TOWN OF BOONE
HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION
MEETING MINUTES
AUGUST 12, 2025, 3:00 PM
Planning & Inspections Department & WebEx Video Conferencing

Historic Preservation Commission Members Present: Vardell Smyth-Chair, Bettie Bond-Vice-Chair, Krystal Carter, and Bennie Gaetano

Historic Preservation Commission Members Absent: Melody Oxendine

Council Liaison Present: Virginia Roseman (via WebEx)

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

Other Town Staff/Representatives Present: Mark Freed-Director of Cultural Resources, Allison Meade-Town Attorney (via Web-Ex), and Lane Moody-Downtown Development Coordinator (via WebEx

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Call to Order

Chair Smyth called the Boone Historic Preservation Commission meeting to order at 3:00 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 Carter made a motion to approve the agenda as presented. Commission Member Gaetano seconded the motion.

Vote: Aye – 4
Nay – 0
Absent – 1 (Oxendine)

The motion passed.

Chair Smyth provided a brief synopsis of the Historic Preservation Commission, its makeup, and its function.

Case A25-0195 Rivers House – Bathroom Renovation

The Town of Boone has submitted an application for a Certificate of Appropriateness for Major Work for 150 Clay House Dr (WT0530 R. L. Clay House), designated as a Historic Landmark within the Town of Boone, for the renovation of the accessory building for the addition of ADA accessible restrooms. Work includes upgrading and installing water and sewer lines, adding ADA-accessible restrooms to the interior of the building, repairing the exterior of the building where needed, installing ventilation systems to the interior of the building, repairing stairs located at the back of the building that leads to the upstairs storage area, and reinforcing the floor in the upstairs storage area.

Amy Snider and Jessica Mitchell, Town Staff members, were sworn in by Chair Smyth.

Commission members indicated they had no fixed opinions or conflicts of interest and had not participated in ex-parte communication regarding this case.

Ms. Snider gave a brief description of the project.

Chair Smyth affirmed Mr. Bill Dixon of Appalachian Architecture, whom presented on behalf of the Town of Boone.

Chair Smyth asked Mr. Dixon, on behalf of the Town of Boone, if he had any objections to the materials contained in the meeting packet. Mr. Dixon replied that he did not have any objections.

Mr. Dixon made a brief opening statement.

Ms. Snider presented evidence and directed members to the Staff Report and noted anticipation of the removal of one of the cherry trees.

Chair Smyth inquired about the garage doors and whether they would stay. My Dixon noted that he had hoped they would be able to and would assess that once the building is cleaned out.

Vice-Chair Bond asked if they found anything interesting. Mr. Mark Freed replied nothing significant had been discovered at this time.

Mr. Dixon asked about staff input/flexibility regarding aluminum siding on the fascia's and eaves and stated that decisions will be made once the condition is determined after the project begins.

Vice-Chair Bond asked if any damage was done to the house during Hurricane Helene. Mr. Mark Freed replied that it was mostly trees on the property; he added that there is a grant that has already been secured to do some tree work on the property.

Motion and Vote:

Vice-Chair Bond made a motion, seconded by Commission Member Carter, that the proposed development is congruous with the special character of the Downtown Boone Local Historic District. The COA is approved subject to the following conditions:

- Where there is a conflict between the application information and the plans (March 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 – 4
Nay – 0
Absent – 1 (Oxendine)

The motion passed.

With no further discussion, Chair Smyth closed this case.

<u>Case A25-0466 Speckled Trout Outfitters – New Stairs</u>

Farmer's Ski Shop, Inc. has submitted an application for a Certificate of Appropriateness for Major Work for 140 S Depot St (WT0605 Watauga Motor Company Building), located in the Downtown Boone Local Historic District. The request is to add a staircase as an entryway to an existing loading dock door on the western side of the northern elevation. The subject property is outlined in green on the Zoning Map included below.

Mr. Eric Brinker, owner and general contractor of The Speckled Trout Outfitters, was affirmed by Chair Smyth.

