

Historic District Commission

May 22, 2025

Meeting Minutes

Chair Eddlemon called the meeting of the Historic District Commission to order at 6:04 p.m. on Thursday, May 22, 2025, at City Hall in the Council Chamber, 181 S. South Street of Gastonia, NC.

Present: Chair Andi Eddlemon and Commissioners Carol Hauer, Jeff Trepel, Blair Propert, and Kaitlyn Peeler

Absent: Commissioners Josh Hauser and Marty Murphy

Staff present: Charles Graham, Joe Gates, Jalen Nash, and Rebeca Mintz

ITEM 1a. Roll Call / Sound Check

Chair Eddlemon opened the meeting, conducted a roll call, and declared a quorum.

ITEM 1b: Approval of April 24th, 2025 Meeting Minutes

Commissioner Peeler moved to adopt the meeting minutes as submitted. Commissioner Hauer seconded the motion. With there being no further discussion, the motion was unanimously approved.

ITEM 2. Public Hearing – Certificate of Appropriateness (File # PLCA202500179 Cont.)

- Carolina Shoffner
- 501 S. Lee Street
- Requesting a COA to replace existing 6/6 sash windows with new 1/1 double-hung windows, previously denied by an HDC subcommittee.

Chair Eddlemon opened the public hearing and recognized Jalen Nash, Planner, for the staff's presentation. The Certificate of Appropriateness (COA) application was presented. Mr. Nash stated that this application is returning from the April 24 subcommittee meeting, where it was denied. He explained that the applicant is requesting a Certificate of Appropriateness (COA) to replace the existing six-over-six sash windows and some larger eight-over-eight sash windows with new one-over-one double-hung windows. The property's zoning map was presented.

Mr. Nash stated that the building was constructed in 1929 and confirmed that the original six-over-six and eight-over-eight sash windows, some of which are grouped in threes, are original and part of the property's description. He noted that the property is located in the York Chester Historic District, is considered a contributing structure, and is zoned RS-8, surrounded by other residential zoning districts.

Mr. Nash presented the key elements of the request and stated that there are 72 total windows. Chair Eddlemon corrected Mr. Nash, stating that there are 73 total windows.

Mr. Nash presented excerpts from the Design Standards related to fenestration.

Chair Eddlemon asked Mr. Nash what was different about this application compared to what was reviewed and denied at the subcommittee meeting. Mr. Nash responded that the applicant reached out and requested that the application be considered by the full commission, along with submitting some additional quotes to be presented.

Commissioner Peeler asked Mr. Nash if this is a multi-family building. Mr. Nash responded, "Yes." Discussion ensued regarding the number of units on the property.

Chair Eddlemon asked the board if there were any questions for Mr. Nash. Commissioner Peeler stated that she did not have any questions for Mr. Nash and asked the board what the consensus of the subcommittee was for those who attended. Chair Eddlemon responded that several people stayed for the subcommittee meeting, and ultimately, the discussion was that the request was not considered like-for-like. Even though it was understood that this would have a significant impact on the overall appearance of the building, the decision was to deny the application. Chair Eddlemon asked Mr. Nash if there was anything she had missed. Mr. Nash responded, "No".

With there being no further questions for Mr. Nash, Chair Eddlemon recognized Carolina Shoffner at 7810 Meadowview Lane, Charlotte, NC.

Ms. Shoffner stated that she completely understands the reasons why her application was denied, but she wanted the opportunity to present her case to the full board and ask for their time and consideration. She presented photos of the subject property and explained that two of the units have

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been fully remodeled, including electrical and plumbing work. In one of those units, there are currently no window units because she has already removed them.

Ms. Shoffner stated that this is a small business operated by herself and her three children. She shared that the remodeling of the two units cost approximately \$120,000, and she plans to remodel the remaining four units. She manages the property as a licensed realtor.

She emphasized that while she understands the requirements of the Design Standards, many surrounding homes already have the type of windows she is requesting. Although she acknowledged that the look would be different, she noted that several nearby houses, some large and attractive, have similar windows.

Ms. Shoffner explained that the cost of replacing windows in a multi-unit building is not comparable to that of a single-family home. She estimated that each window costs about \$750, and while replacing 10 to 20 windows might be manageable, replacing a much larger number at once, especially in the current economy, is not. She added that windows with grids cost about three times more than those without, and being allowed to use gridless windows would enable her to continue improving the property.

She concluded by stating that if the request is not approved, she may be forced to sell the property and turn it over to a large company.

