

**SOMERSET COUNTY CULTURAL & HERITAGE COMMISSION**  
**Thursday, June 1, 2023. Meeting Minutes – Virtual Zoom Meeting**

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**I. Call to Order**

The meeting was called to order at 7:35 p.m. by Commission President Rory Britt in compliance with the Open Public Meeting Notice Act, Chapter 231, PL 1975.

**II. Pledge of Allegiance**

**III. Roll Call**

**Commissioners:** Rory Britt, Donnetta Bishop-Johnson, Natalie Pineiro, Kathy Faulks, Robert Grundfest, Jonathan Hress, Maritza Martinez, Marge Sullivan.

**Technical Difficulties:** Edwin Scannell

**Staff:** Thomas D'Amico, Kaitlin Bundy, Robert Meyer, Katie Himics, Josephine Taranto, Tom Boccino

**Advisory Members:** Sean Blinn, Brian Faulks, Rose Kopf, Rikki Massand, Kathleen Palmer, Roz Sherman, Leslie Workman **Absent:** Aldo Adriazola, Hector Herrera, Gale Skirkanish

**Members of the Public:** Don Esposito, Jessie Havens, Margareta Warlick

**IV. Approval of May 4, 2023, Minutes**

**Motion** to accept the minutes with a minor spelling correction made by Natalie Pineiro and seconded by Jonathan Hress. Passed.

**V. Correspondence**

1. Tom D'Amico noted that he had received the latest copy of the Heritage Review.

2. Kaitlin Bundy read a note sent by Hope Dowling thanking the Commission for supporting the Raritan Valley Choral Society, a 2023 LAP grant recipient, noting that she very much enjoys their concerts.

**VI. Staff Reports/Old Business**

**The following reports were made by Tom D'Amico:**

**Historic Preservation Grant Program.** The Historic Preservation Grant Program is part of the Somerset County Open Space, Farmland and Historic Preservation Trust Fund.

**2022 Grant.** The County has received the executed agreements and purchase orders and has made payments for five out of the six 2022 Historic Preservation Grant Program Projects. In addition, we reviewed signage proposed by the Washington Camp Ground Association which is part of their 2022 grant allocation.

**2023 Grant.** The 2023 Historic Preservation Grant Program Applications and Guidelines have been distributed and are due Tuesday, June 6th. County staff will be sending the Historic Preservation Grant Program Advisory Committee electronic copies of the applications for their review followed by our summary documents. The meeting of the Advisory Committee has been scheduled. After the Advisory Committee has reviewed the applications, their recommendations and the applications will be transmitted to the Cultural & Heritage Commission for their review and comment. All recommendations from the Advisory Committee and Cultural & Heritage Commission will be transmitted to the County Commissioners for the final decision concerning the 2023 allocations.

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**County Historic Preservation Projects:**

**Van Horne House**

As mentioned at the last few meetings the County has completed Phase II of the exterior restoration of the Van Horne House which involved work on the east wing of the house. Phase III will begin in the spring which involves restoration of the west wing, window repair and restoration of the back porch including a new handicap accessible ramp. The historic preservation consultants Historic Building Architects are currently finalizing plans and specifications for the project.

**Stained Glass Windows**

As noted at last month's meeting the County has hired a new general contractor and has begun discussions with the Lamb Studios on Phase IV of the stained glass window project in the Jury Assembly Room which is within the First Dutch Reformed Church in Somerville.

**Baker-Duderstadt Farmstead**

Consultants, Connolly and Hickey Historic Architects, have completed and transmitted to the County the Historic Structures Report for the Baker-Duderstadt Farm. The Report includes a history of the site, statement of significance, conditions assessment and recommendations for restoration as well as cost estimates. As mentioned previously, this is one of the most significant structures in the County and one of the most important barn structures in the United States.

**Van Doren House**

We expect the Historic Structures Report for the farmstead by consultants Connolly and Hickey Historic Architects to be transmitted to the County shortly.