Commission members indicated they had no fixed opinions or conflicts of interest and had not participated in ex-parte communication regarding this case.

Ms. Snider gave a brief description of the project, including that the work was already completed, and referenced the Staff Report on packet page 36.

Chair Smyth asked Mr. Brinker, on behalf of Farmer's Ski Shop, if he had any objections to the materials contained in the meeting packet. Mr. Brinker replied that he did not have any objections.

Mr. Brinker delivered an opening statement. He offered some background information on the current iteration of the stairs, which were constructed prior to having a permit. He noted that permission was given to construct temporary stairs by Mr. Stacey Miller, Town of Boone Chief Building Inspector, in an effort to facilitate the renovations safely during construction. Mr. Brinker added that the stairs were built to code so they would be viable stairs. He noted that the stairs make it safer, and that business is much more functional the way it is currently.

Vice-Chair Bond asked if the stairs were ADA compliant. Mr. Brinker replied that it was not possible to make the stairs ADA compliant. He stated that the only way to do that would be to add a ramp and he was unsure if that was feasible given the proximity to the alley way and limited number of parking spaces.

Chair Smyth noted that he didn't think that was something HPC would ask of the applicant, as it is not within the commissions purview.

Chair Smyth invited public comment.

Scott Williford of 630 Grand Boulevard expressed concern regarding objections to the addition of stairs at The Happy Persimmon. He questioned the objection to the stairs as he noted they are removable, have caused no permanent structural damage, and appear to be well-constructed with handrails and built to code. Mr. Williford argued that the stairs do not detract from the historic character of the area. He expressed frustration with what he perceived as unnecessary bureaucracy and red tape hindering positive growth in downtown Boone. He concluded that the opposition to the stairs feels like an overreaction and that the current approach may represent an extreme swing in the wrong direction regarding downtown development policy.

Kim Short, co-founder of The Happy Persimmon, spoke in support of maintaining the business's dedicated entrance, which has been a significant benefit, both for businesses operations and customer experience. She noted that The Happy Persimmon and The Speckled Trout Outfitters operate on different schedules, and without the separate entrance, they would be forced to leave their shop open during hours when staff are not present. She concluded by expressing a strong desire to retain the entrance, citing its positive impact on both businesses and the local customer base.

Ilya Wang, co-owner of The Happy Persimmon, expressed deep appreciation for the space their business has cultivated and its significance to the local community. She emphasized the challenges of operating a small business in Boone, particularly with regard to affordability and accessibility to space. She noted that having a dedicated entrance has been essential to maintaining their independence and identity as a business. She also highlighted the importance of collaboration with The Speckled Trout and the support they've received from the local business community.

Sabrina Sanders of 335 East King Street, Sustainable Development student at Appalachian State University and full-time resident of Boone, spoke in support of The Happy Persimmon and its continued use of a

dedicated entrance and front porch area. She noted that the addition of the entrance has drawn positive attention to the welcoming space inside and praised the co-owners for creating a unique community space. Ms. Sanders asked commission members to allow continued use of the entry and stairway.

Shane Hillman, Program Director at F.A.R.M. café, spoke in support of The Happy Persimmon's continued use of its dedicated entrance and stairway. Mr. Hillman reflected on Boone's longstanding reputation as a welcoming and inclusive town. He urged for the city to consider the importance of the entryway in the decision making because The Happy Persimmon's separate entrance is vital to preserving its distinct identity and the community it serves. Mr. Hillman noted that it would allow two fire exits for safety.

Robin Greene, Vice President of Farmers Ski Shop, Inc. and property owner, expressed full support for the continued use of the steps and entryway serving The Happy Persimmon. She commended Mr. Brinker for the quality and aesthetic of the stairway construction, noting that it complements the building's style, enhances its overall appearance, and provides a safety enhancement for the property. She concluded by stating that the dedicated entrance is beneficial to both businesses operating in the building, helping to serve their distinct customer bases more effectively.