Ms. Shoffner stated that one of the things she wanted to point out is that she is in the process of improving the six-plex building. She explained that even with the plumbing, she has been working to separate everything and replace old systems that needed attention.

Ms. Shoffner discussed the interior of the property, noting that she has worked to preserve many original features and further explained the extent of the improvements she has made.

Ms. Shoffner stated that her contractor has already measured the windows and that she contacted Lowe's, which is located in Gastonia. She explained that she tries to give business to local vendors and enjoys working in Gastonia.

Ms. Shoffner shared that last year she spent approximately \$120,000 on improvements, and this year she hopes to spend around \$100,000 more, focusing on replacing the windows and beginning remodeling work on two additional units. However, she emphasized that this depends heavily on the board's decision. If the request is not approved, she explained that it would take away about \$50,000 from what she would be able to spend on other improvements. Ms. Shoffner distributed copies of the quotes she had available. Discussion ensued over the cost of the replacement windows with and without grids.

Chair Eddlemon emphasized that she wants to make sure everyone understands that the Historic District Commission does not take cost into consideration when making a decision. Ms. Shoffner responded that, in general, windows with grids cost about \$750 each, while she could find windows without grids for as low as \$180.

Commissioner Hauer echoed Chair Eddlemon's comments, stating that this is a significant project and she appreciates the work Ms. Shoffner is doing. Commissioner Hauer added that she regrets the situation for Ms. Shoffner, but the board cannot set a precedent of using cost as a basis for approving applications, as that goes against the Design Standards.

Ms. Shoffner stated that she completely understands the board's position and has served on a board herself. She acknowledged that cost cannot be the basis for approval and agreed that the board cannot set a precedent by approving something just because it is the cheapest option.

Ms. Shoffner explained that her suggestion is based not on cost, but on the fact that there are already buildings nearby that have similar windows without grids. She stated that her goal is to improve the look and feel of the property while preserving its historic character, including the original brick and architectural features. She noted that nothing is being painted or changed to an inappropriate style.

Ms. Shoffner emphasized that while cost is not the focus, using windows without grids would allow her, as a small business owner, to reinvest in the property and continue improving the living conditions for tenants. She explained that if she cannot make the improvements feasible, she may eventually have to sell the property. She clarified that she is not a flipper, but a realtor with 17 years of experience who is working to build something long-term for her children's future.

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Ms. Shoffner added that her request is intended to enhance the area's appearance, not detract from it. She has seen similar styles used in beautiful historic buildings in Charlotte, and stated that there are already nearby properties in the district with similar gridless windows. She concluded by asking the board to consider an exception in this case, as the style she is requesting is already part of the neighborhood and would not look out of place.

Commissioner Hauer responded to Ms. Shoffner's point about other properties having windows without grids, stating that the board does not know whether those windows ever had grids to begin with, especially the very large ones, which often did not.

Commissioner Peeler added that while it is easy to look around and see homes without grids, that does not mean those windows were approved through a Certificate of Appropriateness. She noted that those would be considered a violation and would have to follow a different process. Commissioner Trepel agreed, stating the windows could have been installed before the existence of the HDC. Commissioner Peeler stated that it is difficult to compare one property to another because the board does not evaluate applications based on what has been done elsewhere. She explained that while the goal is to maintain a cohesive neighborhood appearance, each property is unique. She added that it is not as simple as saying, "Someone down the street built a fence, so I should be allowed to as well." She stated each application is reviewed on its own merits. Discussion continued regarding how each Certificate of Appropriateness application is reviewed on its own merits and not based on comparisons to other properties scattered throughout the neighborhood.

Commissioner Trepel asked Ms. Shoffner how many windows were on the front elevation of the property. Ms. Shoffner responded that there are a lot of windows on the rear elevation but estimated that there are 30 or fewer on the front. Photos of the property were presented. Ms. Shoffner then corrected herself, stating that there are 23 windows on the front, but she is unsure about the exact number on the rear, as she does not have a photo.

Commissioner Trepel then asked how many windows are on the side elevations. Ms. Shoffner estimated that there are 40 windows on the back, 23 on the front, and that the remaining windows, out of a total of 73, are located on the sides.

Discussion ensued regarding the specifications of the proposed windows. Commissioner Peeler asked the board if the windows were vinyl. Chair Eddlemon responded that the proposed windows are double-hung glass windows. The board also discussed the quotes presented by Ms. Shoffner.

Commissioner Probert asked Ms. Shoffner if there are currently any issues with the windows or if the replacement is solely for renovation purposes. Ms. Shoffner responded that there are issues with functionality. Many of the windows, particularly on the upper floors, are difficult to open and close. She added that several of the top windows have been screwed shut. Ms. Shoffner stated that she intends to replace them not only for aesthetic reasons, but also to improve the quality of living for the tenants.

