

SOMERSET COUNTY CULTURAL & HERITAGE COMMISSION

Thursday, February 1st, 2024

Meeting Minutes – Hybrid Live/Virtual Zoom Meeting

I. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 7:03 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, Marge Sullivan

Absent: Edwin Scannell, Maritza Martinez

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

Advisory Members: Aldo Adriazola, Sean Blinn, Brian Faulks, Rose Kopf, Rikki Massand, Margareta Warlick, Leslie Workman

Members of the Public: Don Esposito, Jessie Havens

Commissioner Liaison: Melonie Marano

IV. Approval of January 11th, 2024, Minutes

Motion to accept the minutes made by Marge Sullivan and seconded by Robert Grundfest. Passed.

V. Correspondence

1. Kaitlin Bundy reported that staff received notice from the Borough of South Bound Brook that they may decline their 2024 LAP grant award due to budgetary issues. Staff is in contact with the Borough and expects to be notified of their decision after their Borough Council meeting on February 13th, 2024.
2. Kaitlin also reported that Katie Himics is attending classes for a certification in Creative Placemaking for the next few months and as such will be excused from upcoming meetings.

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. Staff are reviewing the 2023 LAP re-grantee final reports that were submitted on January 12, 2024. Final payments are released to the organization once all necessary elements are met. Additionally, staff is working to finalize the Commission's final report that is due to the State Arts Council on February 6th, 2024.

2024 Grant. 2024 Local Arts Program grant funds have been awarded to 16 organizations. Contracts have been sent out to all 2024 re-grantees and are due back March 15th, 2024. Staff will be working on scheduling ceremonial check presentations for the grants in late February or March.

2024 SCC&HC Meeting Dates:

February 1, March 7, April 4, June 6, October 3, November 7 – Hybrid
May 2, September 5, December 5, and January 9, 2025 – In Person

SOMERSET COUNTY CULTURAL & HERITAGE COMMISSION

Thursday, February 1st, 2024

Meeting Minutes – Hybrid Live/Virtual Zoom Meeting

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. Final reports were sent to the six regrant organizations in late November and were due January 10th, 2024. Staff are in the process of reviewing these final reports. Once all final payments have been made, staff will begin the close-out process for these grants and submit our 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. Staff will be meeting with the consulting team to begin project activities in early February. To help guide project direction, staff are also forming a Docent Training Program Advisory Committee which will include representatives from the Five Generals Houses and County staff. Letters were sent out to each of the participating sites requesting each site identify a primary and secondary representative to be part of the committee. Staff expects to host a kickoff meeting with this Advisory Committee in mid to late February.

Long Range Plan. A public hearing of the Cultural & Heritage Commission’s Long Range Plan for consideration of adoption into the County Master Plan will be held during the Somerset County Planning Boards February 20th, 2024 meeting. Notice has been sent out to all Somerset County municipal clerks and planning board secretaries. The public hearing is also being advertised and staff will send out additional notice about the hearing to all local arts, history, and cultural organizations.

Black History Month. An opportunity came about that has allowed the Commission to help fund a screening and panel discussion of “The Price of Silence,” a documentary about the forgotten story of New Jersey’s enslaved people that will take place on February 27th, 2024, from 5:30 to 7:30pm at the PeopleCare Center Auditorium. A discussion will follow the screening with filmmaker Ridgeley Hutchinson of Truehart Productions and featured speakers Beverly Mills, Elaine Buck, and Kristal Langford.

Technical Assistance Workshops. Throughout 2024, a selection of professionally-led technical assistance workshops will be offered to benefit our local non-profit organizations. The first technical assistance workshop, titled “The ADA and Removing Access Barriers” will be held in-person on Tuesday, March 19th, from 10:00am to 12:00pm at the Somerset County Administration Building. This workshop will be led by Jennifer Perry, Access Specialist with the Northeast ADA Center at Cornell University. Ms. Perry will provide organizations with an overview of the Americans with Disabilities Act and discuss achievable ways for an organization to remove access barriers and develop accessible programs and policies. Marketing materials will be sent out in the coming weeks to promote this workshop, but registration is open on the County website. This year we will also host workshops on Strategic Planning in June and Diversity, Equity, Accessibility and Inclusion (DEAI) in September.

2024 SCC&HC Meeting Dates:

February 1, March 7, April 4, June 6, October 3, November 7 – Hybrid
May 2, September 5, December 5, and January 9, 2025 – In Person

SOMERSET COUNTY CULTURAL & HERITAGE COMMISSION

Thursday, February 1st, 2024

Meeting Minutes – Hybrid Live/Virtual Zoom Meeting

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. Staff has received all 2023 final reports and are reviewing them. Final payments will be released once all necessary elements are met. Staff also submitted the final report to the New Jersey State Historical Commission on January 30th.

2024 Grant. 2024 CHPP grant funds have been awarded to 7 organizations. Contracts have been sent out to all 2024 re-grantees and are due back March 15th, 2024. Staff will be working on scheduling ceremonial check presentations for the grants in late February or March.

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. Staff is working on the final report due to the Division of Travel and Tourism in early February.

