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HPC Members

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VICE-CHAIR: Worth VanLinden
Joanna Beckman
Bobbie Epting
Lindsey Roper
Ellen L. Walker
Thomas White

Support Staff

PRESERVATION PLANNER: Amber Eskew
ASSISTANT PLANNING DIRECTOR:
Bruce Lonnee
ATTORNEY: Austin Jackson

All are invited to attend the HPC hearings held on the 3rd Wednesday of each month at 5:30pm,
120 W. Dougherty Street, Athens, GA

www.acgov.com/208/Historic-Preservation



Athens-Clarke County, Georgia Historic Preservation Commission Annual Report 2023

Historic Preservation & Citizen Engagement

By Heather M. Fletcher, HPC Chair

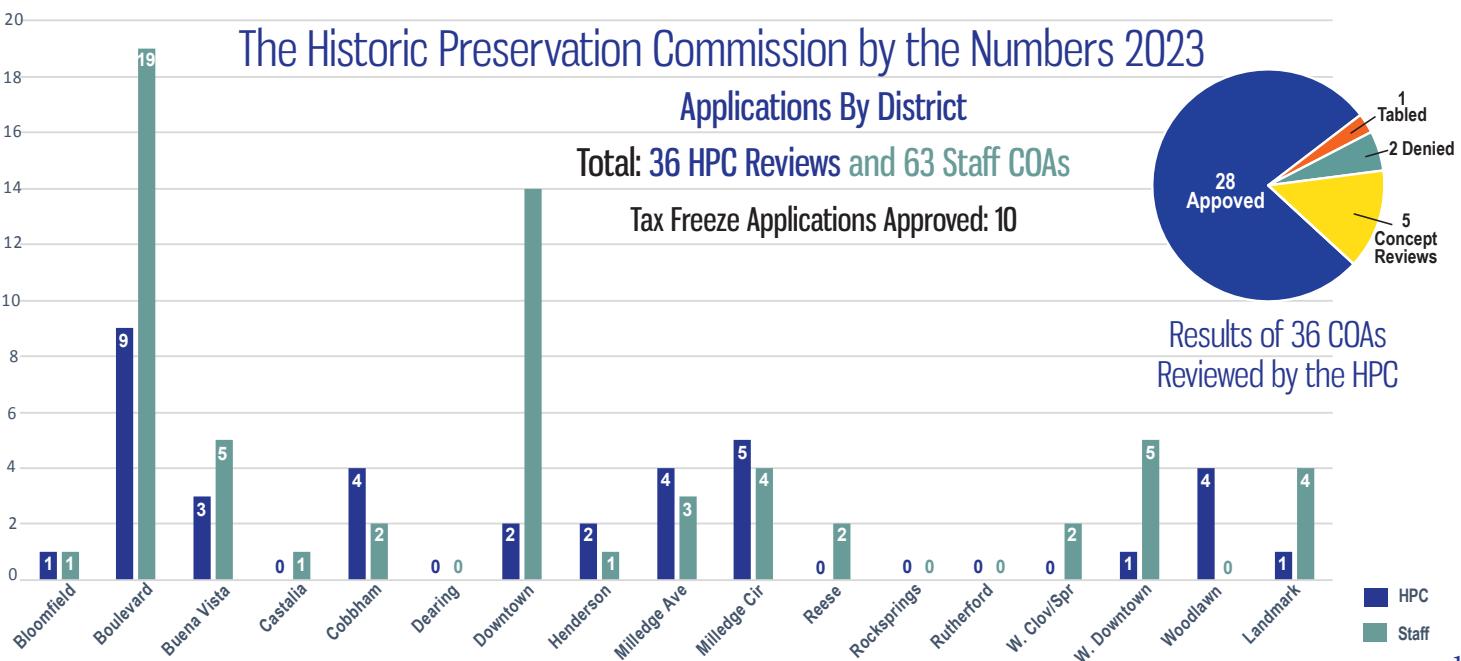
Over the past 5 1/2 years on this commission, I've grown to appreciate even more the benefit and importance of historic preservation without which Athens would be wholly unrecognizable as we know it today. The colleagues with whom I have served have been staunch advocates for preservation, education, and future planning for our historic preservation efforts. Their drive and desire to transform our commission from a passive body—awaiting a monthly meeting to deliberate on applications—to an active body that strives to improve the process and experience for local homeowners and business owners. This was the reason that I re-applied for my second term in 2020. There is nothing more satisfying than volunteering on an effective and engaged board.

