

SOMERSET COUNTY CULTURAL & HERITAGE COMMISSION
Thursday, September 5, 2024
Meeting Minutes – In Person Meeting
3rd Floor, County Administration Building, 20 Grove St., Somerville, NJ 08876

I. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 7:10 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, Robert Grundfest, Jonathan Hress, Marge Sullivan

Excused: Maritza Martinez

Absent: Natalie Pineiro, Edwin Scannell

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

Advisory Members: Sean Blinn, Rose Kopf, Rikki Massand, Margareta Warlick, Leslie Workman

Members of the Public: Angelina Busch, Don Esposito, Michael Fitzpatrick, Johnathan Mao, Olinda Young

Presenter: Marissa Jackson, Ahali Consulting LLC

IV. Approval of June 6, 2024, Minutes

Motion to accept the minutes made by Marge Sullivan and seconded by Donnetta Bishop-Johnson. Passed.

V. Correspondence

1. A letter was received notifying staff that the Somerset County Cultural & Heritage Commission Long Range Plan had won a 2024 Planning Award from the New Jersey Planning Officials. A Reception Breakfast will be held on September 27th to honor awardees.

2. Staff received Raritan Valley Community College's 2024-2025 Gallery and Theater Schedule.

VI. Presentation

Somerset County Docent Training Program. Marissa Jackson of Ahali Consulting LLC presented an overview of the Somerset County Docent Training Program's design and development and discussed the Program's next steps.

VII. Staff Reports/Old Business

Manager's Report – Summer Update. Staff had a busy summer since the Commission's last meeting on June 6th. Staff delivered and hung selected artwork to the State Teen Arts Festival and helped during one of the state festival days in Middlesex County. Artwork from the Somerset County Teen Arts Festival displayed in the County Administration Building throughout June and July. Staff tabled at the Revolutionary Revelry Night at TD Ball Park run by the Heritage Trail Association. Staff hosted an in-person Strategic Planning Technical Assistance Workshop in partnership with the Hunterdon County Cultural & Heritage Commission with over thirty attendees participating. Staff was successfully able to pivot the entire Juneteenth event indoors with only 24 hours' notice. LAP and CHPP interim reports were submitted to the respective State Offices. A very successful All Ages Art Adventure arts-

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outreach event was held at the Bridgewater Library as part of the Library System's summer reading program which saw over fifty participants. Staff hosted a wonderful History on the Green event in Somerville, complete with George Washington on horseback. The Commission hired a new Special Projects Assistant part-timer, Tuqa Ridha. August presented some wild weather for the 4-H Fair, which did see two of the three days cancelled but staff did manage to table for one day at the fair. Kaitlin thanked those Commissioners and Advisory members that were able to attend many of these events throughout the summer and especially those who were able to volunteer their time during these events as well.

Grants

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.

2024 Grant. Staff conducted fifteen interim Zoom conversations throughout the summer checking in on all re-grant organizations and are now preparing the final reports for the 2024 grant cycle, which should be sent out in late September.

2025 Grant. Staff received notice in late July of the Commission's 2025 LAP funding from the New Jersey State Council on the Arts in the amount of \$217,000. The Request for Applications (RFA) for the 2025 LAP grant was released on July 26th and applications are due in the Cultural & Heritage Office on September 13, 2024, by 4:00pm. No applications will be accepted after that deadline. Two separate technical assistance workshops were held in August to help potential applicants understand the grant and the application process.

County History Partnership Program 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.

2024 Grant. Staff received interim reports from all seven re-grantees. The 2024 final report will be released soon. Special Project re-grantees are encouraged to complete the report once their project has concluded so that the remainder of their funds can be released.

2025 Grant. Staff received notice in late July of the Commission's 2025 CHPP funding from the New Jersey State Historical Commission in the amount of \$87,750, with \$24,000 for operating and \$63,750 for re-grants. The Request for Applications (RFA) for the 2025 CHPP grant was released on July 26th and applications are due to the Cultural & Heritage office by 4:00pm on September 13, 2024. No applications will be accepted after that deadline. Two technical assistance workshops were held in August to help potential applicants understand the grant and the application process.

Historic Preservation Grant Program. The 2024 Somerset County Historic Preservation Grant applications were reviewed by an independent panel on July 15, 2024. The Commission will enter into

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closed session tonight to discuss the applications and make recommendations to the Somerset County Board of County Commissioners.