Mr. Brinker asked to add two additional comments. He noted that David Greene was the architect responsible for the 1970s addition to the building, specifically the non-historic portion. This section was originally designed and used as a loading dock. He also noted the installation of doors from the 1700s that Mr. Greene incorporated into the opening.

Vice-Chair Bond expressed concern regarding the appearance of the stairs and inquired whether there were any plans to soften their visual impact, and asked if painting the stairs had been considered as a potential solution.

Mr. Brinker stated that the stairs will be painted once they cure.

Vice-Chair Bond reflected on the broader appreciation of Howard Street and its ongoing development. She expressed enthusiasm for the influx of good ideas and the attraction of interesting people to the downtown area.

With nothing further, Chair Smyth closed the public comment portion of the meeting at 3:31 p.m.

Commission members discussed their favorability of the project.

Motion and Vote:

Commission Member Carter made a motion, seconded by Commission Member Gaetano, that the proposed development is congruous with the special character of the Downtown Boone Local Historic District. The COA is approved subject to the following conditions:

- Where there is a conflict between the application information and the plans (June 26, 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 – 4
Nay – 0

Absent – 1 (Oxendine)

The motion passed.

With no further discussion, Chair Smyth closed this case.

Case A25-0482 Qualls Block – Waterproofing

Trade Land Company, LLC has submitted an application for a Certificate of Appropriateness for Major Work for 605 W King St located in the Downtown Boone Local Historic District. The request is for mortar joint repairs along the east, west, and south elevations of the building. The scope of work states repointing and tuckpointing of the mortar joints and the proposed material includes a water-based natural look sealant.

Commission members indicated they had no fixed opinions or conflicts of interest and had not participated in ex-parte communication regarding this case.

Mr. Joe Keys, general contractor, was sworn in by Chair Smyth.

Ms. Snider gave a brief description of the project and referenced the Staff Report on packet page 75.

Chair Smyth asked Mr. Keys, on behalf of Trade Land Company, if he had any objections to the materials contained in the meeting packet. Mr. Keys replied that he did not have any objections.

Mr. Keys delivered an opening statement. He stated that the proposal was to undertake essential repairs to the mortar joints on the west, south, and east elevations of the historic structure at 605 West King Street. He noted that the repairs are deemed necessary due to water-related deterioration, which has resulted in infiltration, mold development, and progressive damage to both the exterior brickwork and interior walls.

Ms. Snider noted that Appendix D guidelines and recommendations from the Secretary of Interior's Standards are available if needed.

Chair Smyth noted that, based on his review and understanding of the standards provided in the staff report, the product appeared to be both clear, breathable, and acceptable for use on the mortar joints.

Mr. Keys stated his excitement and privilege to work in downtown Boone, and his commitment to carrying out the work that is sensitive to the historical integrity of the building while addressing pressing structural and environmental concerns.

Ms. Allison Meade, Town Attorney, joined the meeting via WebEx at 3:37 p.m.

Ms. Meade inquired whether the sealant would be applied over existing historic mortar, incorporated into new mortar during repointing, or used in another manner. Overall clarification on the exact method of application was requested.

Mr. Keys stated repointing and re-tucking will be necessary in specific areas along the east, west, and south walls where the old mortar joints have been compromised. He stated that Type N cement will be used for this process, clarifying that it is not Portland cement and is less strong, but was selected for its ability to match the existing mortar color. Once the repointing and re-tucking are complete and the mortar has fully cured, a breathable clear coat sealant will be applied to properly seal the exterior.

Chair Smyth asked if recoating would be for the new joints or all the joints. Mr. Keys clarified it would be for all the joints.

Ms. Meade raised a question regarding whether concerns about water sealant had already been addressed or were intended to be part of the ongoing discussion. She noted that both the Town standards and those of the Department of the Interior (Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation, referenced as Secretary of the Interior's standards) express strong disapproval of water sealant use, particularly in the context of historic mortar. Concerns centered on the potential for a water sealant to trap moisture, which can be detrimental to historic materials, including historic mortar. She emphasized that the appropriateness of water sealant depends heavily on the specific circumstances, including the proposed details and the expertise of the mason involved.

