

# Athens-Clarke County HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION Annual Report 2017

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## CHAIRMAN'S MESSAGE

It is undeniable that our historically-built environment and diverse architectural resources are the major touchstones for how people feel about life in our community. February marks the 30th Anniversary of the "first round" of historic designations and we have now expanded to include 13 districts and 41 landmark properties. We have indeed come a long way from the sad days when buildings like the Michael Brothers mansions on Prince Avenue were leveled and lost forever.

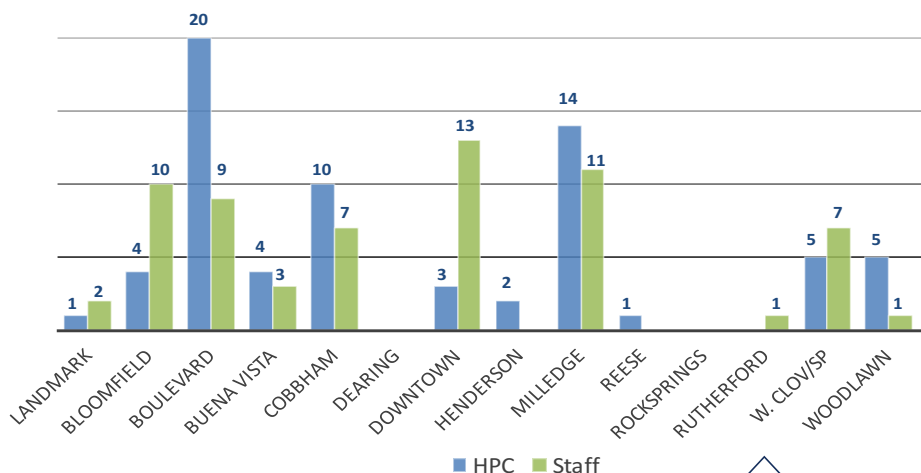
Steps have been taken to make the process much smoother and easier than is often assumed. A large percentage of approvals can be obtained on a "staff level" at the Planning Department desk, and the Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) is working to give staff authority to approve even more applications. Of the 133 applications processed in 2017, 64 were handled by staff and more than 88% of those heard by the HPC gained approval or conditional approval the first time heard.

A fun project reviewed by the HPC came to fruition in 2017 with the restoration of 895 N. Chase Street, as Kelly Noonan uncovered the wonderful old store and painted siding that has been hidden for so long. This project also highlighted how, while following our guidelines, the HPC was able to equip and empower Ms. Noonan to achieve remarkable results. You must see for yourself!

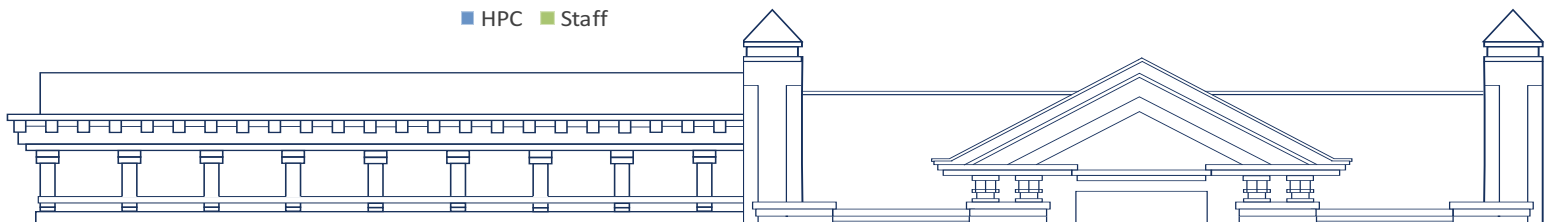
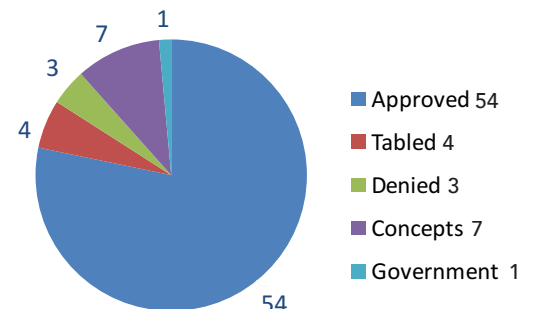
Please join us at an HPC meeting soon to see more projects being undertaken to preserve the character of Athens while adapting to the needs of today. Public input is always valued and welcome. - *Drew Dekle*

## HPC BY THE NUMBERS

Applications By District  
Totaling 69 HPC Reviews and 64 Staff COAs



Results of COAs Reviewed by HPC



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## HPC CELEBRATES 30 YEARS!

In 1986, The Athens-Clarke County Historic Preservation Ordinance established the framework by which the HPC works to designate and protect local historic districts and landmarks. 2018 marks the 30th anniversary of Athens' locally designated Historic Districts. Woodlawn, designated February 2, 1988, was the first local historic district in the County. The first eleven local historic landmarks were designated that same day, including the Taylor-Grady House, a National Historic Landmark. Additional district designations in 1988 included Bloomfield, Boulevard, and Cobbham.

ACC now has a total of 13 local historic districts and 41 individual historic landmarks designated, with more under consideration. The HPC continues to work with the ACC government on the identification, designation and protection of additional historic places in our beautiful community.



*The Taylor-Grady House, Athens Light & Industrial School, and Hoyt Station (clockwise from top) were among the first local landmark designations made on February 2, 1988.*



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## WHAT IS STAFF-LEVEL REVIEW?

