

Minutes

The Mississippi River Parkway Commission of Arkansas
727 Columbia Street
Helena-West Helena, Arkansas
June 9, 2011

Commissioners Present

Joe St. Columbia
Carole Bulloch
Bobby Kennedy
Garland Hayes
Phyllis Stinson
Terri Austin McCullough

Commissioners Absent

Taralou Dunklin
Lois Boyd
Eva Hollowell
Molly Houseworth Jackson

Technical Advisors/ Department Staff/Guests Present

Nancy Clark, Great River Road Division Director
Dr. Ruth Hawkins, Executive Director, Delta Byways Regional Tourism Association
State Representative Clark Hall
Cathy and Ernest Cunningham, Hosts for Meeting
Paula Miles, Delta Byways Regional Tourism Association
Jay Robison, Arkansas Economic Development Commission
Pam Garofas, Helena-West Helena Welcome Center Manager
Katie Herrington, Delta Cultural Center Manager
Julia Nordsieck, Southern Bancorp, Helena-West Helena
Allen Martin, Mayor's Office, City of Helena-West Helena
Lyn Chadwick, Edwardian Inn Owner
Chris Allen, Interested Citizen
Donald Hatchett, Entergy, Customer Service Manager, Helena-West Helena and Pine Bluff
Mark Christ, Civil War Sesquicentennial Commissioner
Melissa Martinez, *The Daily World*, Helena-West Helena

Call to Order

Chairman Joe St. Columbia called the meeting to order, and thanked everyone for taking time from their busy schedules to participate in the meeting of the Mississippi River Parkway Commission. He said that a tour of the Civil War sites in Helena-Helena with Mark Christ and Cathy Cunningham was planned immediately following the business meeting.

Approval of the Minutes from the Previous Meeting

Terri Austin McCullough moved to approve the minutes from the previous meeting. Carole Bulloch seconded and the motion carried.

Special Order of Business

Chairman Joe St. Columbia introduced Allen Martin, Chief of Staff—Mayor’s Office, City of Helena-West Helena. Mr. Martin welcomed everyone on behalf of the Mayor, and thanked the Commission for choosing Helena-West Helena for the site of the meeting. He also thanked Ernest and Cathy Cunningham for hosting the commissioners in their home.

Chairman Joe St. Columbia asked Ernest Cunningham to provide some background information about their home. Mr. Cunningham said that the home was built in 1892 by the Tappan family, and they purchased it in 1987, and began the restoration.

Planning for 2011 National Meeting in Arkansas

Nancy Clark reported the dates for the meeting are September 29—October 2, 2011, and the location is Little Rock with lodging at the DoubleTree Hotel. Ms. Clark presented several ideas she had which included renting motor coaches to take delegates to the Plantation Agriculture Museum in Scott to hear about the history of cotton agriculture from statehood in 1836 through World War II; then to the Museum of the Grand Prairie in Stuttgart for lunch, and to learn about the settling of the prairie and the story of rice agriculture. Along the way there may be an opportunity to see rice being harvested and cotton being picked. A visit to the Dale Bumpers National Rice Research Center is also scheduled as well as a stop at Mack’s Prairie Wings, America’s premier waterfowl outfitter. The last stop of the day will be a visit and dinner at Marlsgate Plantation. This trip will provide a good idea of the kind of things a traveler would see as they travel the Great River Road in Arkansas.

Terri McCullough moved for payment of registration fees and travel expenses for Commissioners, and registration fees only for Technical Advisors to attend the annual meeting of the National Mississippi River Parkway Commission to be held Sept 29-October 1, 2011 in Little Rock. Carole Bulloch seconded and the motion carried.

Geocaching on the Arkansas Great River Road

One of the short-term projects planned for Southeast Arkansas was geocaching along the Great River Road in Desha and Chicot counties. The event was held April 1-2, and included 120 new “treasures” hidden along the southern stretch of Arkansas’s Great River Road National Scenic Byway. It was entitled “April Fools and April Goulds: Geocaching Along Arkansas’s Great River Road”. The event kicked off with a “meet and greet” at the Bear Claw in Arkansas City, and later in the evening participants gathered at the historic Desha County Courthouse for a “haunted” tour. The purpose of the event was to attract visitors to geocache, and to see what the Delta has to offer in the area. With the addition of these caches, the Arkansas Great River Road now has 154 caches, and to date have been found over 4,000 times, with many compliments from the cachers.