Beginning in 2021, we took on the task of reformatting the Milledge Avenue Guidelines and the General Guidelines into a more user-friendly package that makes it

easier for homeowners to better understand the process and the expectations for modifying historic properties. Now, rather than reading through dense paragraphs, they can simply check a list of bullet points to determine if their design decisions will meet the guidelines. We have also made it a habit to actively encourage Concept Reviews by pointing out during meetings where applications were tabled (or denied) that such outcomes may have been avoided had the applicant taken advantage of this complimentary, preliminary review. As such, over the past 3 -4 years we have seen an increase in the number of Concept Review applications.

I would be remiss if I didn't also speak to our most arduous work of creating a 5 Year Strategic Plan. This charge was led by Ellen Walker and without her tenacity and organizational skills, it may never have come to fruition. She kept all of us

Continued on page 3



HPC Strategic Plan Update

By Ellen Walker, HPC Member

The Historic Preservation Commission has been working on many of the goals outlined in our strategic plan. Out of 24 separate goals in 11 categories, the HPC has now completed 4 and made significant progress on 10 others, bringing us very close to accomplishing over half of the tasks we set out to complete in the 5-year plan.

Completed over the past year are the following:

- Develop a strategic plan.
- Distribute Annual Report more widely. The Education Committee created the annual report and all HPC members helped distribute them to various locations around town, including the public library, Historic Athens, The Welcome Center, several architect's offices and at the Planning Department.

- Design and Distribute Welcome Packet. Copies of the packet are available at the Planning Department and as a pdf upon request. Electronic versions will be sent to local realtors and developers.
- Redesign Guidelines to simplify, update, make more user friendly. The entire set of Guidelines are available on line through the Planning Department website. Printed copies can be requested from staff.
- Related to this redesign was the development of a "Landmarks and Historic Districts" publication which will be available at the Planning Department, online and at Historic Athens and the Welcome Center.

To access the HPC Strategic Plan go to:



Noteworthy Numbers

Breaking Down the 2023 COA Reviews

Of the 36 HPC Reviews:

- Only one full demolition and new construction: 285 Milledge Circle (see photo and rendering above)
- 10 additions reviewed: 7 included some degree of partial demolition to allow for the addition; 4 involved activating an upper level and 3 expanded an existing upper level.
- 5 new accessory buildings reviewed: 4 included a guest suite and were two-level, 2 included approval of a breezeway connection

Of the 63 Staff level Reviews:

- 28 included some type of change to roofing, windows, or other building components
- 15 were for business signs
- 13 included hardscape changes such as driveways or patios
- 9 were to modify some aspect of a previous approval
- 8 included new fencing or landscape walls
- 6 involved new storage sheds
- 3 reviews were for small rear additions or decks

Of the 10 Tax Freeze Incentives processed:

- 4 in the Downtown, 2 in West Downtown, 2 in Milledge Cir., 1 in Boulevard, and 1 in Cobham.

Calling All Realtors

The Athens-Clarke County HPC wants to help new homeowners in historic districts with resources to maintain the historic integrity of your property no matter what changes you may decide to make now or in the future. We believe real estate agents are the key to the introduction of new buyers to the benefits and responsibilities of living in a historic district.

