

HISTORIC AND ARCHITECTURAL PRESERVATION COMMISSION (HAPC)
MEETING MINUTES
WEDNESDAY, January 8, 2025
6:00 P.M.

I. Call to Order

The January 8, 2025 meeting of the Oxford Historic and Architectural Preservation Commission was called to order at 6:00 p.m. by Dana Miller.

Those members present: Dana Miller, Corey Watt, Alex French, Rémah Dinç, and Brad Spurlock

Those members excused: Alia Levar Wegner, Sean Wagner

Staff members present: Sam Perry, Community Development Director

Staff members excused: None

Mr. Miller introduced Abbie Emison, the new project manager from McKenna Associates, who was warmly welcomed by the attendees.

II. Approval of Agenda

Mr. Miller proposed to amend the agenda by adding a discussion on the updated restroom designs for the Uptown Park after the Window Replacement Policy discussion item. Ms. French made a motion to approve the agenda as amended. Mr. Spurlock seconded the motion. All were in favor.

III. Election of Officers

Mr. Watt made a motion to maintain the current officers until January 2026. Ms. Dinç seconded the motion. All were in favor.

IV. Public Comments

There were no comments from the public.

V. Approval of Minutes of November 13, 2024

Ms. French made a motion to approve the minutes as written. Ms. Dinç seconded the motion. All were in favor.

Mr. Watt abstained from voting since he was absent during that meeting.

VI. Discussion Items

Presentation from Preservation Forward and McKenna Associates – Abbie Emison (in-person) and Jessica Flores (virtual)

Ms. Flores began her presentation by outlining the overarching goals of the project, which were to align preservation efforts with Oxford's Comprehensive Plan, foster community engagement, and establish a clear and actionable roadmap for the City's historic preservation. Ms. Flores

emphasized that the City's Comprehensive Plan, despite its length and scope, mentioned preservation only once, a gap that she described as both a challenge and an opportunity. Ms. Flores elaborated on the need for updated design guidelines tailored specifically to Oxford. These guidelines would aim to address inconsistencies in the Certificate of Appropriateness (COA) process and ensure that new developments and renovations complement the City's historic character. Ms. Flores introduced the concept of creating a robust inventory of historic structures, noting that such an inventory would serve as a foundational tool for future decision-making. Ms. Flores explained that a detailed inventory not only helps to understand what the City has but also what could be lost if preservation efforts falter.

Ms. Flores expanded on the importance of recognizing underrepresented communities and their contributions to Oxford's history. Ms. Flores noted that beyond mid-century modern architecture, the stories of Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) communities were integral to the City's heritage. As an example, Ms. Flores suggested a marker program to highlight key sites and individuals who have contributed significantly to Oxford's growth and culture. Preservation isn't just about buildings, emphasized Ms. Flores. It's about stories, connections, and a sense of belonging, added Ms. Flores.

Ms. Flores also highlighted the economic benefits of preservation. Ms. Flores described how preserving historic districts could increase property values, attract tourism, and create a unique identity for Oxford. Ms. Flores cited success stories from other towns that had leveraged historic preservation for economic development, emphasizing that grant opportunities and tax incentives were vital tools. Ms. Emison added that the City needs to demystify these programs for property owners so they understand how accessible and beneficial they can be.

Ms. Flores provided specific examples of cities that had successfully integrated preservation into broader development strategies. Ms. Flores referenced a Midwestern town that revitalized its downtown through adaptive reuse, converting warehouses into mixed-use spaces, which attracted both residents and tourists. Another example included a southern city that created a successful marker program highlighting contributions from marginalized communities, boosting cultural tourism and community pride.

Ms. Flores and the Commission members next talked about collaboration with Miami University. The Commission acknowledged the university's significant role as both a property owner and a cultural institution within the city. The Commission members discussed strategies to align the university's development projects with Oxford's preservation objectives. Concerns were raised about the potential impact of large-scale construction projects on historically significant sites, particularly in cases where university-owned properties intersect with local preservation districts.

To address these challenges, the Commission members emphasized the importance of building a stronger partnership with Miami University. Proposed initiatives included the joint development of a walking tour highlighting historically significant university buildings and the integration of these structures into the city's broader preservation framework. By showcasing the university's architectural heritage, such efforts could enhance public appreciation for its historical contributions while fostering a sense of unity between campus and community.

Mr. Miller inquired about how these strategies aligned with the Oxford Tomorrow Plan. Ms. Flores confirmed their compatibility, explaining that preservation goals could strengthen sustainability and community-building efforts. Mr. Watt raised concerns about balancing historic preservation with housing affordability, particularly in a college-town context. Ms. Flores suggested strategies like adaptive reuse of historic homes for multifamily housing and accessory dwelling units (ADUs) to address these concerns without compromising architectural integrity.

Ms. Flores also proposed utilizing advanced technology to foster engagement. Ms. Flores suggested the use of GIS mapping to visualize historic districts and incorporating augmented reality to provide interactive virtual tours of historic landmarks. These tools would attract both residents and tourists while fostering a deeper appreciation for the city's heritage, explained Ms. Flores.