2024 Grant. Our 2024 grant was approved in the amount of \$12,450. The contract was finalized and submitted in late 2023. Staff has reached out to all the proposed vendors and will be confirming the ads once purchase orders have been generated.

Gallery. On January 19th two exhibits opened: the first is the Witness Stone Project from the Stoutsburg Sourland African American Museum, which features 9 pieces of artwork, as well as information boards, honoring Frost Blackwell and Friday Truehart, two enslaved individuals who lived in the Sourland region. The second exhibit features 4 pieces by local artist Veronica Spruill. Our next exhibit will be the Art Access Program at Matheny exhibit which will open on March 8th.

Historic Preservation and History Awards. Nominations are open for the 2024 Historic Preservation and History Awards and are due by March 15th, 2024. Awardees will be notified in April and a ceremony will be held in May. This year, nominations can be submitted online or through the traditional paper method. If you know any individuals or organizations that you think would be worthy of an award, please pass the information along to them. If you are unsure if they have already received an award, a list of all previous winners can be found on our website.

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 contracts have been reviewed by County Counsel and the final draft is being reviewed by Staff.

2024 SCC&HC Meeting Dates:

February 1, March 7, April 4, June 6, October 3, November 7 – Hybrid
May 2, September 5, December 5, and January 9, 2025 – In Person

SOMERSET COUNTY CULTURAL & HERITAGE COMMISSION

Thursday, February 1st, 2024

Meeting Minutes – Hybrid Live/Virtual Zoom Meeting

County Historic Preservation Projects:

Van Horne House. The Van Horne House will be undergoing its third and final phase of restoration. The bid for this project is out, with the intention to begin construction this spring. This includes window restoration, exterior siding, and the roof on the west side's addition, existing ramp replacement.

County Court House, Façade Restoration Project. Mills & Schnoering Architects and their contractor recently came to the Courthouse to test clean the marble stone façade, as was presented in the December meeting. This project is being postponed until next year. The structure is stable and in no immediate danger.

First Dutch Reformed Church, Stained Glass Window Project. As previously reported, Phase IV work is being postponed until the spring. The "building maintenance" bid is out, with the intention to begin the stained-glass repairs in the early months of 2024.

County Owned Historic Sites Assessment. Staff are expecting a final draft of the assessment by next month.

Lord Stirling Park. Staff are waiting for the report on this project.

The Old Stone Arch Bridge. There are no updates to report on the Old Stone Arch Bridge acquisition project.

Other:

Commission President Rory Britt announced that Staff has been working with the Warren Township School District on their History Day Project. Through this project, 6th to 8th grade members of their History Club will learn to be docents and lead the 4th graders on tours of historic sites in the township. Those sites include the Kirch-Ford-Terril House, Mount Bethel Baptist Meeting House, and the grounds of Coddington House. There will also be a discussion about the comings and goings of the Continental Army during colonial times and a tour of Washington Rock in Green Brook, where General Washington monitored British troop movements in the valley below. Rory noted that some students from past tours have come back to be docents at special events for these historic sites, including Journey Through the Past. The intention is to turn this exercise into lesson plans for other schools.

VII. New Business/Action Items

2024 Committees. Rory Britt announced the standing Committees for 2024 and described their duties and responsibilities.

VIII. Somerset County Commissioner Comments

Commissioner Liaison Melonie Marano

1. Commissioner Marano stressed the importance of the service of the volunteers of the subcommittees. She recognized the great job that Robert Meyer is doing sending notice of the

2024 SCC&HC Meeting Dates:

February 1, March 7, April 4, June 6, October 3, November 7 – Hybrid
May 2, September 5, December 5, and January 9, 2025 – In Person

SOMERSET COUNTY CULTURAL & HERITAGE COMMISSION

Thursday, February 1st, 2024

Meeting Minutes – Hybrid Live/Virtual Zoom Meeting

many events with weekly emails and inquired how we could further publicize those events, possibly on the county website. She encouraged the Marketing Committee to meet the challenge.