We've created a helpful **Welcome Packet** that includes information about and resources related to historic preservation in Athens. You will find an abundance of helpful information about the HPC, its role, how the process works for making any exterior changes to your property, and the design guidelines used in our decision making process by visiting the QR links included in the welcome letter. We suggest reviewing the guidelines for guidance on topics such as changing windows or doors, planning an addition or considering demolishing any structure on the property. If you would like to make changes

that require approval of a Certificate of Appropriateness, you will need to submit an application that will be reviewed by Planning Department staff and may need to come before the HPC for approval. More information about how to navigate the COA process is included in the packet. Printed packets are available upon request from the Planning Department office or available online by visiting:



Meet Your HPC Commissioner - Joanna Beckman



Joanna Beckman joined the HPC in June 2021 and hopes to continue in a second term in 2024.

Tell us a little about your background and interest in the field of Historic Preservation.

I grew up in Atlanta and attended UGA in the mid 1980's. I studied Journalism and worked at a homes magazine right after college (*Southern Homes Magazine* – Norcross, GA). I enjoyed showcasing beautiful older homes including the Candler homes and Rhodes Hall in Atlanta.

I developed an interest in architecture and design after taking a drafting class as a teenager, and used to amuse myself drawing room plans, buildings, and houses for fun. I would have pursued a career in architecture if I had known that was a job a woman could aspire to. (It was a different time, folks.)

I moved to North Carolina for 25 years but decided to retire in Athens and my

husband and I moved here in 2019.

Today I work in marketing and have been in the building materials industry for almost 20 years. I love helping architects and homeowners choose sustainable products for greener building practices.

What made you apply to HPC?

I wanted to get involved in my new community and serve on a commission that excited me. Historic Preservation has been an interest of mine for a long time. As a homeowner, I have lived in several 1920's era apartment buildings, bungalows and cottages and appreciate the design and craftsmanship of the period. I love renovation and understand the challenges (and expense) of updating or repairing a century-old home. Athens is such a unique place with so many examples of historic and landmark properties, that I like the idea of being a steward of the movement to protect those architectural treasures.

My current home in Athens is one of the newest I've ever lived in, built in 1966.

What's been the most interesting part of being on the HPC?

It has been fascinating to see how passionate homeowners and architects are about the properties in Athens. Whether it's a renovation, addition, or completely reimaging a commercial building, I love

update them to either clarify language that has proven confusing to homeowners (e.g. scale and massing), as well as to revise other sections to make it less cumbersome for certain property modifications to be made. At time of writing we had not yet met to discuss which sections will be reviewed, however I will recommend that we tackle front yard fencing and windows; two of the most hotly debated items during my tenure. Although a handful

By Worth VanLinden, HPC Member

the ideas that people bring to the commission to keep a historic property functioning and beautiful for the rest of us to enjoy. Most people come with a real desire to complement the historic character of their property and preserve it for future generations.

What is the biggest challenge you see for historic preservation in Athens?

I believe oversized accessory structures is a trend to keep an eye on. Whether it's for

Oversized accessory structures is a trend to keep an eye on.
The number of accessory structures coming before the HPC and the scale and massing of these structures are increasing.

your home office, art studio, or to host out-of-town visitors, the number of accessory structures coming before the HPC and the scale and massing of these structures are increasing. To be clear, the HPC has no purview over the use of a structure and cannot make any decisions based on those criteria. That is handled by the zoning and planning departments. Yet I fear that in historic districts, there is a danger to not only the look of the district but also the overall character of a neighborhood when more and more properties have highly visible backyard structures or modest garages are turned into small houses. It's a complex subject that sometimes pits property owner rights against the greater good of the neighborhood. The HPC will approve plans that fit the design guidelines, but I hope communities will make good choices that preserve not only the architecture, but the character, of historic districts.

Citizen Engagement ... continued from page 1.

motivated to see it through even when we found the task overwhelming. Anyone who has participated in strategic planning will know and appreciate the hours of time and dedication that we put into such a document and I hope that you all have taken time to review it. If not, then I encourage you to do so.

Our next course of action will be to review specific sections of the guidelines and

of amendments were passed in 2019, the guidelines as a whole have not been updated since their adoption in 2011 and we believe that it is time to do so in the New Year.

