partners.

Ms. Mitchell announced that this was Commission Member Basinger's last meeting as his term on the HPC would expire on June 30, 2025. She and the other Commission members thanked Commission Member Basinger for his service.

Vice-Chair Bond announced that Laura Linney would be in town on June 26, 2025. She was scheduled to speak at 11:15 am at the Power of the Purse event at the Holmes Convocation Center and would attend a showing of The Truman Show at 7:00 pm at The Appalachian Theatre. She also announced that the Gatsby Gala fundraiser would be held at The Appalachian Theatre on Friday, August 22, 2025.

Adjournment

Commission Member Basinger made a motion, seconded by Vice-Chair Bond, to adjourn the meeting at 4:01 p.m.

Vote: Aye – 3
Nay – 0

The motion passed.

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Vardell Smyth, Chair **Brenda Henson, Board Clerk**