

**TUMWATER HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION  
MINUTES OF HYBRID MEETING  
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**CONVENE:** 6:38 p.m.

**PRESENT:** Chair David Shipley and Commissioners Dave Nicandri, Rob Paylor, Alex Rossiter, Renee Radcliff Sinclair, Marnie Slakey, and Don Trosper.

Staff: Parks and Recreation Department Director Chuck Denney.

**INTRODUCTION** Chair Shipley welcomed and introduced new member Rob Paylor.

**OF**

**COMMISSIONER**

**ROB PAYLOR:**

Commissioner Paylor shared information on his background. He previously resided in Grays Harbor County and served as a member of the Historic Preservation Commission for the City of Hoquiam. He moved to Tumwater following his marriage a year ago and volunteers at the Bigelow House in Olympia. He is self-employed as a construction contractor.

Commissioners provided self-introduction and shared information about their respective backgrounds and service on the Commission.

**APPROVAL OF  
MINUTES: APRIL  
18, 2024:**

**MOTION:** **Commissioner Trosper moved, seconded by Commissioner Rossiter, to approve the minutes of April 18, 2024 as presented. A voice vote approved the motion unanimously.**

**PUBLIC  
COMMENT:** There were no public comments.

**OLYMPIA  
TUMWATER  
FOUNDATION  
UPDATE:**

John Freedman, Executive Director, Olympia Tumwater Foundation, updated members on the status of activities at the Olympia Tumwater Foundation.

Mr. Freedman announced his upcoming retirement effective December 16, 2024. He plans to continue supporting the Olympia Tumwater Foundation for several months on the history center proposal submitted to the Legislature as well as other issues at the Foundation to assist transitioning the position to the new director, Todd Cutts. Mr. Cutts serves currently as the Olympia Downtown Alliance Executive Director and has extensive experience and background in organizational skills.

Annette Pitts, an Olympia Tumwater Foundation Boardmember is moving to Wyoming. Ms. Pitts also serves as the Executive Director of Experience Olympia Thurston County Visitors Convention Bureau (VCB).

Fundraising is essential to the survival of Olympia Tumwater Foundation. Currently, the Foundation has liquid assets of approximately \$11 million.

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The funds in a trust account are restricted in use with most of the funds dedicated to the maintenance and operation of the Schmidt House. Approximately 4% to 5% is allocated annually to operate the Foundation. The Foundation's annual budget is \$1 million with \$500,000 received from the trust. Previously, the Foundation relied on the Schmidt Family, Olympia Brewing Company, and others to fund the difference. Most of those sources are no longer available requiring the Foundation to pursue other avenues to raise funds. One source is the City of Tumwater, which has contracted with the Foundation to provide a variety of services. Other entities have contributed funds. The Foundation plans to embark on a fundraising campaign next year. Fundraising is critical to the Foundation's long-term survival.

The proposed history and nature center originally estimated to cost \$8 million included an event center to host weddings and other community events. The design was changed to reduce costs to \$5 million. The focus has been redefined as an education center incorporating environmental and history education.

Recent surveys by the VCB reflect that over 30% of all visitors to the Brewery Park at Tumwater Falls live outside a 50-mile radius and over half of those are from outside the state. Visitors to the park account for approximately 3,000 hotel rooms equating to over \$500,000 in economic revenue. The park contributes approximately \$1 million annually to the local area economy.

The Foundation plans to add more interpretive signs in the park to recognize indigenous people and the environmental aspects of the estuary, the river, and Puget Sound. Safety rails are planned for installation along steep slopes. The park experienced a rockslide, which closed the trail. The Foundation learned that the area of the rockslide was not owned by the Foundation. All maps provided by the brewery reflected that the land was owned by the Foundation. However, research discovered that the property was essentially a handshake deal between the Foundation and the Brewery. Subsequently, after two years and \$50,000 in legal expenses, the Foundation now owns the property enabling clearance and removal of slide materials to enable reopening of the trail. Resurfacing of the trail system is planned. The Foundation was able to secure some lodging tax funds from the City for its history programs and park operations.