In closing, I would just like to say that I appreciate having been given the opportunity to serve and look forward to what the Historic Preservation Commission will accomplish moving forward.





Side-stepping Historic Preservation Protections: Demolition By Neglect

By Joanna Beckman, HPC Member

We've all seen a property that sits vacant and unmaintained and wondered why it has fallen on such hard times. Maybe it's been boarded up or just in a state of disrepair with noticeable deterioration to once-beautiful architectural details.

There are many reasons why this may occur. Often this happens when a property is held up in estate issues. Perhaps the beneficiary of an inherited house hasn't been located, or there is a dispute over the ownership rights, or the new recipient simply doesn't have the funds to take on a major repair of the structure. Sometimes it's a temporary situation while the owners raise funds or find the right contractors to tackle a rehabilitation of the property. On rare occasions, it's willful neglect, intended to skirt preservation ordinances. This is called "Demolition by Neglect."

The Athens-Clarke County Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) follows strict guidelines set out by the ACCGov code of ordinances that regulate when it is appropriate to demolish a structure in one of our 16 historic districts. Our Historic Preservation ordinance and our design guidelines help us make informed decisions about specific properties on a case-by-case basis. Certain considerations are made including the historical significance of the property, whether it is one of the last remaining examples of its kind in

the neighborhood, or whether reasonable measures can be taken to save the building, among other factors.

When a property comes before the HPC requesting a Certificate of Appropriateness (COA) to demolish a structure, the commission could deny that request based on the factors above. If the property owner simply stops maintaining the property for the express purpose of waiting out the deterioration of the property so that it is no longer possible to save the building, then this is Demolition

by Neglect. Because of the high property values in Athens, this rarely happens. Most properties can find a buyer who will take on the rehab if it is economically viable. But if it does happen, there are steps that can be taken.

The ACCGov code of ordinances includes the Nuisance Abatement chapter which governs section 3-13-3: Unsafe dwellings, buildings, structures, or properties. Chapter 7-1, Article 5 of the Housing Code includes the International Property Maintenance Code. These sections outline

the duty of all ACCGov property owners (inside and out of historic districts) to maintain the property, keep it up to code, and prevent activities on the property that would cause it to be unsafe. Any property that is determined to be unsafe or unfit for habitation or commercial use will be in violation of the ordinance. It could be cited for lack of structural integrity, inadequate egress, violation of building codes, unsafe or unsanitary conditions, or for presenting a fire hazard.

With the review of a municipal court judge, the city has a few options if the owner doesn't respond to the citation and bring the property into compliance. The city can repair the property if the cost is reasonable compared to its market value. The city can also demolish the property if the courts determine that repairs are not viable. Any costs associated with repairs or demolition will be incurred as a lien on the property.

Demolition of properties has negative impacts to historic character as well as affordability, sustainability and the environment and the purpose of the ordinances is to prevent this action of last resort. There are frameworks in place to help the community and city officers



take note of distressed properties and try to flag them for attention. A request for investigation into a particular property can be filed by any public authority or by a minimum of five residents. These requests are filed with the office of Building Inspectors or Code Enforcement. An inspection will be made and a citation or summons can be issued.

If a property needs to be "moth-balled" or secured for a fixed period of time, say while an estate is settled or investors



587 W. Hancock Avenue in Athens, demolished in 2021 and replaced with new construction that reflects the rest of the neighborhood.

acquired, a property owner can request a permit to have the property “secured” or boarded up for up to one year, and extended for a maximum of three years. Under Section 3-13-4 of the code, the procedures and requirements to secure a structure are clearly outlined. All requests must be accompanied by documentation of issues, an estimate of repair costs, and a schedule for those repairs. No permit will be granted unless the building is structurally sound to start and certain conditions apply during its secured status, such as remaining vacant, all windows and doors must be covered, utilities turned off, maintaining in a manner that prevents fire hazard, including yard upkeep, free from litter and combustible materials.