Certificates of Appropriateness (COAs) are issued when a project for a historic designated property has been reviewed and found to be within the Design Guidelines and not expected to significantly impact the character of the historic district or landmark involved. This is true whether staff or the HPC does that review. The type of project undertaken determines what level of review the application will need. The types of projects that are possible for staff level review often have less potential to directly impact a historic structure such as a business sign, rear yard fencing, and driveways, or involve removal of a non-historic feature to return the property to a known previous condition. It is this potential for impact that determined the level of review when establishing the Design Guidelines and the Bylaws for the HPC.

Most years, roughly half of the COAs issued are at staff level. The primary differences are the time frame between submittal and a decision and the application fee. While both applications involve staff reviewing the request and how it fits within the Design Guidelines, items going before the HPC are thoroughly described in a staff report, have a legal ad in the newspaper, and a sign is placed in the front yard, among other things. These actions require a longer time frame and higher fee to cover expenses. However, the opportunity to have a decision made by the HPC when the potential impacts are greater is very important to properly preserve the historic character of Athens-Clarke County. State laws both set the requirements for much of the work needed for a COA and the maximum 45-day review period. This guarantees a thorough review in a timely manner.

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## BEFORE & AFTER: PRESERVATION SUCCESS

### 897 N. CHASE STREET

The building at 897 N. Chase Street has been on the map in Athens for more than 100 years, literally. The 1913 Sanborn map to be exact. Details about its past are few, though known former uses include a barbershop and grocery store.

Several years ago, the site caught the eye of Kelly Noonan. She wanted to turn it into a business and residence. In preliminary conversations with contractors, she received advice to tear it down and rebuild. But she "likes old buildings" and submitted a concept proposal to the HPC in September 2015 to remove the vinyl siding and breathe new life into the building. The HPC worked with Ms. Noonan to determine the most appropriate course of action regarding renovations, roof dormers, skylights and windows.

Exposed exterior signs, historic window patterns and minimally-visible foundation work allowed the project to bring out great details. In the end, all the effort and persistence by Ms. Noonan and her contractor, Brent English, yielded a neighborhood gem and saved a great slice of Athens history.

Everyone who drives down Chase Street and Nantahala Avenue can appreciate the work and the benefits to the community character by being in a historic district.



2015



Today

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## BEFORE & AFTER: HISTORY LOST

### 596 & 598 PRINCE AVENUE



*The Michael Brothers' Homes*  
Photo Credit: Gary Doster

The Michael brothers, Simon and Moses, had twin Neoclassical houses on Prince Avenue, east of the intersection with Grady Avenue. The houses were built in 1902 and sat between the Taylor-Grady House and what is now the UGA President's House. The brothers together founded the Michael Brothers department store downtown. The impressive homes were demolished in the 1960s to make way for new construction.



Today

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## IS FRONT YARD FENCING HISTORICALLY APPROPRIATE?

Requests for front yard fencing approval through a COA are submitted regularly to the HPC. While many projects within the front yard, such as driveway materials and rear fencing, are often handled at staff level, the highly visible impact that front yard fencing can have on a property and neighborhood often mean that review by the HPC at a public hearing is necessary.

While our culture sometimes cultivates a nostalgic connection with picket fences in the front yard, this is not always reflective of an area's real history. In some areas, the openness of the yards and their connection with the street and each other are character-defining features that would be greatly disrupted by fencing a front yard. Conversely, some areas have fenced front yards as a regular element in the landscape and these fences were installed in a manner to not detract from the historic character of the immediate community. For these reasons, the HPC is called upon to review requests for front yard fencing by looking at the neighborhood setting and the frequency of front yard fencing, as well as the particulars of the fencing requested, to determine if it will have a significant impact on the character.

The impulse to install a front yard fence to contain pets and young children or simply to decorate the property is understood by the HPC. However, the charge of the HPC is to make decisions that protect historic character, and the appropriateness of front yard fencing is not predicated on the age of one's children or pets, or even aesthetics. Planning staff are available daily to provide guidance on these and other design matters.

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## WHO IS THE HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMISSION?

With the passage of the National Historic Preservation Act in 1966, each state was charged with creating a state historic preservation office (SHPO) that oversees preservation programming and reviews nominations to submit for the National Historic Register. The Georgia SHPO resides within the Department of Natural Resources, with the main office located in Atlanta. Community historic preservation decisions and the designation of historic districts is delegated to the local government level. Our local HPC began in 1986 after the passage of the preservation ordinance by the City of Athens, and continued after the city-county unification in 1991.

The Athens HPC is a seven-member board appointed by the Mayor to make preservation-related recommendations for established historic districts and landmarks, and identify new sites for designation. As we enter our 30th year of serving the Athens community, we encourage anyone owning or interested in a historic site to reach out for assistance in determining how to best preserve its character for future generations to enjoy!

### HPC MEMBERS

**Chair:** Drew Dekle

**Vice-Chair:** Mary Cook

Barry Allen

Jeff Bishop

Megan Morgan

Janet Parker

Jared Peden

### SUPPORT STAFF

**Preservation Planner:** Amber Eskew

**Senior Planner:** Bruce Lonnee

**Attorney:** Michael Petty

**Preservation Intern:** Lauren Patterson

**All are invited to attend the HPC review meetings held on the third Wednesday of each month at 5:30pm, 120 W. Dougherty Street.**

