

North Carolina Historical Commission

Meeting Minutes

December 11, 2025

The North Carolina Historical Commission (NCHC, Commission) met via Zoom on Thursday, December 11, 2025. In attendance were commissioners: David Ruffin, Chair; Shana Condill; Dr. David Dennard; Dr. Sally Greene, Dr. Valerie Ann Johnson; Dr. Lawrence Locklear; Susan Phillips; W. Noah Reynolds; and Barbara B. Snowden. Absent were commissioners Newell Clark and Dr. Susanna Lee.

Also in attendance were: Dr. Darin Waters, Deputy Secretary for Archives and History, Department of Natural and Cultural Resources (DNCR); Michelle Lanier, Director, Division of Historic Sites and Properties (DSHSP); Ramona Bartos, Director, Division of Historical Resources (DHR); C.J. Roberts, Director, Division of State History Museums (DSHM); Christie Norris, Department of Natural and Cultural Resources Director of Education; Terra Schramm, Public Information Officer, DSHSP; Elizabeth Reighn, Director of Curatorial Services, DSHSP; Michael Moore, Deputy Director of Curatorial Services and Chief Curator, DSHSP; Lori Townsend, Interpretive Curator, DSHSP; Ansley Wegner, Director, Division of Historical Research and Publications (DHRP); Parker Backstrom, Office of Archives and History (OAH) administrative assistant and Recording Secretary for the NCHC.; and Matt Zeher, Information Technology facilitator.

The meeting was livestreamed on Microsoft Teams. Copies of all cited written materials can be found in the file for this meeting.

Call to Order, Welcome to New Commissioners, and Conflict of Interest Statement

The meeting was called to order at 10:03 AM. The chair noted that he would call roll before welcoming the new members, which he did to establish the presence of a quorum, explaining that given the virtual nature of the meeting, all action items will be voted upon by way of roll call.

The chair then asked the commissioners to state concerns any might have about a potential conflict of interest pertaining to the business at hand. No such concerns were expressed.

Mr. Ruffin welcomed new commissioners Greene and Locklear and acknowledged the reappointment of Condill and Phillips. He stated that he's working with Dr. Waters on a letter of recognition for immediate past commissioners Sam Dixon and Barbara Groome for their service to the Commission. Noting that both had been sworn in, the Chair asked Drs. Greene and Locklear to offer introductory comments.

Approval of Minutes

The chair entertained feedback about the minutes from the September 23, 2025, meeting of the NCHC. Dr. Dennard moved approval of the minutes as written. The motion was seconded by

Commissioner Condill and carried by voice vote, with Mr. Reynolds abstaining because he was absent from that meeting.

Report from the NCHC's Public History Advisory Committee

At the Chair's prerogative, this item was moved up on the agenda. For the edification of the new members, Mr. Ruffin explained that Commission's Public History Advisory Committee was formed in 2024 to identify tangible ways that the NCHC could support and advocate for the teaching of public history in North Carolina. He then ceded the floor to committee chair, Commissioner Reynolds.

Mr. Reynolds pointed out that the committee has not met since November 2024. But at that meeting the committee produced a report that was given to the full Commission at its December 2024 meeting. The committee devised three tactical recommendations that the OAH can follow to assist the NCHC's stated goal, and ways that the commissioners themselves could advance the development of strategies. Those recommendations were:

- a. That the OAH develop a curated resource that centralizes information about upcoming activities and events being offered by divisions of the DNCR and make it available in a regular and timely fashion to the commissioners of the NCHC to make them aware of upcoming opportunities they may advocate for on behalf of the department and its activities. Furthermore, until this first tactical step is taken, the committee believes that the NCHC will be unable to move forward effectively to advocate for the importance of learning and understanding public history.
- b. That each commissioner develops and shares with the DNCR staff, on a voluntary basis, their personal profiles and specific interests in history and the work of the DNCR, such that staff may better understand what those interests are toward making individual commissioners aware of specific activities and opportunities in which any commissioner may choose to become more involved.
- c. That the Commission develop multiple fundraising strategies and find definitive ways to further support DNCR initiatives and complement existing funding sources such as the DNCR Office of Education's field trip fund for educators, the OAH DAR's 'Docs in a Box' program, and *Friends of the Museums* initiatives.