The Foundation's educational scholarship program began in 1967 and has awarded scholarships totaling over \$2.4 million to local students. The Foundation typically awards \$140,000 in scholarships each year and \$10,000 annually for grants and early learning and innovative programs that are not funded by the school districts. The History and Nature Center will serve as an important educational resource to both the community and schools. Criteria for the scholarship program limit the scholarships to

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graduating students residing in Thurston County attending a post secondary school within the state.

The Foundation continues to explore options for the best utilization of the Schmidt House. Several weddings are hosted at the House each year; however, events are restricted to 15 paid events because of the Foundation's tax status.

The History and Nature Center will provide educational opportunities on the environment, history, and indigenous people. The center will include an open interpretive area with rotating displays, interactive exhibits, and community space. The Foundation is working with the Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) and submitted a funding proposal of \$2.5 million to fund a learning center at the adjacent fishery facility.

Mr. Freedman shared a site illustration of the placement of the History and Nature Center. A new maintenance facility is located in the area of an existing storage shed with the new facility also housing the offices of the Foundation. Site improvements include expanded parking and a bus drop off area. He shared several design renderings of the new center that will incorporate indigenous interpretation, history of the Olympia Brewery Company, City of Tumwater, and a map of Puget Sound. The Foundation plans to work with underserved and underprivileged youths by offering free programs to the school district as well as STEM activities. The estimated cost of the new center is \$5.5 million with \$2.1 million awarded by the state. Another proposal included in the WDFW budget to the Governor is for \$2.5 million for the Fish and Wildlife Nature/Educational Center component of the new facility. The Foundation and WDFW should learn by March 2025 whether the funding proposal was approved. If no funding is received, the project would not move forward. The Foundation has received private funding pledges of approximately \$200,000 with the Foundation contributing another \$400,000 for a total amount of \$5.2 million. Funds from the WDFW are critical for the project to move forward. If funding is obtained, the Foundation would begin construction in summer 2025 with completion anticipated in 2026.

Mr. Freedman said he has enjoyed working with the Commission and the City of Tumwater.

Karen Johnson, Schmidt House Curator, updated members on activities at the Schmidt House over the last several years. History Talks attract most of the visitors to the Schmidt House. The Foundation offers history talks from January through May/June and then resumes them at the end of October. The History Talk in October focused on the history of the U.S. Flag. Commissioner Nicandri is scheduled to provide a talk in December on *The Evolution of the Northwest Passage as a Cartographic Image – 1753-1853*. Typically, the talks attract approximately 20 to 30 individuals. Future topics

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in 2025 include talks on *Gardening's Past, Gardening's Future* by Jill Severn, *Whatever Happened to Ambrose Asher?* by Dave Welch, a descendant of Ambrose Asher and a long-time member and officer of the Oregon-California Trails Association, *The 1883 Schwatka Expedition to the Yukon River* by local historian Dennis Larsen about the harrowing story of their five-month adventure, based on the explorers' journals, and *Spring Birds* presented by writer and long-time bird observer George Walter. Gary Ritchie is scheduled to present a talk on the history of roses.

In addition to presenting talks at the Schmidt House, Ms. Johnson said she has provided talks at the City of Lacey, local retirement communities, Olympia Regional Learning Academy, and civic clubs throughout the region. The Foundation also provides displays that are themed with various events. She was also featured on King TV discussing the Davis Meeker oak tree.

Ms. Johnson shared that she and former employee Paul Knight were filmed for a show on the Discovery Channel.

Other Schmidt House events during the summer featured Model A cars in July and Midsummer Night's Dream Faire in August. The events fund music scholarships for schools in Tumwater. The Schmidt House also featured three piano recitals for area music teachers and their students. Approximately 250 people attended the three events. The main room in the Schmidt House can accommodate up to 80-seated individuals.