IX. Cultural & Heritage Commissioner Comments

1. Kathy Faulks announced upcoming events at the Abraham Staats House: The first, Celebrating Black History Month: Annual “Tory Jack Day” Event, will be held on Saturday, February 10th, 2024. Seating begins 10:30am, with a presentation at 11:00am: Speaker Joe Becton returns! The topic of the presentation is: “African Americans During the American Revolution.” \$10 per ticket, 18 and under are free. This event can be attended either in-person or remotely via Zoom. Register in advance at: www.staatshouse.org.
On Sunday, February 18th, 2024, the Staats House will be participating in the “Middlebrook Five Generals Bus Tour.” Details about the tour can be found at: <https://heritagetrail.org/>.
On Thursday, February 29th, 2024, from 3:00pm to 4:30pm the Staats House will be holding a special event: “We Were Here ~ The Enslaved People of Colonial America” A Witness Stone Project. The South Bound Brook Public School and the Friends of the Abraham Staats House partnered on this project to commemorate Henry “Harry” Staats of the Staats Farmstead. More details at: www.staatshouse.org.
2. Jonathan Hress noted that he attended the opening reception for Raritan Valley Community College’s Faculty Art Show where they had standing room only for the Question & Answer Session. He also attended the opening reception for the Center for Contemporary Art’s “2024 International Juried Exhibition,” on Friday, January 26th, 2024. He stated that both were wonderful events.
3. Marge Sullivan announced the Black History Trail is seeking online sites submissions. Marge also announced upcoming events hosted by the Heritage Trail Association: Sunday, February 18, 2024, will be the “Middlebrook Five Generals Bus Tour.” Tickets are \$40 per person. For group rates and children aged 0 to 4 years old, please call Cindy at (310) 691-9388 to register your family. 3-hour tours start at 10:00am, 11:00am, 1:00pm, and 2:00pm. More details at: <https://heritagetrail.org>.
The Middlebrook Symposium: “Why Washington Choose Middlebrook: Geography and Logistics”, will be held on Saturday, March 16th, 2024, from 9:00am to 3:30pm at Raritan Valley Community College. <http://www.htanj.org>.
The book of the collective papers from the 2023 Middlebrook Symposium is now published and available for \$20 on Amazon.com. The book is titled “The Revolutionary War Comes to Middlebrook, New Jersey: Washington’s Encampments: 1777 Encampment and November 1778-June 1779 Cantonment (Middlebrook Symposia Proceedings).”
4. Bob Grundfest stated that he is very happy with Warren Township’s plan to create a museum, cultural center and community meeting space in the former Municipal Building, also known as the Hofheimer House.
5. Donnetta Bishop-Johnson congratulated the Abraham Staats House on their Witness Stone Project. Donnetta also encouraged people to go to the Stoutsburg Sourland African American Museum to see upcoming Black History Month events: “Meet Phillis Wheatley” will be held on Saturday, February 10th, 2024, from 1:00pm to 3:00pm and “Frederick Douglass Day” will be held on Wednesday, February 14th, 2024, from 11:00am to 3:00pm. More information can be found at: <https://www.ssaamuseum.org>.

2024 SCC&HC Meeting Dates:

February 1, March 7, April 4, June 6, October 3, November 7 – Hybrid
May 2, September 5, December 5, and January 9, 2025 – In Person

SOMERSET COUNTY CULTURAL & HERITAGE COMMISSION

Thursday, February 1st, 2024

Meeting Minutes – Hybrid Live/Virtual Zoom Meeting

6. Natalie Pineiro announced the Downtown Somerville Alliance has multiple events commemorating Black History Month. Natalie also noted that the Borough of Somerville's East Main Street Redevelopment Program is looking to turn that area into an arts center or performance venue and is looking for a consultant/volunteer to perform a feasibility study.

X. Advisory Committee Comments

1. Sean Blinn thanked Jonathan Hress for attending the opening reception of the Center for Contemporary Art's "2024 International Juried Exhibition" and noted the exhibit will be on display until March 17th, 2024. <https://ccabedminster.org>. Sean stated that the American Association for State and Local History (AASLH) will be holding a Virtual Summit titled "Doing History in Polarized Times" on February 8th and 9th. <https://learn.aaslh.org/products/doing-history-in-polarized-times-virtual-summit>. Sean also announced The Northern Slave Collective will hold their annual conference on Monday, February 5th, 2024. He noted that the in-person portion is sold out but there is still room for virtual registration. <https://dyckmanfarmhouse.org/initiatives/northern-slavery-collective/>
2. Rikki Massand announced that this is Elizabeth Palius' last week on the Montgomery Landmarks Commission. She is recognized for founding the Raritan Millstone Heritage Alliance and being a great proponent of storm water management.
3. Leslie Workman announced that registration is now open for the Farmstead Arts Center Winter Arts Classes. Through February 26th, 2024, the Farmstead Arts Center, in partnership with the New Jersey Highlands Coalition, is hosting "Entr'Exhibit: Visions for the Next Decade & Beyond." The gallery is open on Sundays from 1:00pm to 4:00pm. www.farmsteadartscenter.org.
4. Brian Faulks reminded everyone that Joe Becton will be returning with new material at the upcoming Tory Jack Day event at the Abraham Staats House on February 10, 2024.
5. Margareta Warlick announced four programs to be held at the Kirch-Ford-Terril House in Warren. The first is a workshop which will be followed by a Colonial Tea Party, a demonstration of open-hearth cooking and bake oven cooking and a Family workshop making flags out of recycled materials. Details to follow.

XI. Public Comments

1. Jessie Havens questioned if it was true that the Cultural & Heritage Commission required non-profits to hold virtual meetings. Kaitlin Bundy responded that it is not a requirement made by the Commission but up to each individual organization to determine in-person or virtual attendance.

Announcements/Other News:

The next SCC&HC meeting will be hybrid, in person and virtual, on Thursday, March 7th, 2024.

XII. Adjournment

Motion to adjourn made by Robert Grundfest and seconded by Natalie Pineiro. Passed.
Adjournment 8:25 pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Kathy Faulks, Secretary

2024 SCC&HC Meeting Dates:

February 1, March 7, April 4, June 6, October 3, November 7 – Hybrid
May 2, September 5, December 5, and January 9, 2025 – In Person