Commissioner Trepel asked Ms. Shoffner if she had inquired about simulated divided light windows. Ms. Shoffner responded that the windows quoted at \$750 were for simulated divided light windows. Commissioner Trepel stated that it is hard to believe simulated grids add that much to the overall cost. Chair Eddlemon and Commissioner Probert responded that the grids do add a significant cost, noting that they have both recently replaced windows themselves.

Chair Eddlemon asked the board if there were any further questions for Ms. Shoffner. With no additional questions from the board, the discussion shifted to further consideration of the application.

Commissioner Peeler stated that she would like to discuss the potential ramifications of approving this type of application, especially given the size of the building and its prominent location. She noted that the windows are highly visible and that the overall visual impact should be considered.

Commissioner Trepel responded that the windows on the rear elevation would not be visible.

Commissioner Trepel suggested another perspective, stating that while he could not support approval for the front or sides, the board might consider allowing the replacement windows on the rear elevation only.

Chair Eddlemon responded that the board used to allow that approach years ago but stopped to maintain fairness and consistency. She explained that corner properties would be unfairly penalized since more of their elevations are visible.

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Commissioner Trepel acknowledged the point and clarified he was referring only to the rear, noting that corner properties would still follow the same standard.

Commissioner Hauer added that visibility can change over time, citing storms or landscape changes. She referenced a recent approval of a garage on the corner of Chester as an example. Discussion ensued among the board members regarding which windows would be visible from the public right-of-way.

Chair Eddlemon stated that although some nearby homes may not have grids, windows stay on a building much longer than paint or fixtures. She explained that if gridless windows keep getting approved, the district could eventually lose its historic character. She said that while she understands the cost concerns, she does not see a way to approve the request as submitted and asked if anyone was ready to make a motion or offer an alternative.

Hearing no other recommendations, Commissioner Hauer moved to deny the application. Commissioner Peeler seconded the motion. With no further discussion, the motion was unanimously approved.

ITEM 3. Public Hearing – Certificate of Appropriateness (File # PLCA202500183)

- Jarvis Roberts
- 213 W. Fifth Avenue
- Requesting approval to remove one backyard understory tree over 8 inches in diameter.

Chair Eddlemon opened the public hearing and recognized Jalen Nash, Planner, for the staff presentation. Mr. Nash stated the property is a contributing structure in the local York-Chester Historic District and is zoned RS-8, surrounded by residential and office zoning. He explained that the City's Municipal Arborist, Greg Reynolds, reviewed a request to remove three trees on the site. Two were approved for removal, but the third was not. Mr. Reynolds noted the leaning tree is an understory species growing toward available light, with healthy growth around it. He did not recommend removal at this time but acknowledged it may be necessary in the future.

Commissioner Hauer asked Mr. Nash if two of the trees had been approved for removal, so the board was only considering one tree. Mr. Nash responded, "Yes." Photos of the tree in question were presented.

Commissioner Trepel stated that the description says these are understory trees, which he understands to mean trees with others hanging above them. However, he did not see evidence of that in this case.

Chair Eddlemon asked if they knew what species the trees were.

Mr. Nash responded that Mr. Reynolds did not specify the species but confirmed they were understory trees. He explained that the trees are growing the way they are because they are reaching upward for light. Chair Eddlemon stated that she lives near this corner and noted that the area has never seen more sunlight than it does now because seven to eight trees in that corner have been lost.

Mr. Nash responded that this observation was part of the Municipal Arborist's comments in his inspection.

Commissioner Peeler asked Mr. Nash if the arborist did not recommend removal. Mr. Nash responded, "He did not."

Chair Eddlemon asked the board if there were any other questions for Mr. Nash. Hearing none, she recognized Jarvis Roberts of 213 W Fifth Avenue. Commissioner Trepel asked Mr. Roberts about his motivation or need to remove the particular tree in question.

Mr. Roberts responded that five years ago, a tree fell in their neighborhood, causing a fire that displaced them from their home. He explained that last year, another storm caused a tree to fall and damage his shed. He noted that two of the three trees under discussion have already been approved for removal. He identified the pecan tree as posing the greatest risk, with another rotten tree behind it that was also approved for removal. Mr. Roberts stated that the tree in question is near his home, facing his youngest daughter's bedroom. He expressed concern that if it falls, it could land on the sun porch next to her room.