Ms. French mentioned a phased approach for expanding the historic district boundaries. Ms. Flores proposed starting with areas of strong historic integrity and emphasized the importance of community engagement and consensus-building. Ms. Flores added that public education, including workshops, walking tours, and accessible materials would play a critical role in fostering support for preservation initiatives.

Ms. Flores briefly talked about another aspect of the design guideline update – building classification. Ms. Flores proposed simplifying property classifications, consolidating them into two primary categories: “contributing” and “non-contributing.” This reclassification aimed to eliminate ambiguity and enhance the efficiency of property evaluations.

Window Repair and Replacement Policy

The meeting next transitioned to a discussion on window repair and replacement policies. A recent COA for a historic house had highlighted the need for clear, enforceable guidelines, explained Mr. Perry. Mr. Spurlock shared insights from Hamilton's preservation commission, advocating a repair-first approach and pre-approved lists of acceptable replacement windows. Mr. Spurlock emphasized that original windows often contribute significantly to a building's historic character and that repair is typically more cost-effective in the long term.

Ms. Dinç explained that organizations like Cincinnati Preservation Association holds workshops to teach property owners how to maintain and repair historic windows. Education is key, stated Ms. Dinç. If people understand how to preserve their windows, they are less likely to replace them unnecessarily, added Ms. Dinç. Ms. Flores supported this approach, highlighting the importance of referencing the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation. These standards provide a defensible framework for decision-making, by adhering to them, we ensure consistency and credibility in our preservation efforts, explained Ms. Flores.

Ms. Flores elaborated on technical solutions, suggesting adding storm windows to enhance energy efficiency while preserving historic window frames. Ms. Flores proposed developing a “preservation toolkit” for local residents, which could include repair guides, tools, and access to professional consultations. Ms. Flores further explained that this initiative could be supported through partnerships with regional preservation organizations and local libraries.

Discussions also explored the challenges of enforcement. Mr. Perry noted that past commissions had sometimes allowed inappropriate replacements, creating a precedent that made stricter enforcement difficult. Ms. Perry stated we need to reset expectations, clear guidelines and consistent application to help us move forward. Mr. Spurlock suggested that windows visible from public rights-of-way should receive the highest scrutiny, while less visible windows could allow for more flexibility. This balanced approach received broad agreement.

The commission agreed to incorporate the proposed strategies into future design guidelines. Ms. Dinç emphasized the need for a public education campaign to raise awareness about the value of preserving historic windows. Mr. Miller proposed developing a digital resource hub to complement in-person workshops. Ms. Flores added that a long-term vision could include creating incentive programs for property owners who commit to repairing rather than replacing historic windows, such as subsidies or tax credits.

Uptown Park Restroom Project

Mr. Perry presented revised designs for the Uptown Park restroom, which had been updated to better align with the park's aesthetic and functional needs. The design featured a stone facade that mimicked the historic limestone foundations of surrounding buildings, ensuring that the structure blended seamlessly with its environment. The roofline was designed to harmonize with the nearby pavilion, creating a cohesive visual experience within the park.

The restroom included two unisex facilities, one of which was equipped with a universal adult changing table to meet the needs of all visitors, including those with disabilities. Mr. Perry emphasized that this addition was part of the city's commitment to inclusivity and accessibility. Mr. Watt remarked on the unobtrusiveness of the design, stating that this is as functional as it is visually appealing.

Ms. Dinç suggested incorporating public art into the project, proposing a mural on one of the restroom walls to enhance its aesthetic appeal and create a sense of place. Mr. Perry confirmed that plans were already underway to include rotating art panels that would feature works by local artists. Mr. Perry noted that these panels could be updated periodically to reflect community events, history, and culture.

The restroom was strategically located near the splash pad, which was also slated for replacement. Mr. Perry explained that the placement was essential to comply with state health requirements, which mandate restrooms within 100 feet of such facilities. The design also included new pathways to improve pedestrian connectivity within the park, making the restroom accessible from multiple directions.

Mr. Watt raised the possibility of incorporating eco-friendly features such as solar panels or water-efficient fixtures. Mr. Perry responded that while solar panels were considered, the cost-benefit analysis showed they would not be feasible for this project. However, water-efficient fixtures and automated lighting systems were included to minimize environmental impact. The commission praised the design as a model for future projects.

VII. Administrative Decisions (Previously Decided)

HAPC-2024-15, 151 W High Street, CERTIFICATE OF APPROPRIATENESS, wall sign, Klusty Sign, Applicant/Agent

HAPC-2024-16, 48 E Park Place, CERTIFICATE OF APPROPRIATENESS, patio fence, Tyler Store, Applicant/Agent

VIII. Adjournment

Mr. Watt made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Mr. Spurlock seconded the motion. All were in favor. The meeting adjourned at 9:52 pm.