Mr. Keys responded by proposing the use of a breathable masonry sealer on the repaired areas. It was noted that such sealers are considered essential in historic preservation efforts due to their ability to allow moisture vapor to escape from within the masonry, while still providing a protective barrier against external water infiltration. This approach is intended to prevent deterioration such as cracking and spalling, which can occur when moisture becomes trapped in non-breathable systems. Product specifications for the proposed sealer were made available.

Ms. Meade asked Mr. Keys to clarify his professional expertise. Mr. Keys responded that he is the general contractor working on the Qualls Building. Ms. Meade confirmed that he is not a mason and asked whether he had prior experience working on historic masonry. Mr. Keys explained that his team had completed work on the front of 599 West King Street, formerly the King Street Creamery, which involved repointing, re-tucking, and repainting the exterior face. He noted that this work was carried out around the same time last year. Ms. Meade asked if the same mason would be used for the current project, and Mr. Keys confirmed that they would be working again with Octavia Gonzalez of Gonzalez Masonry.

Ms. Meade expressed concern after reviewing the historic district standards, which she noted strongly discourage the use of water sealant. She pointed out that the Secretary of the Interior's standards had not been cited and felt they should have been included in the staff report, as they are central to evaluating the proposal. She questioned whether the mortar being removed is historic and emphasized that disturbing historic mortar is generally discouraged. If removal is necessary, she stressed the importance of closely matching the new mortar in both material composition and pointing style.

Ms. Meade acknowledged the argument presented in favor of breathable sealants but stated that this position contradicts both local and federal preservation standards.

Ms. Meade recognized the complexity of the issue and the challenge to the Historic Preservation Commission, noting this is why the matter requires review and cannot be resolved administratively. She concluded that this is a fundamental historic preservation question and suggested that some Commission members may have relevant expertise to help guide the decision.

Vice-Chair Bond asked whether the breathable sealant currently being proposed was developed after the historic preservation standards were written.

Chair Smyth acknowledged that he had not reviewed the Secretary of the Interior's standards. He noted that his understanding of local standards generally cautions against materials that trap moisture, whereas the proposed sealant appears to be specifically designed to avoid that issue. He acknowledged that, based on his understanding—which he admitted may be incorrect—repointing requires removal of some existing mortar to allow for new adhesion. He added that once that process begins, the question arises as to whether the sealant is necessary at all. For the sake of discussion, he posed the hypothetical of simply using a traditional cement similar to what was originally in place, thereby eliminating the need for sealant.

Mr. Keys explained that the purpose of the sealant is to fully seal and protect the masonry from future freeze-thaw cycles and prolonged exposure to weather. He noted that the team is currently evaluating whether there has been a longstanding issue with porosity in the masonry, which may have compromised its integrity. The application of the sealant is intended to address and mitigate that concern.

Ms. Meade emphasized the guidance advising against sealants and stated there does not appear to be sufficient expertise present to fully assess the implications of the proposal.

Ms. Snider provided a National Park Service Preservation Brief regarding masonry and the use of water-repellent treatments. She noted that the standards indicate that sealants may be used, but it also emphasizes the importance of involving a historic preservation specialist to determine whether their use is appropriate.

Chair Smyth acknowledged that the current request differs significantly from that prior work performed at 599 West King Street.

Vice-Chair Bond remarked that she heard King Street was heavily flooded after Hurricane Helene and asked if the Qualls Building was affected. Mr. Keys responded that they were fortunate, as the building sits at a high point and experienced only minimal water infiltration.