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Commissioner Propert stated that he understands the risk the tree poses to the house, recalling last year's storm. He then asked Mr. Roberts if he had a plan for what would go in place of the tree if it were removed, such as planting a new tree or another replacement.

Mr. Roberts responded that if the tree and the other two come down, he would plan to define his property line and then petition to install a fence.

Chair Eddlemon asked the board if there were any other questions for Mr. Roberts and if anyone felt prepared to make a motion.

Commissioner Trepel responded that from their perspective, any tree in the neighborhood could potentially fall. Since this tree is not diseased or has any special characteristics, he does not see how the board could approve its removal.

Mr. Roberts stated that he understands the point made and appreciates its validity. He explained that one reason he moved to the neighborhood was for its historic character and tree canopy, which he wants to preserve. He shared a personal experience with a tree in his front yard that appeared healthy but was later found to have a large hollow inside, illustrating how hidden dangers can exist. He emphasized that while they need to protect the canopy, they also must protect the historic homes.

Commissioner Trepel responded that almost every property in the neighborhood has trees that could potentially fall during a storm. He said he does not see anything special about this tree to warrant removal and asked if any maintenance has been done on it. He added that he is not concerned about the other two trees that have already been approved for removal.

Mr. Roberts responded that he has not had any maintenance performed on this tree. He said he consulted with several tree companies about trimming or cutting it back, but they advised against it. He was told that pruning could increase the risk of the tree dying or falling because of the way its canopy is structured. He explained that the pecan tree nearby is dwarfing this tree, which is an understory tree beneath it. Although more light reaches the area now due to fallen trees, the experts warned that trimming could put this tree at greater risk.

Chair Eddlemon asked if there were any further questions for the applicant, and if not, whether anyone was prepared to make a motion. Commissioner Hauer stated that the board has dealt with similar requests before, and if a tree isn't diseased or currently endangering anything, it's difficult to approve removal.

Commissioner Peeler said she questioned the claim that proper trimming would harm the tree, noting that while topping is harmful and against city standards, trimming done correctly should not kill a tree.

Chair Eddlemon added that everyone in the neighborhood lives with the risk of storm damage from trees. In this case, since two of the three trees are already approved for removal and the third wasn't recommended for removal by the arborist, she felt the request struck a reasonable balance. She said she was open to a better argument but was not currently in favor of removal.

Hearing no further discussion, Chair Eddlemon asked the board if anyone felt prepared to make a motion. Commissioner Trepel moved to deny the application as submitted. Commissioner Peeler seconded the motion.

Commissioner Propert stated that the commission has a canopy problem and is trying to preserve it, but trees are still being removed. He explained that his earlier question was meant to explore ways to rebuild the canopy over time. Instead of always saying no, he suggested educating applicants about removing a tree and planting one back in its place.

Commissioner Trepel responded that this is often what the board proposes as an alternative.

Commissioner Peeler responded to Commissioner Propert, stating that while replanting is a good idea, newly planted trees are not protected until they reach eight inches in diameter. If a property changes hands, the new owner could remove those young trees before they are protected, which would undermine the board's efforts.

Commissioner Trepel added that the board has allowed removals in cases where there was clear justification, such as a tree being very close to a structure, and in those cases, they encouraged replanting to help offset canopy loss.

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Commissioner Trepel stated that in past cases, the Commission has allowed tree removal on the condition that a new tree is planted, but in this case, he didn't see anything unique about the tree to warrant removal.

Chair Eddlemon agreed that both perspectives may be valid — the tree canopy is a concern, but this particular tree doesn't have any distinguishing issue. She added that the Commission isn't made up of tree experts, so without stronger justification or a recommendation from the arborist to remove it, it warrants pause.

Hearing no further discussion, Chair Eddlemon called for a vote on Commissioner Trepel's motion, seconded by Commissioner Peeler. The motion was unanimously approved.

ITEM 4. Public Hearing – Certificate of Appropriateness (File # PLCA202500185)

- Joshua Sutton
- 707 S. South Street
- Requesting approval to remove one front yard Magnolia tree over 8 inches in diameter.

Chair Eddlemon opened the public hearing and recognized Jalen Nash, Planner, for the staff presentation. The Certificate of Appropriateness (COA) application was presented. Mr. Nash stated the applicant is requesting approval to remove a front yard magnolia tree measuring well over eight inches in diameter. He presented the property details, noting that the home was built in 1931, is zoned RS-8, and is surrounded by residential zoning. Mr. Nash then reviewed the arborist's inspection, explaining this was a similar case involving three trees. Two were approved for removal, one due to disease and one already dead. The third, the magnolia, was not approved for removal, though the arborist noted it has outgrown the confined space. Photos showed an exposed root system that could potentially damage the sidewalk and other nearby structures.