**County Court House Façade Restoration**

The investigative phase of the County Court House facade restoration project has begun. The consultant Mills and Schnoering have electronically scanned the building in order to develop the base plans for the project. The next step will be a detailed analysis of the masonry.

**County Owned Historic Sites Assessment**

The consultants Mills and Schnoering have received all of the questionnaires dealing with how 10 other Counties have adaptively reused and administered their historic resources. This is a key element of the report since it will provide successful examples of how other Counties preserve their historic sites. The County has also received draft recommendations for potential public use of each of the historic sites that were analyzed.

**Warren Township Historic Preservation Master Plan Element**

Tom D'Amico mentioned that County staff is reviewing the Warren Township Historic Preservation Master Plan element that was transmitted to us by Michael Francois, member of the Warren Township Historic Sites Committee. Tom also mentioned that we gave the Township copies of the pictures from the 1989 Somerset County Cultural Resource Survey.

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**The following reports were made by Kaitlin Bundy:**

**Local Arts Program Grant.** The Local Arts Program (LAP) Grant are funds the Commission receives annually from the New Jersey State Council on the Arts to primarily re-grant out to local non-profits and municipalities.

**2023 Grant.** Staff are scheduling virtual interim discussions with all 15 organizations to take place throughout June and July.

**2024 Grant.** Staff are starting to review and update applications for the 2024 Grant round.

**Juneteenth.** Staff are working with the Downtown Somerville Alliance, Somerset County Chief Communications Officer, Brad Fay and Assistant to the Administrator, Shelly Bell on the Somerset County Juneteenth event, which will take place on June 19, 2023 from 6:00pm to 8:00pm. The event will include a ring shout circle, intergenerational panel discussion, live painting by artist Raven George and special performances by Zawadi Dance and Drum and Soul Steps.

**RevolutionNJ.** Staff informed the Commission that RevolutionNJ (a partnership between the New Jersey Historical Commission and the nonprofit Crossroads of the American Revolution Association to plan the commemoration of the 250th anniversary of the American Revolution in New Jersey) has released its Brand Partnership Program and Guidelines for the RevolutionNJ initiative. These guidelines can be found at: <https://www.revunj.org/revnjpartners>

**4-H Fair.** The Somerset County 4-H Fair will take place August 9th, 10th and 11th from 10:00am to 10:00pm. Staff expects to have a table in the County government tent and to provide various arts and history demonstrations throughout the fair. Commission and Advisory members will be invited and encouraged to volunteer at the Cultural & Heritage table during the fair. This allows for engagement with the public focused on the Commission itself. Local nonprofit arts and history organizations are allowed to send brochures and fliers to display at the table. More information about the fair will be provided in late June or July

**The following reports were made by Robert Meyer:**

**CHPP Grant.** The County History Partnership Program (CHPP) Grant, are funds the Commission receives annually from the New Jersey State Historical Commission to primarily re-grant out funds to local non-profits and municipalities.

**2023 Grant.** Interim reports were sent out on May 23 and are due on June 19.

**2024 Grant.** Staff are starting to review and update applications for the 2024 grant round.

**Cooperative Marketing Grant.** The Cooperative Marketing Grant are funds the Commission receives from the NJ Division of Travel and Tourism to market and promote the Commission's Heritage Tourism event, Journey Through the Past.

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**2023 Grant.** Print ads in Bucks County Magazine, and Edible Jersey, as well as digital ads with Hudson Valley Magazine will begin this month. Advertising in the Hook Magazine will begin next month.

**2024 Grant.** Staff is working on finalizing the application for the 2024 Cooperative Marketing Grant which is due on June 14.