Dr. Waters noted that the department under former secretary Reid Wilson developed the PUSH initiative, work that continues under present secretary Pam Cashwell. Also developed under Secretary Wilson was the Learning Happens Here (LHH) initiative, which highlights the DNCR's extensive educational resources available to teachers, parents, and students throughout the state for their use both in the classroom and at home. The initiative aims to inspire a love of learning, promote unity through shared history, foster science literacy, encourage environmental responsibility, and instill a lifelong passion for reading. To head up the initiative, the department brought in Christie Norris as Director of Education for the department. Dr. Waters asked Ms. Norris to give a report on what has been happening in her area of the department.

With the help of a PowerPoint presentation, Ms. Norris highlighted the work she's been doing. She described LHH as the "website" that the DNCR can use to market to teachers in all the state's 100 counties what resources are available to them and how to access those resources. The program's

priorities are to empower educators all year long, enhance classroom learning, expand access to resources, and foster cross-departmental collaboration.

Ms. Norris explained that in November 2024, to launch the initiative, then-Governor Roy Cooper allocated \$1M to 275 schools in 86 counties, designed to serve over 19,000 students. The department has also launched #NCLearningHappensHere on social media. She said she has gotten a lot of positive feedback from teachers. The program has been especially beneficial to rural schools.

Chairman Ruffin noted that counties in northeastern North Carolina seem underserved when it comes to education. She confirmed that this region has been a challenge to serve. To partially address this, she proactively sends letters to schools in that region informing principals and school boards that LHH money is available to them, noting that applicants for LHH money are met with a 96% acceptance rate. In response to a question by the Commission, she emphasized that the money has already been allocated and is not tied to the current as-yet non-passed state budget. She also said that she will send to the commissioners a list of the 14 counties not yet served by the program, for their information. Dr. Johnson stated that she has contacts in Bertie County and will do what she can to help spread the word up there about LHH. Per Ms. Norris, about \$150K of the allocated funding remains available and would pay for transportation, meals, and substitute teachers, if needed, while participating students are on field trips. She then played a short video highlighting the benefits of this 'Field Trip Fund.' It featured a 31-year teacher for which this was her first field trip to Raleigh and the impact visiting the state archives, Freedom Park, and the Museum of History, among others, made on her and her students. In the video, the teacher encouraged other teachers to reach out to the DNCR so they and their students can get the same experience.

Ms. Norris also highlighted the DNCR Teacher Ambassador Program, which selected 18 teachers from across the state to become ambassadors for the DNCR. They were taken to different historic sites and exposed to other resources, being asked in return to carry their experience back to their regions of the state to offer first-hand knowledge about the program to other teachers. She stressed the need to support teachers and their work as a way of validating their importance and combating the feelings of disenfranchisement they're experiencing, especially history teachers whose work is being devalued through the conflagration of teaching and politics.

Before concluding, Ms. Norris touched upon History Day, an academic program for 6th- to 12th-grade students focused on historical research, inquiry, analysis and creative expression, which in 2025 served almost 7,000 students from 109 schools in 48 counties.

Dr. Waters pledged that Ms. Norris will add the email address of each commissioner to the recipient list for the monthly LHH newsletter. He also encouraged any of the commissioners to attend any upcoming events.

Ruffin commended Ms. Norris and thanked Commissioner Reynolds. Dr. Greene shared her strong belief in the importance of a hands-on approach to showing students archival materials, rather than just relying upon digital resources. In response to a question from Dr. Dennard, Ms. Norris said she doesn't know of neighboring states that have anything like the Field Trip Fund or the Teacher Ambassador Program. Added Dr. Waters, North Carolina is unique in its commitment that all its historical and cultural resources are under the umbrella of a single state-level department, and he commented that historians and other colleagues that he meets from around the country are amazed at the comprehensive nature of what all the DNCR does.

In direct response to one of the three recommendations of the NCHC's Public History Advisory Committee, Dr. Waters reported that he has confirmed with DNCR Public Information Officer Schorr Johnson that the curated calendar of events that are scheduled to take place within the department's many divisions is now up and running, and that he will share information about accessing this site with commissioners after the meeting.

Accessions and Deaccessions of Items in State Collections

Chairman Ruffin explained for the edification of the new commissioners that it is the role of Commission to consider recommendations by DNCR staff to accession, or add, items to state collections, and deaccession, or remove, items from state collections. He then ceded the floor to Dr. Waters for a walk through the most recent annotated list of items up for accessioning and deaccessioning.

