



# Town of Chapel Hill

## HISTORIC TOWN HALL COMMITTEE

Wednesday, May 3, 2017, at 5:30 p.m.  
Southern Human Services Center, Board Room  
2501 Homestead Road, Chapel Hill, NC 27516

### Meeting Minutes

Members: Council Member Sally Greene (Chair), Moses Carey, Joel Curran, Richard Ellington, Josh Gurlitz, Commissioner Penny Rich, Alan Rimer, Lee Storrow and Chela Tu.

#### 1. Opening

##### a. Roll Call

Members Present: Council Member Sally Greene (Chair), Moses Carey, Joel Curran, Richard Ellington, Josh Gurlitz, Commissioner Penny Rich, Alan Rimer, Lee Storrow, Chela Tu

Staff Present: Megan Dale, Travis Myren

#### 2. Business

##### a. Presentation on Historic Town Hall Committee

Background: The presentation will cover the Historic Town Hall committee's formation, charge, and work to-date.

Action Item: No action is anticipated.

- Action Taken: The presentation was delivered by Council Member Greene and discussed. No action was taken.

##### b. Public Discussion

Background: The committee and community members will discuss the possible future use of Historic Town Hall for a purpose related to local history and culture.

Action Item: No action is anticipated.

- Action Taken: The committee and community members engaged in a dialogue on potential uses for the building and opportunities that were available. No action was taken.

Town Ombuds Jim Huegerich led a facilitated discussion. The following comments were recorded from members of the public:

- A resident remarked upon Chapel Hill's transformation during and since the 1960's, and that the Town should remember and celebrate this history so current generations are aware of it.
- A resident said that their hope for the building was that the space would be a museum and have some relationship with the university. The resident noted that the history of the town is closely related to the history of the university, and the town and university should partner in commemorating that history.
- A resident said it was important to consider the costs to renovate and operate a museum in the building. Also the town should consider options to spread out the economic benefits of a museum, rather than isolate it in one building that may not always attract visitors.
- A resident said that the museum could serve as a cultural hub connecting and supporting other cultural organizations. The building could also provide a space for cultural activities, which could extend the reach of culture along the Downtown corridor.
- A resident said that the building is an opportunity to increase the foot traffic and economic opportunities on Franklin Street, increase partnerships, and make Downtown Chapel Hill a destination for the arts.
- A resident said it is important for the town, county, and university to make a financial commitment to the use of the building during the early stages of the process so it is financially sustainable.
- A resident shared their concern that a museum in this particular location may not be cost effective and may not be the best location for such a property use.
- A resident said that the property could be an opportunity to take the town's dynamism to the next level, create synergies with businesses, and to celebrate what we do well in Chapel Hill, both in the past and today.
- A resident shared their concern that the building is relatively small and that there could be problems in trying to put too many different uses in it. There also is a potential in using the building as a forum for public dialogue and connecting the Northside neighborhood to Downtown Chapel Hill.
- A resident said that there was an opportunity to consider the space as a community hub that connects the town and the university. This gives students a downtown space that is separate from campus to connect with the community and tackle controversial topics in a historical context.

- A resident said that students and faculty are looking for outlets to participate in public projects. Historic Town Hall can potentially provide an outlet for community engagement.
- A Visitors Bureau staff member shared some perspectives and common questions they receive from visitors, including a demand for history and culture and hearing Chapel Hill's story. The staff member noted that visitors are looking for conveniently located parking. Locals are interested in a cultural center that shares Chapel Hill's story and how it is different than other parts of the South.
- A resident asked the committee to consider why the Historic Town Hall location was the best location for university students to engage with Chapel Hill history.
- A resident stated that there is a desire for people to do projects involving the community to address local issues. The resident stated that the town needs to provide financial support so the space can be an outlet for community impact and make Chapel Hill a destination for the arts.
- A resident stated that it is important to recognize how people have historically engaged with the Historic Town Hall space while also recognizing how the space is currently being used as a place for food. Also, the committee should consider the commercial benefits the building can bring if it is available for multiple uses.
- A resident asked that the committee consider acquiring property near the Historic Town Hall building to think bigger about the space. The resident stated that local artists currently do not have space to show their work.
- A resident said that the Historic Town Hall location and the visitors center location offers a powerful symbiosis to serve children and create a space for people to convene and engage in dialogue.
- A resident was interested in knowing how disability organizations fit in with the future of the Historic Town Hall location. They shared that the property could provide a space for disability organizations, which is currently lacking in the community.
- A resident sees potential for a history-focused museum and noted that it is important to consider the differences in a use intended to promote the Town vs. a use that brings the community together and creates dialogue on difficult questions.
- A resident pointed out how the building is inaccessible and the exterior does not present a welcoming space. Elements of the building need to be redesigned to be inviting and open to serve as a community space.