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

2024 Grant. Print ads have run in Bucks County Magazine, Edible Jersey, and the Hook Magazine. Digital ads with Edible Jersey and Hudson Valley Magazine are currently running.

2025 Grant. Staff submitted the application for the 2025 Cooperative Marketing Grant which was due on June 12th. Staff expects to be notified of funding in late September or early October.

Docent Training Program. The Cultural & Heritage Commission and Ahali Consulting have developed a structure for collaborative docent training to benefit local historic sites and have designed a series of comprehensive volunteer training Toolkits which will be valuable resources for sites to train quality volunteer history docents. This Phase I of developing the Somerset County Docent Training Program was made possible by a New Jersey Historical Commission Project Grant, which was awarded to the Cultural & Heritage Commission in the amount of \$18,500. Staff submitted the final reporting to the State in late August. The Cultural & Heritage Commission is now beginning Phase 2 of this project, which is to launch the first round of the Docent Training Program. A formal Request for Proposals (RFP) was released on August 21st seeking consulting services to assist the Cultural & Heritage Commission in Program Launch. RFP responses are due by September 17th at 4:00pm.

County Historic Preservation Projects:

Van Horne House. This project went out to bid in July. Due to delays, the project will be re-bid in the coming months.

First Dutch Reformed Church, Stained Glass Window Project. Staff received approval for this project from the New Jersey Historic Preservation Office in July. Staff are working to move the project forward.

County Owned Historic Sites Assessment. Staff have received the final draft of the assessment and will be sharing it with County Administration.

Lord Stirling Park. The Geophysical Survey of the Lord Stirling site was received in July. This report included the analysis of data collected using ground penetrating radar and magnetometry. The report is being reviewed by staff.

The Old Stone Arch Bridge. The County closed on the Handle with Care Property, which surrounds the Old Stone Arch Bridge, on July 22nd.

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Howe Property. The Howe Farmhouse is being restored by the Somerset County Historical Society with funds from the County’s Historic Preservation Grant Program. Restoration and stabilization of the house began this summer. So far, the roof, gutters, chimneys, foundations, basement doors, and some interior elements have been restored and repaired.

Diversity Festival. The Somerset County Diversity Festival will be held on September 29, 2024, in Somerville. Cultural & Heritage staff are part of the committee that plans and executes the festival. Several fun activities are being planned for the festival day, including bounce houses, face painters, live music and arts and craft activities.

2024 Technical Assistance Workshops. Throughout 2024, a selection of professionally-led technical assistance workshops have been offered to benefit our local non-profit organizations. The next technical assistance workshop, titled “Understanding Unconscious Bias & Embracing IDEA-B for Non-Profit Organizations” will be held virtually via Zoom on Tuesday, September 17th, 2024, from 10:00am-12:00pm. This free workshop focuses on IDEA-B, or Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, Accessibility, and Belonging in non-profit organizations. Participants will learn how to recognize unconscious or implicit bias that may be impacting their organizational growth and outreach, and they will explore ways how their organizations can embrace diversity and inclusion. This workshop will be hosted by NOWWellspring Consulting’s Founder & Executive Consultant, Varissa McMickens Blair, a seasoned nonprofit leader with a focus on DEI initiatives. Registration for this workshop is on our website. Please register by September 9th to secure your spot.

Journey Through the Past. This year’s Journey Through the Past will be taking place on October 12th and 13th with 31 participating sites. Banners are currently available for pickup, and we encourage participants to pick up their banners early to help promote the event. Staff is currently working on finalizing the guidebook and activity guide.

Semiquincentennial – Interpretive Plan. The County has contracted with Mills + Schnoering Architects to begin the interpretive plan for four County owned historic sites. Site visits with the entire consultant team (which includes subconsultants Hunter Research and Main Street Design) occurred in late July. The entire team additionally met on September 5th to provide an update on Phase I of this project, which will see the creation of a Concept Document presenting a variety of ideas for interpretation of each of the sites.