Dr. Waters cited a list of items proposed for accessioning into the collections of the Museum of History (MOH) in Raleigh, the Museum of the Albemarle in Elizabeth City, and the North Carolina Maritime Museums (NCMM), as recommended by the Office of Archives and History Collections Committee (OAHCC). This annotated list was made available to the commissioners in advance of the meeting. All groupings, he said, will be dealt with as a single slate. He then opened the floor to questions or comments about any of the recommendations. Hearing none, Ms. Snowden moved approval of the recommended accessions into the museums, Dr. Dennard seconded the motion, and the motion was carried by roll call voice vote.

Dr. Waters then cited the list of recommended accessions into the collection of the DSHSP. With no questions or comments forthcoming, Dr. Dennard moved approval, Ms. Phillips seconded the motion, and the motion was carried by unanimous roll call voice vote.

Next, Dr. Waters cited the list of items proposed for deaccessioning from the DSHSP. No questions about any of the items were forthcoming. But at the Chair's request, Ms. Lanier explained the reasons for deaccessioning items, which include their relevance to collections, item duplication, education — the transfer of substandard items into a teaching collection — and the deterioration of items over time. Commissioner Snowden moved approval of the recommended deaccessions, Dr. Greene seconded the motion, and the motion was carried by unanimous roll call vote.

Reports from Division Directors

Written reports on activities and developments within each division were drafted by each division director and shared with the commissioners in advance of today's meeting. Since each division director offered in-person summaries of their written reports at the Commission's September 2025 meeting they were not required to do so at this meeting. At the chair's request, Dr. Waters touched upon a couple of aspects of the goings-on within the OAH.

He gave a brief report on the status of the state budget. The department is currently prioritizing what it wishes to go into the governor's proposed budget under the upcoming short legislative session of the North Carolina General Assembly (NCGA). The department, he said, is currently under strain because costs continue to rise and no state budget resulted from the just completed long session of the NCGA.

He announced the hiring of Kelly Policelli as the new director of the Division of Archives and Records. He noted that she has worked in the archives in the past and feels that she was an excellent hire to succeed Sarah Koonts.

Dr. Waters cited the written reports submitted by division directors and offered each a chance to briefly touch upon highlights from their reports, if they so desired.

Division of Historical Research and Publications – Ms. Wegner reported that A250 planning is in full swing. She noted that the DNCR's A250 Committee received a \$25,000 grant from Walmart for upcoming First in Freedom Festival in February. Her A250 team was at the North Carolina State Fair in October talking with thousands of people. Dr. Waters noted that the committee is planning a big event at the state capitol on July 4, 2026.

Division of State History Museums – Mr. Roberts reported that the major renovation project at the MOH is slated to take four years at a cost of \$230M. \$180M of that amount was provided by NCGA, with the balance to be raised by way of a capital campaign. The four-year process will be made up of four phases: one year to break down and store all exhibits and artifacts; a year to demolish those parts of the building that require it; a year to renovate the building; and a year to reoccupy the building, replace exhibits, and restore artifacts. That would place the reopening of the museum in the fall of 2028. Mr. Roberts reported that the Civil War & Reconstruction History Center in Fayetteville is on schedule to open sometime in the spring or summer of 2027.

Division of State Historic Sites & Properties – Ms. Lanier reported upon several capital projects within her division. The \$30M visitors center at Ft. Fisher is the largest capital project in the division's history, while great progress is being made with the visitors' center at Fort Dobbs State Historic Site. There was a groundbreaking at House in the Horseshoe — a very important Revolutionary War site — and a ribbon-cutting at the newly restored Davie House. She proudly reported 1.9M visitors to the state's historic sites this calendar year. She cautioned, however, that 2026 numbers are likely to drop due to ongoing capital projects at a variety of sites that will require closure of those sites.

Division of Historical Resources – Introducing Ms. Bartos, Dr. Waters acknowledged her national work. She just recently stepped away from serving as president of the National Conference of State Historic Preservation Officers, and her work on the national stage has really helped put North Carolina's national preservation work on the national map.

Ms. Bartos described her division, listing its constituent offices and what each does. She touched upon archaeological work being done at Historic Halifax and the House in the Horseshoe's Alston House. She also touched upon personnel changes within division, noting that employees with 30 years' experience, and more, are leaving state employment. She noted that her division is having trouble recruiting new staff due to cost of living in Raleigh, which is non-commensurate with the level of salaries they receive. She noted that historic preservation work is facing funding challenges and receiving pushback from Washington, DC, regarding the perceived value of historic preservation.