- A resident said the property should be separate from the visitor's center because the space is small and the separation would encourage people to walk downtown between the Historic Town Hall location and the visitor's bureau location. There are opportunities for the visitor's center and a history center to work together if they are not co-located.
- A resident said that Chapel Hill needs a cultural arts center that catalyzes a connection between art and history. There is also a need to identify stakeholders and bring all interested parties to the table in order to tell the full history of Chapel Hill.
- A resident said that it is important to publicize in different ways and get more people involved in the conversation about the building's use, including minority groups and students at the university.
- A resident talked about the need for a needs assessment on the following before a decision is made on the building's use: (1) the economic drivers, (2) historic interests, and (3) the cultural arts component.
- A resident said that it was interesting to learn about the uses being considered for the property in response to the petition and was interested in learning what other types of uses for the building could be considered. The resident stated that it would be important to include those who may not have engaged with this specific committee charge, but may be interested in building's future use.

### **c. Other Public Comment**

A few comments were provided by email and verbally to staff at the end of the meeting. Below is a summary of these comments.

- A resident asked if the new potential for development on the adjacent property creates urgency in the timeline for determining the building's future use.
- A resident asked that literary art be considered along with history and culture as a future use for this space.
- A former Chapel Hill Museum board member emailed comments stating that real artifacts should be included if a history center/ museum is formed, and that it is important to include the town/gown relationship through the centuries. The board member noted that all Chapel Hill Museum items were returned to the owners or auctioned.
- A resident emailed comments stating an interest in turning the building into a "Tourist Information" center where businesses could advertise, and that Carrboro history and businesses should be included in the future use of this space.

- A resident emailed comments stating an interest in “pop-up” spaces for local artists.
- A former Council member emailed comments regarding the Chapel Hill Museum. As a Council member, he served on a citizens committee that performed two feasibility studies, which culminated in Council approving a museum located in the old Chapel Hill Library on East Franklin Street. He noted it was a slow start due to the need to fundraise from citizens and businesses, but the museum eventually flourished with many exhibits and programs, including programs for children. He noted that the museum’s closure was a great loss to the community and was due to the building condition and lack of funding for maintenance.

### **3. Adjournment**

#### **Meeting Materials**

##### Presentation on Historic Town Hall

**Opportunity Statement:** The Inter-Faith Council for Social Services is proceeding with plans to vacate Historic Town Hall. A recommendation is needed regarding the future use and occupancy of this building.

**Goal:** A Historic Town Hall Committee will represent the interests of the Town of Chapel Hill and Orange County to consider the opportunity to renovate the Historic Town Hall building at 100 West Rosemary Street as a Visitor's Center, a History Center, or both for possible occupancy by the Chapel Hill and Orange County Visitor's Bureau, Chapel Hill Historical Society, and/ or Chapel Hill Museum.

**Public Charge:** The Historic Town Hall Committee pledges its respect to the public. The Committee asks the public to conduct themselves in a respectful, courteous manner, both with the Committee and with fellow members of the public. Should any member of the Committee or any member of the public fail to observe this charge at any time, the Chair will ask the offending person to leave the meeting until that individual regains personal control. Should decorum fail to be restored, the Chair will recess the meeting until a genuine commitment to this public charge is observed.