Delta Byways Update

Dr. Hawkins said that four individual grant proposals and one joint proposal were submitted for National Scenic Byway funds: (1) to develop a biking trail along Crowley’s Ridge—this was not funded because they disqualified Arkansas State University for the matching portion, (2) to continue Phase II of the West Memphis Gateway Project—this project was funded at \$52,800, (3) restoration of Pickens Baptist Church for an Arkansas Delta Gospel Institute in Dumas—qualified, but was a low priority and didn’t receive funding, (4) a feasibility study/engineering survey for paving the route through the St. Francis National Forest and part of the Mississippi

River State Park—not funded because sufficient proof of cash match not provided, and (5) the joint application (Arkansas, Mississippi and Louisiana) for marketing the Civil War heritage sites in all three states—unfunded.

Dr. Hawkins also reported on the Historic Dyess Colony project involving a museum to honor the Johnny Cash legacy as well as restoring or re-creating his boyhood home. Arkansas State University has acquired the house Johnny Cash lived in from the time he was three-years-old until he graduated from high school (1935-1950). It will be restored or re-created to accurately convey his early lifestyle. The house will be furnished as it was during the 1930s and 1940s based on recollections of family members. The project will also draw from Johnny Cash's own memories of the house, documented on video during his 1968 return to Dyess. Arkansas State University is working on restoring some of the buildings of the Dyess Depression-era farming colony.

The former New Deal-era Administration Building is being restored as a memorial to Johnny Cash. The museum will include exhibits on his boyhood in Dyess, the influence of his family, and the impact his early life had on his later music. The former theatre next door will be reconstructed to show an orientation film, along with Johnny Cash documentaries. The Johnny Cash Museum and Home, once completed, are expected to generate 27 new jobs in Mississippi County (a Great River Road county) with a payroll of \$450,000 during the first year of operation. After 5 years of successful operation, the site is expected to serve as a catalyst for as many as 83 new jobs in the county with a yearly payroll of \$1.35 million. A Johnny Cash Music Festival will be presented annually by Arkansas State University, with participation by the Cash Family to benefit the Johnny Cash Boyhood Home Project in Dyess. The first music festival to raise funds for the restoration of the boyhood home will take place on August 4 at the ASU Convocation Center with members of the Cash family including daughter and musician, Roseanne Cash performing. Other stars include Kris Kristofferson and George Jones among many others.

The Rural Heritage Development Initiative (RHDI) and Arkansas State University, through a grant from the National Park Service, have contracted with an interpretive planning firm to research, develop, and design sensitive and thought-provoking storytelling elements about the more than 8,800 Japanese-Americans interned in the relocation camps at Rohwer and Jerome between 1942-1945. This project compliments the City of McGehee's on-going efforts to restore and reuse their historic railroad depot to house an existing exhibit just a few miles from the Rohwer site. Rowher Relocation Camp Cemetery National Historic Landmark site and McGehee are located on the Great River Road.

Another project of RHDI, located on the Great River Road includes the rehabilitation of the 1906 Tushek Building in downtown Lake Village. Plans include converting the vacant space into the new home of municipal government, moving city leaders back downtown and spurring interest and investment in the core of historic Lake Village. The city has been awarded more than \$1.5 million dollars in grants and low-interest loans for the project. Once completed the Tushek Building will be the first LEED-accredited building in the Arkansas Delta.

Dr. Hawkins also reported that a new Delta Byways regional guide was produced in May, 2011, which is an important tool for the promotion of both national scenic byways in eastern Arkansas: the Great River Road and Crowley's Ridge Parkway. Copies were distributed to commissioners.

Helena-West Helena Welcome Center

Chairman Joe St. Columbia told the commission that the Arkansas Highway and Transportation Department (AHTD) and the Arkansas Department of Parks and Tourism met at Phillips College on June 7, and unveiled an artist's rendering of the proposed welcome center. It will be located on Highway 49 Bypass at the foot of the Helena Bridge over the Mississippi River. AHTD took the time to study and survey the structures that are in the area which reflect Helena-West Helena. The design will be an informal Italianate style which will be very welcoming and reflect much of the styles of the area.

Pam Garofas, Helena-West Helena Welcome Center Manager, commented that everyone was really pleased with the location, and the building design. The new center will be approximately 3,000 square feet which is many times larger than the current facility.

Chairman Joe St. Columbia reminded Commissioners to return their TR1s to Nancy Clark for processing.

A discussion ensued as to the next meeting date, and Commissioner Phyllis Stinson suggested a meeting in at the Clarendon Visitors Center on Thursday, August 11, 2011.

The meeting adjourned to participate in the Civil War sites tour of Helena led by Cathy Cunningham, Community Development Coordinator for Southern Bancorp, and Commissioner Mark Christ, Arkansas Civil War Sesquicentennial Commission.

An invitation was extended to all to return to the Cunningham residence following the Civil War tour for lunch prepared by Joyce St. Columbia.

Respectfully submitted:

Joe St. Columbia, Chairman
Mississippi River Parkway Commission

Nancy Clark, Director
Great River Road Division