Ms. Meade emphasized that, without the input of a historic or architectural conservation expert, it is difficult for the Commission to fully evaluate the appropriateness of the proposed approach. She reiterated that local standards explicitly discourage the use of sealants and referenced sections 4.3 and 4.4 of Appendix D. She asked whether it had been determined that the material in question is, in fact, historic mortar. Chair Smyth responded that the building had previously experienced a fire, but stated he was unsure what repairs or restoration had been completed afterward. He questioned why the same type of mortar originally used could not simply be applied again to avoid using the water repellent.

Mr. Keys provided packets containing product specifications **(copy on file.)**

Brandon Wise, Town of Boone Planning and Inspections Deputy Director joined the meeting at 3:55 p.m.

Ms. Meade explained that the Secretary of Interior's standards generally recommend repairing mortar first and considering sealants only if there are signs of leaking after repairing the mortar.

Chair Smyth asked the applicant what would happen if a sealer were not applied. Mr. Keys referred to the packet photos, noting significant water weeping on the interior masonry walls. He emphasized that

the space is scheduled to be finished and opened within the month, and water is infiltrating all three southwestern walls.

Ms. Meade stated that if sealant is permitted, a silane-siloxane sealer is typically recommended based on referenced guidance. She asked if that was the proposed solution, and Mr. Keys confirmed it was.

Ms. Meade acknowledged that the applicant may not have been aware of preservation concerns. She suggested that staff and the Historic Preservation Commission consider advising future applicants to seek professional preservationist testimony when appropriate. She went on to emphasize that repointing is the traditional and standard method for addressing water infiltration and explained that mortar should act as a water barrier.

Chair Smyth asked the applicant whether repointing alone could resolve the issue. Mr. Keys responded that repointing could potentially solve the problem and could be attempted first.

Members discussed recommendations and conditions, favoring the suggestion to repoint and then reassess if a water sealant is necessary.

Motion and Vote:

Chair Smyth made a motion, seconded by Commission Member Carter, that the proposed development is congruous with the special character of the Downtown Boone Local Historic District. The COA is approved subject to the following conditions:

- Where there is a conflict between the application information and the plans (June 26, 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.
- That the proposed sealant is not applied. If water infiltration persists, the applicant must come back with a specialist.

Vote: Aye – 4
Nay – 0
Absent – 1 (Oxendine)

The motion passed.

With no further discussion, Chair Smyth closed this case.

<u>Approval of Meeting Minutes</u>

Vice-Chair Bond made a motion, seconded by Commission Member Gaetano, to approve the June 10, 2025 Historic Preservation Commission quasi-judicial meeting minutes.

Vote: Aye – 4
Nay – 0
Absent – 1 (Oxendine)

The motion passed.

Other Matters

Ms. Mitchell provided an update on the Stoneman's Raid interpretive panel. Following the last advisory meeting, she shared updates via email and provided a handout **(copy on file.)** The funding partner reviewed the latest draft and requested one change: spelling "material" as "m-a-t-e-r-i-e-l." All other edits received consensus. She contacted Civil War Trails (CWT) with questions about the panel title and map. They acknowledged the Commission's concerns and proposed a layout featuring "Stoneman's Raid" at the top and again in the CWT's red campaign banner, along with the quote "The Fight Got Real Hot." The map will include landmarks such as the old courthouse (location of the Linney House), the Councill House (the location of the Post Office), Howard's Knob, Boone Cemetery, and highway markings. A "You Are Here" marker will also be added. CWT asked if the Commission would object to the red campaign banner; Ms. Mitchell indicated to CWT no foreseen objections.

Ms. Mitchell indicated that next steps include sending this latest draft to the Town Attorney for review. CWT will be updated afterward, and a revised version may be available at the next advisory meeting.

Ms. Mitchell also noted that a reminder email will be sent in the coming weeks regarding packet posting. Members conducting research on work plan topics should submit materials at that time.

Adjournment

Commission Member Carter made a motion, seconded by Commission Member Gaetano, to adjourn the meeting at 4:09 p.m.

Vote: Aye – 4
Nay – 0
Absent – 1 (Oxendine)

The motion passed.

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Vardell Smyth, Chair **Alyson Wuagneux, Board Clerk**