Ms. Bartos explained that the National Register Advisory Committee (NRAC) advises Dr. Waters, as the State Preservation Officer, to nominate places for national register recognition, adding that five members of the NCHC serve on that committee. Ms. Bartos concluded by reporting that the NCGA is looking at repurposing the downtown Raleigh building in which the archaeology lab is

located and efforts are underway to try to figure out what options the Office of State Archaeology has should that come to pass.

Deputy Secretary's Report

Dr. Waters limited his report to thanking Mr. Backstrom and Mr. Zeher for their efforts to keep meetings of the Commission running smoothly.

Other Business

Mr. Ruffin opened the floor to other business. Dr. Johnson thanked staff and recognized the North Carolina Maritime History Council (NCMHC) for its 35th annual conference, extending a special thank you to Commissioner Snowden for her years of support of the NCMHC's endeavors. Dr. Johnson commended staff at the Fort Fisher visitors' center, where the conference was held, for the way they interpret its history, as well as to the Office of State Archaeology for its contributions to protecting sites and artifacts along the coast.

Ms. Snowden reported that she attended Virginia's conference marking the 250th anniversary of the Battle of Great Bridge, where evidence was presented that all of North Carolina's 17 northeast counties had soldiers at that battle. She also suggested, as a way to assist commissioners in their advocacy work on behalf of the department, that the OAH develop an identification or name badge that commissioners can wear to events they attend around the state.

Dr. Dennard thanked the division directors for the work they do. He asked Ms. Lanier whether her staff has had to take precautions about historical interpretation at state historic sites given the national "temperature" surrounding teaching what some feel is "bad history" along with their teaching of "good history." He also asked whether any of the work that DSHSP does has been affected by the activities of the U.S. Office of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). Ms. Lanier stated that none of the division's work has been affected by ICE activities. Regarding his first question, she said that the guiding principle of the DSHSP's mission is the "power of story." The narrative is guided by the messages received from Dr. Waters, Secretary Cashwell, and Governor Stein to "do your work and do it well." Resultingly, the division has received no undue negative influence regarding the telling of its stories to their fullest.

Finally, Mr. Ruffin noted that renowned historian Ken Burns offers state-by-state breakdowns of Revolutionary War events on YouTube.

Chair Announcements

Mr. Ruffin noted that traditionally he puts forth proposed dates for the following year's meetings of the Commission at this last meeting of the year. But he asked for the commissioners' indulgence for a week or two while he checks his schedule to be sure of dates that will work for him. He also stated his hope that at least two of the four meetings will be in person next year.

Adjournment

With business concluded, Dr. Johnson moved adjournment, Dr. Dennard seconded the motion, and following a vote the meeting was adjourned at 12:03 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

*[A final, post-edit version will be
presented for a signature]*

Darin J. Waters

Draft

North Carolina Historical Commission

Meeting Minutes

January 22, 2026

The North Carolina Historical Commission (NCHC, Commission) met via Zoom on Thursday, January 22, 2026. In attendance were commissioners: David Ruffin, Chair; Shana Condill; Dr. David Dennard; Dr. Sally Greene, Dr. Valerie Ann Johnson; Dr. Lawrence Locklear; Susan Phillips; and W. Noah Reynolds. Absent were commissioners Newell Clark, Dr. Susanna Lee, and Barbara B. Snowden.

Also in attendance were: Dr. Darin Waters, Deputy Secretary for Archives and History, Department of Natural and Cultural Resources (DNCR); Ramona Bartos, Director, Division of Historical Resources (DHR) and Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer; Renee Gledhill-Earley, Environmental Review Coordinator, North Carolina State Historic Preservation Office (HPO); Parker Backstrom, Office of Archives and History (OAH) administrative assistant and Recording Secretary for the NCHC.; and Matt Zeher, Information Technology facilitator.

The meeting was livestreamed on Microsoft Teams. Copies of all cited written materials can be found in the file for this meeting.

Call to Order and Conflict of Interest Statement

The meeting was called to order at 10:02 AM. The chair noted that he would call roll before welcoming the new members, which he did to establish the presence of a quorum, explaining that given the virtual nature of the meeting, all action items will be voted upon by way of roll call.

Given the matter at hand, the Chair asked the commissioners to state concerns any might have about a potential conflict of interest pertaining to the business at hand. Ms. Phillips stated that she wishes to recuse herself because her husband has business connections to Guilford County Schools.

Review of NC GS 121-12(a) Matter (Demolition and Reconstruction of Swann Middle School (formerly Charles B. Aycock School))

Dr. Waters asked Ms. Bartos to explain to the Commission the purpose of this meeting. Ms. Bartos thanked the commissioners. She then explained that N.C.G.S. 121-12(a) requires the Commission to weigh in and provide comments on any actions that would be considered having an “adverse effect” on properties that are listed on the National Register of Historic Places. In the case of the Swann Middle School, it is listed under the Summit Avenue Historic District.