There will be periodic inspections by the city to ensure compliance of the conditions set out in the ordinance. Ideally this

is a temporary state that will stabilize the building until a rehab can begin.

If you notice properties that seem to linger in poor condition or in the secured state longer than three years, it may be that it is stuck in a backlog of cases at the ACCGov attorneys’ office. Unfortunately, staffing issues have prevented timely action on many properties around town. There must be political will for our elected officials to set priorities if we want to call attention to the issue of neglected properties.



In our climate, a vacant building with no climate control will deteriorate quickly. Our humidity levels speed up the degradation of wood floors and casework, painted surfaces, and plaster. Mold can grow permeating surfaces

beyond repair. With an unsealed building envelope, rain can penetrate causing wood rot or permanent damage to bricks, stone

or the mortar that holds them together, resulting in permanent foundation or chimney issues. Termites can move in and, left unchecked, can destroy critical support members or devour historical details. Freezing and thawing in the winter can cause a host of issues to pipes, foundations, and roofs. Left unmaintained, even vines and vegetation can penetrate windows, brick, siding, or cracks causing additional damage. It’s easy to see why leaving a property vacant and neglected can cause irreparable harm.

The best remedy is to maintain properties before they are too far gone. There are tax credits for historic district homes that a homeowner can apply for to offset costs. There are grants and organizations like



Hands On Historic Athens that may be able to provide help to owners in need. At the HPC we love to see property owners who are up to the task of finding solutions for saving our historic treasures instead of tearing them down.



The National Alliance of Preservation Commissions

By Ellen Walker, HPC Member

The Athens-Clarke County Preservation Commission is a member of The National Alliance of Preservation Commissions (NAPC).

From their website: "The NAPC was founded in 1983 in response to amendments to the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966. These amendments provided financial assistance to local governments that met requirements of the Certified Local Government program, including the establishment of a local preservation ordinance and commission. NAPC was formed to provide a forum for commissions to discuss mutual problems and to serve as a national voice representing the particular needs of commissions.

NAPC provides technical support and manages an information network to help local commissions accomplish their preservation objectives. Our established education and training programs, including our biennial FORUM conference and Commission Assistance and Mentoring Program (CAMP®), have provided essential training to thousands of commission members and staff. NAPC also serves as an advocate at federal, state and local levels of government to promote policies and programs that support preservation commission efforts, thanks in part to collaboration with our partner organizations in Washington, D.C."

The NAPC offers several webinars, in-person conferences, training, educational publications, and a quarterly newsletter. Many ACCGov HPC members take advantage of our membership by viewing many of the webinars that are offered annually. Several of this past fall's sessions directly related to items in our strategic plan, including one about engaging more with realtors and developers to build stronger knowledge and advocacy for historic properties.

NAPC Mission

Helping to build strong local preservation programs and leaders through education, training, and advocacy.

The webinar was entitled "Begin at the Beginning, Creating a Preservation Realtor/Developer Course. The emphasis was on creating a program for realtors and developers in our community who could benefit from a greater understanding of our local historic preservation ordinance, the neighborhood boundaries for our districts, the guidelines that the HPC uses in making decisions regarding Certificates of Appropriateness and helping them to understand that historic preservation can be, and is, of economic benefit to our community.

Realtors and developers are often the starting place for residents looking to invest in properties in Athens. Realtors are the ones that can convince someone to buy a historic building or in an historic district. They can be on the front lines of helping educate a buyer on advantages and incentives. Developers are the ones who will take on a project that spurs additional investment. Educating realtors and developers about our local ordinance and its implementation, can help them become advocates for preserving part of what makes Athens a desirable place to live and work.

The HPC is considering developing such a course. The course would ideally be held in person and include local preservation advocates, realtors, HPC members, planning department staff, an architect knowledgeable about the guidelines and the process of applying for a COA, and perhaps a mortgage lender or attorney and/or a state Historic Preservation Officer.

The focus of such a program would include:

- History of historic preservation and an overview of the Secretary of Interior Standards.
- Architectural styles. Include a walking or bus tour of historic areas of Athens.