VIII. New Business/Action Items

Middlebrook Signage Discussion

Cultural & Heritage Commissioner Marge Sullivan has asked that the Commission discuss possible Middlebrook Commemorative Markers. **Motion** for staff to explore markers and signage for the Middlebrook Encampment & Cantonment possibly tying into the Semiquincentennial Interpretive Plan and recognizing there may be a need to apply for a separate grant made by Donnetta Bishop-Johnson and seconded by Robert Grundfest. Passed.

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IX. Cultural & Heritage Commissioner Comments

1. Jonathan Hress stated that he attended a screening of the movie, "The Asbestos City," a documentary about the town of Manville, at Reading Theater. The Van Veghten House is featured in this film.
2. Kathy Faulks announced that the annual "1770's Festival" will be held on Sunday, October 6, 2024, 11:30am to 4:00pm at the Lord Stirling Manor and hosted by the Somerset County Parks Commission. The Cultural & Heritage Commission will have a table, and all are encouraged to attend. <https://www.somersetcountyparks.org/maple-sugaring/pages/lord-stirling-1770s-festival>
The Abraham Staats House will be hosting "The Ghost is Clear" (GIC) Paranormal Investigators on Saturday, September 14, 2024, from 6:30pm to 10:30pm. The registration cost is \$50 in advance or \$60 at door. www.staatshouse.org.
The Abraham Staats House will also participate in Somerset County's Journey Through the Past on October 12th and 13th, 2024. <https://www.co.somerset.nj.us/government/public-works/cultural-heritage/weekend-journey>

X. Advisory Committee Comments

1. Leslie Workman announced Fall events at the Kennedy-Martin-Stelle Farmstead: A History Talk with Joel Farkas, titled "*Painting the American Revolution*", will be held on September 8th at 1:00pm; A guitar concert by Columbian musician Daniel Reyes Llinas, performing etudes on Spanish guitar and improvisations on 12-string guitar, will be held on September 22nd at 2:00pm; the Farmstead Members' Art Show: "Color of Joy" will be running from September 29th to October 27th, with an Opening Reception on September 29th from 1:00pm to 3:30pm; for Somerset County's Weekend Journey Through the Past, on Saturday October 12th, 10:00am to 5:00pm and October 13th, 12:00pm to 4:00pm, guests are welcome to tour the Kennedy-Martin-Stelle Farmstead and learn more about its history; The Lord Stirling Theater Company will be presenting Agatha Christie's "Black Coffee" on October 18th, 19th, 25th, and 26th at 7:30pm; October 20th and 27th at 2:00pm. <https://farmsteadarts.org>
2. Rose Kopf announced that the Dr. John Vermule House in Green Brook will be open the 3rd Sunday of each month. On October 20, 2024, there will be a program on traditional spinning and dyeing at the site.
3. Margareta Warlick announced that the historic Kirch-Ford-Terrill House was open June 9, 2024, with a program on the Importance of Colonial Tea.

XI. Public Comments

1. Olinda Young of the Somerset County Historic Society reported that they have not yet received word from the state on how they may spend the Federal grant money. They now have an archivist, Moira Armstrong, who will be creating a policy statement for the Somerset County Historical Society. Due to the unavailability of the Van Veghten House, the 3rd Annual Reenactment of the Arrest of Derrick van Veghten will be held in December at the Old Dutch Parsonage. Somerset County Historical Society Member Mike Beck will be presenting, "How Central Jersey Won the Revolutionary War" at Warren Township Library on Tuesday, October 8, 2024, at 6:30pm. The Somerset County Historical Society has acquired a 19th century carriage thanks to the efforts of

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Jane Gandolfe of the Martinsville Community Center. The carriage will eventually be housed at the Howe Farm after the carriage house is restored.

Announcements/Other News:

The next SCC&HC meeting will be hybrid, on Thursday, October 3, 2024.

XII. Closed Session Meeting

Motion to close the meeting to the public to discuss the 2024 Historic Preservation Grant Applications made by Marge Sullivan and seconded by Robert Grundfest. Passed.

XIII. Reopen Meeting

Motion to come out of closed session meeting and reopen the meeting to the public made by Marge Sullivan and seconded by Robert Grundfest. Passed.

Motion to accept the recommendations made during the closed session meeting made by Robert Grundfest and seconded by Marge Sullivan. Passed.

XIV. Adjournment

Motion to adjourn made by Marge Sullivan and seconded by Robert Grundfest. Passed.
Adjournment 9:32 pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Kathy Faulks, Secretary

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