Commissioner Trepel stated that he visited the property and remarked on the size of the magnolia tree. He said it completely overwhelms the house, in his opinion, though he also acknowledged it is a beautiful tree.

Chair Eddlemon asked the board if anyone had any questions for Mr. Nash. Commissioner Peeler noted that the roots have outgrown the area and asked if the arborist's concern about the size also extended to potential issues with city plumbing or anything underground.

Mr. Nash responded that Mr. Reynolds was mainly concerned about the sidewalk, but that there could be other potential issues as well. Mr. Nash continued, stating the tree has outgrown the space it is confined to. He emphasized that the tree is healthy but large, and it is up to the board to make the approval decision.

Commissioner Trepel commented that while the tree is healthy, it is causing damage to everything around it.

With there being no further questions for Mr. Nash, Chair Eddlemon recognized Joshua Sutton at 707 S. York Street. Commissioner Trepel asked Mr. Sutton how long he had lived at the address. Mr. Sutton responded 10 years.

Commissioner Trepel asked if the tree has grown a lot during that time. Mr. Sutton responded yes and said he loves the house and the tree, but the tree is suffocating them.

Chair Eddlemon asked if they had recently replaced the roof. Mr. Sutton responded, "Yes".

Mr. Sutton stated the tree was bigger before. He explained that a few seasons ago, the limbs over the power line were trimmed on one side for maintenance. Because of that, the weight is now mostly on one side, so the tree does not look as beautiful as it did when they first moved in. He said he understands the need to keep the branches away from power lines. However, he noted that the roots are causing significant damage, destroying everything they touch. He expressed that he loves the tree but added that it sheds leaves constantly. He also said it produces very few blossoms now—only one or two—unlike the beautiful magnolias normally seen.

Commissioner Trepel asked Mr. Sutton what his primary motivations are for wanting to remove the tree.

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Mr. Sutton responded that he is trying to address the problem before it gets worse. He is unsure of the full extent of the plumbing issues but mentioned that the pipes got clogged with terracotta debris due to roots invading the plumbing. He knows the tree is causing increasing damage, some of which he is not yet fully aware of.

Commissioner Trepel asked Mr. Sutton what his plans are for the space if the tree removal is approved.

Mr. Sutton responded that he would like to be able to see the beauty of his house from the road, which is currently blocked. He mentioned he would research suitable trees to plant in the future, but would want to avoid anything that would cause similar problems.

Commissioner Hauer commented that it would likely be necessary to wait before planting anything because the roots need time to die. She shared that after losing two large trees in front of her house, she was advised to wait at least a year before planting again. Discussion followed about possible replacements for the Magnolia tree.

Commissioner Trepel stated that this case is very different from the one they just denied. He wished the previous applicant could hear the discussion. He explained that this tree presents a special circumstance because it has completely overwhelmed the house, street, sidewalk, and yard. The negative impacts on the property outweigh the tree's beauty. While acknowledging it is a beautiful tree, he said it causes too much damage. In his opinion, the removal should be approved, possibly with a condition that a new, smaller tree be planted in its place within a year, although he was unsure how to enforce the timeframe.

Chair Eddlemon asked Mr. Sutton if the tree had been pruned. Mr. Sutton responded that, believe it or not, if you look at old Google Photos, the limbs originally went all the way to the ground before they were pruned up. He added that the pruning happened around the time of the house remodeling.

Hearing no further discussion, Chair Eddlemon asked the board if anyone felt prepared to make a motion.

Commissioner Trepel moved to approve the application with the condition that a new, smaller tree be planted somewhere in the front yard within one year to replace the removed tree. Commissioner Hauer seconded the motion. With no further discussion, the motion was unanimously approved.

ITEM 5. Other Business

Joe Gates, Assistant Planning Director, presented the proposed new fee schedule for the York-Chester and Brookwood historic districts, which will be brought before City Council. He stated the new fees are comparable to those in other municipalities. The discussion included potential uses for the revenue generated by these fees and how the neighborhood would be notified if the fees are approved. Mr. Nash suggested including a notice in the annual newsletter to inform residents.

ITEM 6. Adjournment

With there being no further discussion, Chair Eddlemon adjourned the May 22nd, 2025, meeting of the HDC at 7:35 p.m.

Respectfully submitted:

Andi Eddlemon, Chair
Historic District Commission

Jalen Nash – CZO, Planner
Planning Department