- Overview and access to the local design guidelines. Distribute copies.
- Local historic design review processes. How the COA process works from beginning to end.
- Difference between local and national historic designation.
- Marketing historic properties.
- Economic, zoning and procedural information.
- Debunking myths of what it means to live in an historic district or own an historic property.
- How to work with Planning Department staff to maximize efficiency and forestall stumbling blocks for property owners.
- Distribute the HPC's newly created "Welcome Packet."
- Provide a historic overview of the value to our community of preserving certain aspects of our history.

A detailed study by PlaceEconomics entitled "Measuring Economic Impacts of Historic Preservation," is a great resource for helping local realtors, and other stakeholders, understand the economic value of historic preservation. The study asserts, backed up with statistical analysis, that "historic preservation has become a fundamental tool for strengthening American communities."

From the HPC Strategic Plan:

Goal: Create a Realtor/Developer Education program on guidelines and districts

Objective: Realtors and Developers need to understand the role that HP plays in Athens and how to communicate that to prospective buyers.

Strategy: Recruit local agents to act as a liaison/point of contact for Athens Association of REALTORS & builders. Provide all area realtors with the welcome packet.





Heather Fletcher has served on the ACCGov HPC for 2 terms, and has been the chair of the commission for the past 3 years.

What initially inspired you to apply to be on the HPC?

I had recently transitioned from being a high school Spanish teacher to being a realtor and one of my goals upon leaving the teaching profession was to become more engaged in my community. Because of my new career in real estate, I found planning and zoning to be both interesting and relevant; and so I applied to serve on the planning commission. However, they had received an abundance of applications for planning that year, and not as many for the HPC, so my commissioner, Jared Bailey, called to ask if I would consider switching my application over to the HPC. Since I have always had an affinity for old houses and believe that historic preservation contributes to the tangible history of the community, I agreed.

What would you like our community to understand about what the HPC is and does that it might not know?

The HPC works with homeowners and businesses owners to assist them in understanding and adhering to the design guidelines. The biggest misconception is that we don't allow any changes ever to historic properties, when quite the contrary is true. We especially welcome and encourage applicants to present their project during a non-binding concept review. These reviews provide opportunities for open and candid conversations about a project before it is presented during a regular commission meeting. These reviews

Reflections from Outgoing HPC Commissioner Chair, Heather Fletcher

have helped so many homeowners gain approval during the regular meeting and can save a lot of time, money, and frustration should a project be denied or tabled. Lastly, we do not always agree with staff's recommendation so applicants should always attend meetings as the commission may have a different interpretation of the guidelines with respect to a particular property.

What do you think the HPC has accomplished in the 5+ years you have been a commissioner?

In my opinion, the reformatting of the guidelines into a more user-friendly and more easily understandable design is probably the accomplishment for which I am most proud. When the guidelines are clearly stated and easy to follow it helps property owners understand what modifications are and are not appropriate. As a former high school teacher, I pushed hard to switch from long winded paragraphs to bullet points so that at a glance people can see the expectation for modifying their property. These updated documents are the most immediate results of our long-term strategic plan. My hope is that other historic preservation commissions will be as cohesive as we have been and will continue our efforts.

What impact do you think historic preservation has on our community; (economically, culturally, physically)?

Economically speaking, historic preservation drives tourism, and although people may not recognize that as much in Athens as they do in places like Savannah, Charleston, New Orleans, it is still true that people come here to go on tours of old homes, historic gardens, and to have a small town experience that can also at times feel very cosmopolitan with respect to restaurants and retail opportunities. The reason Athens looks the way that it does is by and large due to historic preservation, without which we may have lost the character of our Downtown and the late 19th

and early 20th century neighborhoods. Culturally, however, I think we need to do more to preserve the African-American history of our community. I think that moving forward, those in historic preservation need to do a better job of regaining the trust of minority communities when it comes to preserving neighborhoods and cultural landmarks. We need to preserve what we can of what's left of those neighborhoods that have been so drastically changed by development and speculation.