The HPO provided the commissioners with written materials, including descriptions and photographs of the buildings in question and the proposed changes, in advance of this meeting. During her presentation Ms. Bartos shared those images during the meeting to make clear the school board’s planned actions. In this case, instead of a wholesale demolition, she explained, the school board proposes rehabilitating this property. She pointed out, though, that over time,

alterations have been made to the existing buildings and additions have been made to the complex. She shared both street-level and overhead views of the school complex showing both the main school building and the original cafeteria building, as well as the footprint of the original 1919 school, which no longer stands.

The original 1922 core school building (National Register-contributing) and Annex 4 (1981 cafeteria; non-contributing) would be left intact and not demolished. However, the following parts of the school would be demolished:

- Annex 1 (1957 gymnasium; not recognized as historic and therefore non-contributing)
- Annex 2 (1975 music building; not recognized as historic and therefore non-contributing)
- Annex 3 (1961 library; not recognized as historic and therefore non-contributing)
- Annex 5 (1928 cafeteria; National Register-contributing)

The proposed demolition of the 1928 cafeteria constitutes an adverse effect on the National Register-listed property. But Ms. Bartos has confirmed that the school board has already documented and photographed the 1928 cafeteria building, which is a typical recommendation prior to any demolition activity. So, while the loss of the cafeteria is regrettable, the retention of the core school building, said Ms. Bartos, is considered a “preservation plus.” With that, she said the Commission has the opportunity to provide comments to the Guilford County School Board on its proposed actions, via the HPO, if it so wishes.

Chairman Ruffin stated that he was reassured that most of the demolition would be to non-contributory buildings. He asked whether there was any opposition or controversy at the county or local levels. Ms. Gledhill-Earley replied that she is not aware of any local issues. She said that because the property is listed as a historically significant local resource, the board of education had to request a certificate of appropriateness from the Greensboro Historic Preservation Commission (GHPC) in order to carry out the demolition, which was granted. Ms. Bartos added that the GHPC process would have also required a public hearing. In addition, said Ms. Gledhill-Earley, the GHPC provided the HPO with not only documentation of the current resources but also the original plans for the building and a description of its development over time.

Commissioner Reynolds asked some questions about how to interpret aspects of the building’s construction, based upon an overhead photograph that Ms. Bartos showed, which Ms. Bartos and Ms. Gledhill-Earley answered to Mr. Reynolds’ satisfaction. They also confirmed for Mr. Reynolds that the plan currently calls only for removal and renovation of buildings, it does not include the addition of any structures to the building, adding that plans for any additions would also require a certificate of appropriateness from the GHPC and would come back before the NCHC for consideration.

Dr. Greene asked whether the plans for future use after renovation are for a school. Bartos replied affirmatively.

Dr. Dennard re-framed a fundamental question, asking for confirmation that these changes will not have any significant adverse effect on the overall integrity of the historic district. Bartos responded that he is correct, other than the removal of the original 1928 cafeteria. She said she is gratified that the original school building itself is being retained, given that so many of these types of matters brought to the Commission involve the complete removal of buildings such as this. Ms. Gledhill-

Earley added that she knows the school board is very serious about the protection of the archaeological site and has taken steps already to protect it, both during demolition and renovation and into the future.

In summary, Ms. Bartos reminded the commissioners that as a 121-12(a) matter, the HPO is not asking for any kind of approval from the Commission, only any comments it wishes to be sent to the school board pertaining to its plans for the school buildings. Dr. Greene suggested that the message be that the NCHC appreciates the emphasis on preservation and documentation that has gone into this proposal, and just the overall care that has been followed through this process.

Ms. Bartos concluded by saying that the HPO will generate the letter sharing the Commission's comments which will be signed by Dr. Waters on behalf of the HPO and the NCHC. Dr. Greene moved approval for such a letter to be drafted. Dr. Dennard seconded the motion, which was approved by roll call vote, with Ms. Phillips abstaining.

Chair Announcements

Next meeting will be March 19 and will be virtual unless otherwise communicated.

Adjournment

With business concluded, Dr. Dennard moved adjournment, Ms. Phillips seconded the motion, and after a vote the meeting was adjourned at 10:30 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

*[A final, post-edit version will be
presented for a signature]*

Darin J. Waters