

SOMERSET COUNTY CULTURAL & HERITAGE COMMISSION

Thursday, November 2, 2023.

Meeting Minutes – Hybrid Live/Virtual Zoom Meeting

I. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 7:30 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, Kathy Faulks, Natalie Pineiro, Robert Grundfest, Jonathan Hress, Maritza Martinez, Marge Sullivan

Absent: Edwin Scannell

Staff: Walter Lane, Kaitlin Bundy, Robert Meyer, Katie Himics, Tom Boccino, Josephine Taranto

Advisory Members: Aldo Adiazola, Sean Blinn, Brian Faulks, Hector Herrera, Rose Kopf, Rikki Massand, Kathleen Palmer, Gale Skirkanish, Leslie Workman, Margareta Warlick

Members of the Public: Don Esposito, Jessie Havens

Commissioner Liaison: Melonie Marano

IV. Approval of October 5, 2023, Minutes

Motion to accept the minutes amended to correct the announcement of Kennedy-Martin-Stelle Farmstead job posting to marketing director made by Natalie Pineiro and seconded by Jonathan Hress. Passed.

V. Correspondence

Kaitlin noted that staff received a letter of resignation from Roz Sherman from the Somerset County Cultural & Heritage Commission Advisory Board.

VI. Staff Reports/Old Business

The following reports were made by Kaitlin Bundy:

Local Arts Program Grant. The Local Arts Program Grant (LAP) 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. Final reports have been sent out to all 2023 re-grantees and are due back on January 12, 2024. Staff are encouraging any special project re-grantees to complete the final report once their project is complete so that staff can release final funding to those organizations. General operating support re-grantees must report on the entire calendar year before funds can be released.

2024 Grant. Staff received 21 applications for the 2024 LAP grant round, with requests totaling \$547,482.92. In October, the independent peer panel met after reviewing all applications independently. Funding recommendations will be brought before the Cultural & Heritage Commission during a special meeting in November.

Middlebrook Symposium. The Commission funded the Middlebrook Symposium which took place on October 28, 2023, at Raritan Valley Community College. With over 100 individuals registered, the

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Symposium kicked off with a special announcement by Somerset County Commissioner Melonie Marano which introduced a five point plan the county will be undertaking to prepare for the 250th in 2026:

Washington Valley Park

Herb Patullo's property, known as the "Eagle's Nest," has been acquired by Somerset County Open Space and will be incorporated into Washington Valley Park to highlight the property's history as one of George Washington's most notable lookouts from the Watchung Mountains. The County is in the process of creating a new access road to the Patullo property – which is the first step towards creating an interpretive space, which will include a new building with flexible exhibit and meeting space. This work will be done with the appropriate approvals by the State Historic Preservation Office and will require archaeological investigations.

Lord Stirling Manor

Lord Stirling Park in Basking Ridge was the property of William Alexander, best known as Lord Stirling, and his expansive manor. Richard Hunter of Hunter Research and Richard Veit of Monmouth University will be investigating the property this fall with the use of GPR (ground penetrating radar) to help identify potential archaeological sites. This is the result of our Historic Sites Assessment project, as our consultant, Richard Hunter, felt that the site had more archaeological potential than previously thought.

Old Stone Arch Bridge

Somerset County is currently under contract to purchase the Old Stone Arch Bridge with the help of Middlesex County. The bridge is a circa 1730, three span, rough cut stone arch structure that was an integral location in the Revolutionary War's Battle of Bound Brook. The Counties plan to create a "pocket park" where residents from both Counties can boast of its historical significance, being one of the oldest bridges in the nation. The creation of the pocket park will involve removing the warehouse that currently sits on the property, and excavating the Old Stone Arch Bridge so that it can be restored and interpreted.

Interpretive Planning

The County will be engaging a consultant team to assist in the interpretation of Washington Valley Park, Lord Stirling Manor, the Old Stone Arch Bridge, and the Borough of Millstone, helping to tell more diverse and untold stories in these four areas with valuable Revolutionary War histories. Interpretive planning will include helping to design inclusive storytelling with engaging elements such as video.

Docent Training

Through the project grant received from the New Jersey Historical Commission, staff will be engaging a consultant to help the County design and develop a docent training program. Additionally, C&H staff will be working with the County's Office of Volunteer Services to help engage new volunteers to strengthen volunteer capacity at our local sites.

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Long Range Plan. At the October Cultural & Heritage Commission meeting the Commission approved the draft Long Range Plan. Staff are now working with Walter Lane, Director of the Office of Planning, Policy and Economic Development, to move the plan forward with the County Planning Board for adoption into the County Master Plan. The consultant has made all requested changes to the plan, and in November the plan will be sent out to all Somerset County municipal clerks and planning board secretaries and be made available on the County website. Currently staff are still in discussion about if a special meeting of the Somerset County Planning Board will be held to discuss the plan or if public comment will be scheduled for a regular meeting of the planning board.