**Gallery.** The Photography from Raritan Valley Community College exhibit officially opened in the Cultural & Heritage Gallery on May 4, 2023. This exhibit features 28 pieces of photography, including digital photos and cyanotypes. Additionally, works by James Adkins, also from RVCC, are featured in the third floor display cases. The next gallery will be the 2023 Teen Arts Gallery and will open on June 16, 2023. The Farm to Frame gallery was installed at the Senior Wellness Center at Basking Ridge and the Senior Wellness Center at Hillsborough on May 9 and officially opened on May 10. The exhibit will be there through June 29. Following that, the exhibit will travel to Bernardsville Public Library and Montgomery Public Library. Farm to Frame will open at those venues on July 6 and run through August 30.

**The following reports were made by Katie Himics:**

**Teen Arts Festival.** The Somerset County Cultural & Heritage Commission's Teen Arts Festival took place on Thursday, May 18th, 2023, at Raritan Valley Community College. This was the Commission's annual arts education opportunity for middle school and high school students throughout the County to come together and celebrate their accomplishments in the visual and performing arts. 11 schools from throughout the County participated, with about 700 festival attendees. Students were given the opportunity to have their artwork and performances critiqued by professionals in the field, as well as attend a variety of engaging workshops and masterclasses. There were almost 50 student performances throughout the Festival day and 24 engaging workshops to choose from. Staff has received excellent feedback from the schools letting us know that their students enjoyed themselves immensely and are looking forward to joining us again next year. Additionally, many of our County's schools had students selected to advance to the State Teen Arts Festival, which is being held on May 30th, May 31st, and June 5th at Middlesex College.

**National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) American Rescue Plan (ARP) Sub-granting for Local Arts Agencies Grant.** The Commission received \$150,000.00 in funding from the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA). These funds are intended to help support jobs in the arts sector, keep the doors open to arts organizations, and assist the field in its response to and recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.

**2023 Grant.** Interim reports for the six funded organizations have been sent out and are due back by July 26th. Staff is also working to prepare the semi-annual status report to the NEA that is due in June.

**History on the Green.** The second annual History on the Green will take place on Saturday, July 22, 2023 at the Courthouse Green in Somerville from 10:00 a.m. to 4:00pm. This living history event will

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focus on the Washington Rochambeau Pop-up Encampment. Staff are working to secure various vendors to include a variety of activities throughout the day including:

- o Revolutionary War Soldiers
- o Children’s Activities with Liberty Hall Museum
- o Hand-cut Colonial Style Silhouettes
- o Canon and Musket demos
- o Meet and Greet with George Washington and Rochambeau
- o Special appearance by the Massachusetts Middlesex County Volunteer Fife and Drum band who will march from the Wallace House to the Court House Green for a special end of day performance.

This year staff have also invited our local history organizations to sign up to table at the event and connect with the public. The due date for those registrations was today, June 1st. However, if your organization still wishes to register to table at History on the Green, please be sure to reach out to us by the end of the week.

**Other:**

Kaitlin announced that the County has hired Josephine Taranto full time as a preservation planner. While Josephine will not be directly under Cultural & Heritage now, she is still within the Office of Planning, Policy and Economic Development, where Cultural & Heritage is located. She will now be working with Tom Boccino in the preservation section of the office, focusing on Historic Preservation in preparation for Tom D’Amico’s retirement. Staff have started the process to readvertise the vacant part-time position.

**VII. New Business/Action Items**

**2024 LAP and CHPP Grants.** Staff are preparing the applications for the 2024 Local Arts Program and County History Partnership Program Grant programs. Kaitlin asked the Commission to make a motion on match requirements for the 2024 grants, as currently state guidelines allow the Commission to make the determination to have one or not. **Motion** to discuss the match requirement made by Robert Grundfest and seconded by Marge Sullivan. The Commission discussed the benefits of not having a match requirement. **Motion** to continue to remove the match requirement for both the CHPP and LAP Grants made by Kathy Faulks and seconded by Marge Sullivan. Passed.

**250<sup>th</sup> Round Table.** Katie Himics summarized the 250th Round Table Discussion and described the five themes identified: Empower Organizations; Create a Calendar of Events; Engage Youth and Family Audiences; Utilize Marketing Resources; and Look Beyond the Revolution. A survey will be sent to the Cultural & Heritage Commission and Advisory Board members asking them to rate the 5 themes in order of priority to be addressed, with the understanding that some items may be addressed in part or not addressed at all.