What would you tell someone who might be interested in serving on the HPC?

Short of running for office, serving on a volunteer board is one of the most important things you can do for your community. Anyone who has a passion for Athens and wants to ensure that we maintain our small-town charm, will have the opportunity to make an impact by serving on this commission.

Born and raised in South Georgia, Fletcher moved to Athens in 2002 to attend the University of Georgia (A.B.J. '05, B.A. '09, M.A. '11). She fell in love with this town and has made it her home. An avid traveler, Fletcher enjoys immersing herself in other cultures as well as learning languages in an effort to broaden her perspectives. Before entering into the real estate profession, she worked in the food and beverage industry for 14 years followed by four years as a Spanish teacher at Cedar Shoals High School.

Fletcher currently serves as a member of the 2022-2024 Local School Governance Team for Cedar Shoals High School, as Chair of the Athens-Clarke County Historic Preservation Commission, and was the 2023 President of the Women's Council of Realtors Athens Network. She also serves on the Board of Directors for the Athens Area Association of Realtors. She is also a founding member of the UGA Salsa Club which recently formed a nonprofit organization, TIMBAthens, to promote Cuban dance and culture in Athens.

Notable Building Birthdays and Designation Anniversary Milestones in 2023

2023 marks 50 years since Athens was devastated by two tornadoes just two months apart and following nearly the same path. Especially hard hit were Atlanta Highway, Forest Heights, and Boulevard. The March 31, 1973 twister included two fatalities while the May 28, 1973 twister included one. Both were categorized as F3. While smaller tornadoes have been felt by Athens since 1973, these remain the deadliest and had the most impact.

1988 was the year that local historic

designations were first made for the City of Athens following the creation of a preservation ordinance at the end of the previous year. Turning 35 are those designations from that first year including 4 districts and 14 individual landmarks. Bloomfield, Boulevard, Cobbham, and Woodlawn were those first districts designated. Individual landmarks included government-owned properties such as City Hall and the Church-Waddell-Brumby House as well as important examples of Black history in Athens with the Athens High and Industrial School and the Morton Theater.

Greyside turns 100 years old. Located at 638 Milledge Circle, Greyside was constructed in 1923 for Dr. Corbin



Decker by renowned architect Frederick J. Orr. John and Charlotte Waters purchased and restored the property in 1973 as only the second owners of the property. Professor Waters played an important role in historic preservation in Georgia and in Athens in the nearly 50 years he owned the property prior to his death in 2022.



Also turning 100 in 2023 are Chase Street (recently renamed Johnnie Lay Burkes Elementary) and Barrow Elementary Schools. Their opening to students in the fall of 1923 helped resolve overcrowding in smaller schools. These elementary schools were state of the art at the time. City Engineer J.W. Barnett



studied the leading thoughts on school design and toured the highly touted new schools in Columbus, Georgia before awarding the architectural group Lockwood and Poundstone of Atlanta the contract for a design based on his specifications. Of significance is the continued use of these schools for the children of Athens and how that fit into Barnett's plans. He had complained of too many school and university buildings erected without consideration of the future and how they soon became inadequate.

Update on the Bell and Costa Buildings

The Bell Building

Originally approved by the HPC for renovation in July 2022, local design firm Arcollab has redesigned the interior as a boutique hotel, still with an owner apartment on



the third floor and terrace roof deck. The building is currently under construction as of October 2023 and is set to complete in Fall 2024, just in time for football season!

The Costa Building



This ACCGov owned property, once the home of the police department, has begun its extensive renovations. To date, the interior demolition, asbestos abatement, and

structural stabilization efforts have been completed. Contractors are now focused on bringing all of the building systems up to code. Overall the project is approximately 15% complete.

The next key milestone is construction of the building addition on the north elevation, anticipated to be completed by the end of March 2024.



The project is scheduled to be completed by Fall 2024 and will be used for ACCGov offices.