The following reports were made by Robert Meyer:

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

2023 Grant. The 2023 final report was emailed to re-grantees in early October and is due on January 12, 2024. Staff are encouraging any special project re-grantees to complete the final report once their project has concluded so that staff can release final funding to those organizations. General operating support re-grantees must report on the entire calendar year before funds can be released. Staff have also started working on the final report to the New Jersey State Historical Commission which is due in January.

2024 Grant. Staff received 7 applications for the 2024 CHPP grant round, with requests totaling \$864,453.33. All applications were sent to the independent peer panel for review. In October, staff met with the independent peer panel to review all application scores and funding recommendations. The Commission will enter into closed session later tonight to discuss the recommendations.

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.

2023 Grant. All ads finished running in early October and staff is currently working on the final report to the Division of Travel and Tourism.

2024 Grant. Staff were informed on September 20th that our 2024 grant was approved in the amount of \$12,450. This is an increase of \$2,400 from last year. Staff submitted the contract for the 2024 Cooperative Marketing grant on Friday, October 20th. Staff will be reaching out to vendors soon to secure ad space for 2024.

Gallery. The Pieced Together Quilters exhibit opened on October 13th and features 28 quilts. Our next gallery will be the Scrubs Paper Project from Frontline Arts which will open on December 1st. The Scrubs Paper Project features artwork made on paper which is handmade from deconstructing donated scrubs and other medical garments. The project began in response to working with

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healthcare workers and their families during the COVID-19 pandemic and serves as an opportunity for healthcare workers to tell their stories.

Journey Through the Past. The 18th annual Journey Through the Past took place on Saturday, October 7th, from 10am to 5pm, and Sunday, October 8th from noon to 4pm. Feedback forms, as well as banners, lawn signs and A frame signs, from all participating sites are due Friday, November 3rd. At this time, staff has received 20 feedback forms, with an overall estimated attendance of 1,515. While staff are still collecting feedback, many sites have noted on their feedback forms that they saw a lower turnout, likely because of the weather across both days. So far, this year's event had visitors from 11 other counties (Atlantic, Burlington, Essex, Hunterdon, Mercer, Middlesex, Monmouth, Morris, Passaic, Union, and Warren), 7 other states (Delaware, Florida, Kentucky, Maryland, Massachusetts, New York, and Pennsylvania) and 1 other country (South Korea). More information will be provided in December.

The following reports were made by Katie Himics:

National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) American Rescue Plan (ARP) Sub-granting for Local Arts Agencies Grant. Funds from the National Endowment for the Arts 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. Staff are currently reviewing all requirements from the NEA to begin the close out process for these grants at the end of the year, this will include final reporting from the six regrant organizations and final reporting to the NEA.

New Jersey Historical Commission Project Grant. The Cultural & Heritage Commission has been awarded \$18,500 through the New Jersey Historical Commission Project Grant to fund the design and development of a Docent Training Program. This is the first year that Cultural & Heritage has been awarded the New Jersey Historical Commission Project Grant. Staff completed the contract stage of accepting the Project Grant funds, and a formal Request for Proposals (RFP) for consulting services was released on Monday, October 2nd. The RFP will be open for 30 days. The Commission will review proposals in November 2023, with the intention to award in December 2023, and a contract term from January 1, 2024, to June 30, 2024.

Diversity Festival. The Somerset County Diversity Festival was held on Sunday, October 15, 2023, in Somerville. Cultural & Heritage staff were part of the committee that planned and executed the festival. A variety of fun activities and live musical performances took place throughout this family-friendly, free festival day. The Diversity Festival was a success, with a great audience turnout. If you would like to see pictures of this year's Diversity Festival, please visit the Somerset County website.

Excellence in the Arts. The Excellence in the Arts awards are dedicated to honoring those individuals and organizations demonstrating exemplary leadership and dedication to fostering the fine and performing arts in Somerset County. After thorough review of this year's nominations by the Arts Awards Committee, the Cultural & Heritage Commission notified the following 7 selected awardees: In the category of Arts in Education, Meghan Russo and Qing Yang; In the category of Arts in the Community, Lois Buesser, Shankhadip Chakraborty, American Theater Group, Downtown Somerville

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Alliance, and The Sieminski Theater. These individuals and organizations were honored at an awards ceremony held on Thursday, October 26th, at the Sieminski Theater in Basking Ridge. The awards ceremony also featured a beautiful dance performance by the local Qing Yang Youth Dance Troupe. Staff would like to extend our sincere thanks and appreciation to all Cultural & Heritage Commission and Advisory Board members who joined us at the awards ceremony to celebrate these awardees' contributions to the arts in Somerset County.

The following reports were made by Josephine Taranto:

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

2023 Grant. The 2023 Somerset County Historic Preservation Grant Program awarded four historic sites a total of \$931,821.00 from the Open Space, Farmland, and Historic Preservation Trust Fund on October 24th. The sites awarded were the Friends of the Kennedy-Martin-Stelle Farmstead for the Kennedy-Martin-Stelle Farmstead, the Somerset County Historical Society for the Howe property, the Borough of South Bound Brook for the Abraham Staats House, and the Stoutsburg Sourland African American Museum for the Reasoner – True House.

County Historic Preservation Projects:

Van Horne House.