**Reminder.** The Cultural & Heritage Commission does not formally meet in July and August. However, special closed sessions of the Commission may be called to help staff proceed with grant obligations.

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**VIII. Staff Comments**

**Thomas J. Boccino, PP, LLA - Supervising Planner – Preservation**

Tom Boccino announced that the Somerset County Master Plan has received the NJ Smart Growth Award, one of seven recipients. The ceremony will be in the Fall. This is in addition to the National Association of Counties Award. Both awards recognize that the plan supports tourism and economic development within Somerset County. Many Somerset County projects are a result of recommendations made in the 4 part Master Plan.

**Thomas R. D'Amico, AICP/PP - Supervising Planner & Historic Sites Coordinator**

Tom D'Amico stated that this will be his last Cultural & Heritage meeting and expressed thanks to the Commission and Don Esposito, with whom he's worked for the last 35 years.

**IX. Cultural & Heritage Commissioner Comments**

1. Natalie Pineiro announced that the Downtown Somerville Alliance will host a Juneteenth Event on June 19 and a Pride Month event on June 29.
2. Maritza Martinez announced the Hispanic Heritage Parade and Concert in North Plainfield September 16, 2023. She will send a flyer to Robert Meyer for distribution.
3. Donetta Bishop-Johnson announced that The Stoutsburg Sourland African American Museum will host their Juneteenth Celebration, on Saturday, June 17, 2023, 12:00 p.m. to 4:00 pm.  
<https://www.ssaamuseum.org/upcoming-events>
4. Kathy Faulks wished Tom D'Amico well, welcomed Josephine Taranto onboard and complimented Katie Himics for a well-run Teen Arts program. She also invited people to attend the Boy Scout Flag Retirement at the Abraham Staats House on June 14, 2023, at 6:30pm. She noted that the event is free. <https://www.staatshouse.org>

**X. Advisory Committee Comments**

1. Rikki Massand invited the Commission to attend Preservation NJ's Second Story Somerville Tour on June 11, 2023, and thanked Marge Sullivan and Paul Soltis for their help. Rikki noted that the tour is free as well as the reception at the historic Wallace House which will follow the tour. He also announced that a new brochure on historic preservation and sites in Montgomery will be coming soon.
2. Sean Blinn announced that the Jacobus Vanderveer House will be hosting it's annual Field of Honor ceremony on Saturday, June 2, and a free concert on Sunday, June 3, at 12:30pm. He also announced a grant opportunity "Public Impact for Smaller Organizations" due June 28.  
<https://www.neh.gov/program/public-impact-projects-smaller-organizations>
3. Rose Kopf noted that the Green Brook Historic Society will have the Vermeule House open on the 3rd Saturday of each month, from 10:00am to 4:00pm.
4. Roz Sherman asked about the status of the Fleischmann Carriage House in Somerset that used to be a horse barn. Tom Boccino replied that the HSR is completed, and the building has a budget for improvements. The options for potential adaptive reuse are being investigated.

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**XI. Public Comments**

1. Don Esposito congratulated the Office of Planning Policy and Economic Development on the award for the Master Plan. He welcomed Josephine Taranto to the Office of Planning, Policy and Economic Development and stated that we were going to miss Tom D'Amico.
2. Jessie Havens said she was sorry to see Tom D'Amico go. Regarding the 250th Round Table Discussions, Jessie noted that she would have liked more discussion about the story of the 250<sup>th</sup> itself as well as more about youth involvement.

**Announcements/Other News:**

**The next SCC&HC meeting will be in the 3rd Floor Commissioners' Meeting Room on Thursday, September 7, 2023.**

**XII. Adjournment**

**Motion** to adjourn made by Marge Sullivan and seconded by Robert Grundfest. Passed.  
Adjournment 9:03 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,  
Kathy Faulks, Secretary

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