

Preservation North Carolina

The Historic Preservation Foundation of North Carolina, Inc.

Saving historic places important to the diverse people of North Carolina.



February 2, 2022

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Andrew Stewart, Raleigh
Chairman
Valerie Ann Johnson, Oxford
Vice Chair and Chair-Elect
Benjamin Briggs, High Point
Secretary
Trish Wilson, Wilmington
Treasurer
April Larkins, Greensboro
At-Large Executive Committee Member
Louise Porter Martin, Raleigh
Immediate Past Chairman
Richard Angino, Winston-Salem
Denise R. Barnes, Durham
Tamara Holmes Brothers, Fayetteville
Johnny Burleson, Raleigh
George Carr, Greensboro
Allan Casavant, Tryon
Mary Boney Clark, Wilmington
Claire Edwards, Farmville
Larken Egleston, Charlotte
Demetrius Haddock, Fayetteville
Jason Harpe, Lincolnton
Irvin Henderson, Henderson
Matt Hobbs, Raleigh
Richard Hunter, Warrenton
Earl Ijames, Wendell
Laurie Jackson, Raleigh
Lester Lowe, Raleigh
Jeff Michael, Davidson
John Moore, Winston-Salem
Carl R. Nold, Chapel Hill
Marshall Phillips, Charlotte
Donna Scott, Lake Waccamaw
Darin Waters, Asheville
Tom Winslow, Oak City

J. Myrick Howard, *President*

OFFICES

Hall and Graves-Fields Houses
Headquarters, Raleigh
919-832-3652

Bellamy Mansion, Wilmington
910-251-3700

Eastern Office, Tarboro
252-563-5288

Piedmont Office, Durham
919-401-8540

Western Office, Shelby
704-482-3531

Mayor Jim Butler
Harold Owen, Councilmember
Kathy Hykes, Councilmember
Bob Ward, Councilmember
Ronnie Wall, Councilmember
Burlington Historic Preservation Commission
Burlington Planning & Zoning Commission
James Euliss, Chair of the Burlington Historic Preservation Commission
City of Burlington
425 S Lexington Ave
Burlington, NC 27215

RE: Proposed property removal from West Davis Street–Fountain Place Local Historic District: 1004, 1010, 1016, and 1022 West Davis Street, Burlington, Alamance County.

Dear Mr. Euliss,

Preservation North Carolina understands that on February 8th, the Burlington Historic Preservation Commission will review a report by Richard Grubb & Associates (RGA) assessing the potential impacts of removing four individual properties in the West Davis Street–Fountain Place Local Historic District. Preservation North Carolina has been contacted by several members of the community concerned for the future of the properties and the Historic District.

Preservation North Carolina is the state's preservation leader, dedicated to protecting and promoting buildings, sites and landscapes important to the diverse heritage of North Carolina. For decades we have worked with communities in a variety of ways to achieve this mission. Our work has included drafting the state enabling legislation for local districts and advocating for the creation of new local historic districts. This effective planning tool gives community members the ability to preserve a sense of place, stabilize neighborhoods, and promote sustainable economic development and vitality.

Years ago, we supported the work of Ethel Gant, a driving force behind the effort, along with Helen Walton, Tom Harper, Diane Vaught and others, to nominate this neighborhood to the National Register of Historic Places in 1984, which was then used as the basis for the current local historic district boundaries approved by the City of Burlington in 1987. The information in the National Register nomination supporting the architectural significance of the district cited the properties under consideration as being of particular note. The Roger Gant House at 1016 West Davis Street was documented as being among "the most distinctive Georgian Revival houses in the neighborhood. . .and pivotal to the character of the district." The Allen Gant House at 1022 West Davis Street was hailed as "the most finely crafted dwelling in the West Davis-Fountain Place District" expressed through a combination of Medieval construction techniques and materials including authentic hand-hewn half-timbered

beams, culminating in “one of Burlington’s purest examples of the Tudor Revival style.” These statements of significance demonstrate the integral position of these properties in the West Davis Street–Fountain Place Local Historic District and exemplify the very reason local communities designate historic districts.

The West Davis Street–Fountain Place Local Historic District has stayed remarkably intact through the years and has benefitted from the careful stewardship of many owners who are as diverse as the buildings within its boundaries. The prospect of the removal of the four properties in question from the current boundaries of the West Davis Street–Fountain Place Local Historic District is of great concern as are the reasons stated by the applicants.

The RGA Report outlines each of the applicants’ complaints, addressing each one thoroughly, and substantiates in detail how the City and Historic Preservation Commission have addressed or are in the process of addressing some of them. Preservation North Carolina is aware that in recent years the City of Burlington has been working diligently to improve the review process for Certificates of Appropriateness, update its Design Standards to reflect new materials and technologies, encouraging training of new and existing Commissioners, and developing educational programs and information geared toward property owners and the public. We applaud the Commission’s efforts to honor its mission as outlined in its local ordinance and state enabling legislation, while recognizing opportunities to improve the local process.

As for economic viability and financial advantage to remaining in the local historic district, we would like to point out that these four properties make up approximately 6.5 acres in the district and comprise a combined \$2,220,620 in assessed value. The assessed tax value for the land is a mere \$464,863. The assessed value of the houses is \$1,755,757. Clearly the values of the architecture are strong, and much can be attributed not only to the quality of construction, materials and styles, but the stability and investor security that location in the locally designated historic district affords property owners. Incentives such as historic tax credits for rehabilitation and repair add to the financial advantages.

We are puzzled by this dramatic request to remove such prominent parcels from the West Davis Street–Fountain Place Local Historic District. In reviewing the over 30 Certificate of Appropriateness applications for the four parcels since the creation of the historic district, we identified only one denial. That application was for a porch roof on a property that has since been demolished by the applicant.

We urge the City of Burlington to live up to its commitment to all current and future property owners in the City’s historic districts to ensure that their careful stewardship of Burlington’s built heritage and thoughtful investment in their own private property will not be diminished by such a short-sighted request.

Any amendment to exclude these pivotal properties essential to the story and context of the historic district will result in a substantial negative impact on an otherwise remarkably cohesive district, render vulnerable prominent houses and parcels, and potentially cause ripple effects across the City. We are keenly aware of the potential precedent for other property owners in other communities. We strongly encourage the Historic Preservation Commission and the City of Burlington to maintain the current district boundaries which define in no small way the character of the West Davis Street–Fountain Place Local Historic District.

Sincerely,



J. Myrick Howard
President

Thanks for your consideration.

cc: Conrad Olmedo, Planning Manager
Jamie Lawson, AICP, Principal Planner