This spring, the Van Horne House will be undergoing its third and final phase of restoration, which will include window restoration, exterior siding, and the roof on the west side's addition. The existing ramp will be replaced with a newer, smaller ramp.

County Court House, Façade Restoration Project.

There is no update to report on this project, as the County is waiting for cost estimates and a project timeline.

First Dutch Reformed Church, Stained Glass Window Project.

Phase IV work is being postponed until the spring. The glass is in stable condition and in no immediate danger.

County Owned Historic Sites Assessment.

Staff are continuing to review the assessment and will be meeting with consultants in the coming weeks. Staff are waiting for final elements to be completed and transmitted to us.

VII. New Business/Action Items

Holiday Gathering. Commission and Advisory members discussed having a holiday gathering prior to the regularly scheduled December meeting. The consensus was in favor of the holiday gathering.

VIII. Somerset County Commissioner Comments

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Commissioner Liaison Melonie Marano

1. Commissioner Marano praised the Cultural & Heritage staff for their work performed leading up to and participating in the October events: 1770's Festival, Journey Through the Past, the Diversity Festival, the Excellence in the Arts Awards, and the Middlebrook Symposium.
2. Commissioner Marano also recognized Cultural & Heritage for their combined readiness to help execute the new Five-Point Plan to increase public awareness of Somerset County's part in the American Revolution.

IX. Cultural & Heritage Commissioner Comments

1. Natalie Pineiro announced Somerville's Native American Heritage Day event will be held on November 4, 2023, on Division Street in Somerville, from 12:00pm to 4:00pm; the Annual Small Business Saturday will be held on November 25th; and the Holiday Jubilee at 5:30pm on December 1st on Division Street and Main Street in Somerville. Natalie also extended kudos to Cultural & Heritage staff and volunteers for a great Excellence in the Arts Awards program.
2. Kathy Faulks praised the Cultural & Heritage staff and volunteers for making the October programs a success and expressed appreciation to the Board of Commissioners and the Cultural & Heritage Commission for awarding the Somerset County Historic Preservation Grant to the Borough of South Bound Brook for the Abraham Staats House East Sidewalk ADA project.

X. Advisory Committee Comments

1. Aldo Adriazola noted that Branchburg's Oktoberfest will be occurring on Sunday, November 5, 2023 from 1:00pm to 8:00pm at White Oak Park, 235 Baird Road in Branchburg.
2. Sean Blinn congratulated staff and volunteers for doing a great job in October. He announced "Small but Mighty: The Powerful Resilience of Small Museums," a virtual summit being held by the American Association for State and Local History (AASLH) from December 5th through 6th, 2023. <https://aaslh.org/annualconference/2023-small-museums-summit/>
3. Brian Faulks requested the drone footage from the 2023 Battle of Bound Brook. Kaitlin and Rikki noted that it would be provided.
4. Rikki Massand noted that he enjoyed this year's Diversity Festival. He also expressed his thanks to Montgomery Township Committee member Patricia Todd for her attendance at two events held by the Sankofa Collaborative.
5. Kathleen Palmer announced Back in Time at Upton Pine, the kickoff event for Bernardsville's 100th Anniversary Celebration. The event will be held on November 4th, from 6:00pm to 10:00pm at the Upton Pyne Carriage House and will have food, live music, and a silent auction. <https://bernardsvillecentennial.org/>
6. Leslie Workman announced that the Farmstead Arts Center is one of the beneficiaries of the Raritan Valley Arts Association, which has closed after 100 years of operation; the Farmstead Arts Center plans to hold programming over the coming years in honor of their gift. At the end of November, they will be holding their annual Holiday Boutique. On Sunday, December 3, 2023, the Farmstead Arts Center will host a member/patron/volunteer thank you/open house from 2:00pm to 4:00pm. No tickets necessary. www.farmsteadartscenter.org.
7. Margareta Warlick expressed that she is happy to be so involved as an Advisory member.

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XI. Public Comments

1. Don Esposito announced that the Raritan Public Library will be having a Booksale on Friday, November 3rd from 9:00am to 5:00pm and Saturday, November 4th from 9:00am to 2:00pm. <https://raritanlibrary.org>
2. Jessie Havens was happy that the Board of County Commissioners announced the Five-Point Plan at the Middlebrook Symposium. She encourages the County to hold celebratory events in honor of the 250th.

Announcements/Other News:

The next SCC&HC meeting will be in-person on Thursday, December 7, 2023.

XII. Closed Session

Motion to enter into closed session discussion of the 2024 County History Partnership Program (CHPP) Grants made by Marge Sullivan and seconded by Natalie Pineiro. Passed.

1. 2024 County History Partnership Program (CHPP) Grant Recommendations.

XIII. Reopen Meeting

Motion to close the closed session meeting and reopen the meeting to the public made by Natalie Pineiro and seconded by Jonathan Hress. Passed.

XIV. Adjournment

Motion to adjourn made by Natalie Pineiro and seconded by Jonathan Hress. Passed.
Adjournment 9:00 pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Kathy Faulks, Secretary

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