The Schmidt House Centennial Rose Garden is maintained by volunteers with many of the volunteers aging out with only five volunteers remaining to maintain several hundred rose bushes. A partnership was established with WSU Master Gardener Program of Thurston County. In 2023, a workshop was featured of the Master Gardeners with food and drink. Subsequently, 12 master gardeners volunteered to help maintain the rose garden. This year, Schmidt House sponsored a rose photography workshop with Rich Baer, a nationally recognized photographer of roses, one of which was featured on a U.S. postage stamp. In April, the Schmidt House hosted *An American Revolution Exhibit* created by the American Battlefield Trust and the National Society Daughters of the American Revolution. The event featured exhibits in the house and auxiliary exhibits outside. The event attracted over 700 people during the multiple day exhibit of which 150 were students. The Schmidt House was one of only three venues in western Washington hosting the exhibit in 2024.

Ms. Johnson reported that several volunteers work with her on the archives located in the basement of the Schmidt House. One volunteer is focusing on framed art. The volunteer cleans and repairs many of the frames. Efforts are underway to catalog the art pieces on the museum database.

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The Schmidt House offers house tours with 21 tours hosted during 2024. The tours are offered every other Tuesday. The Foundation offers a virtual house tour on its website. The virtual tour was funded by a 2023 Thurston County Heritage Grant. The Foundation publishes the *Thurston County Historical Journal*. Next month, the 25<sup>th</sup> issue will be published. The Foundation also participates in the Tumwater Artesian Brewfest and the Tumwater Falls Fest.

The Foundation offers other services, such as historical research. Earlier in the year, the Foundation provided historical research on the Davis Meeker oak tree and the George & Isabella Bush property.

A small grant funded the renovation of the exterior first floor of the Schmidt House. The house was originally painted with paint containing lead. Throughout the years following numerous paintings, paint began bubbling as moisture leached from old siding. A paint company completely removed all old paint employing lead abatement procedures and repainted the house. A wheelchair lift was added to the west end of the front porch and a part of the garage was converted to an ADA restroom. The house is ADA accessible only on the first floor. Electrical was updated throughout the house as well as lighting. The area of the archives in the basement was expanded to increase space for materials. The project cost was \$350,000 of which \$110,000 was funded by the state.

Mr. Freedman noted that in 2025, the Foundation will celebrate its 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

Commissioner Nicandri asked about the amount of lodging tax the Foundation receives from the City. Director Denney responded that the City's Lodging Tax Advisory Committee evaluates each applicant and the amount of tourism an event attracts to the City. One of the largest recipients is the Olympic Air Show.

Commissioner Trosper inquired about the status of the Foundation supporting the operation of the Brewmaster's House. Director Denney reported the final payment for repairs to the House caused by the arson fire was recently approved by the City. All contents in the house were moved off-site after the fire. A substantial project is planned to move the contents back to the house. Staff discussed the project with Ms. Johnson during a recent lunch with the Daughters of the Pioneers at the Brewmaster's House.

Commissioner Trosper inquired about the status of the Daughters of the Pioneers with respect to operations at the Crosby House. Director Denney reported the house is under repairs to stabilize and repair the foundation and replace siding and gutters. The Daughters are using the Brewmaster's House during the repairs to the Crosby House.

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Commissioner Slakey reported on the Pioneer Cemetery event in September to honor the dedication by the Daughters and Sons of the Pioneers. The event was well attended. The event featured six pioneer graves and their respective histories and connections to Tumwater. She congratulated the City and the Parks and Recreation Department for participating in the event. Director Denney said the cemetery has increased in popularity with the City's website receiving over 400 inquires for the event as well as contacts through Facebook. The event was coordinated by Parks and Recreation staff and the City's volunteer coordinator.

**2025 PLANNING:**

Chair Shipley said the discussion will entail the Commission's meeting schedule and planning activities during 2025. He previously contacted Mr. Schrader regarding the Old Grange. He has not received any response from Mr. Schrader and plans to follow-up with another phone call. He would like to add the project to the schedule, as well as the Wickie Farm and the Hayden School. The intent is to post some signage at each location within either the interior or exterior of the structures. Mr. Schrader had indicated a need to follow-up with Starbucks to receive corporate approval. He is unsure of the status at this time. Another possible project is an inventory of historic sites in Tumwater. Shanna Stevenson had initiated a similar project many years ago.

Commissioner Slakey asked whether the City has a list of historic buildings designated as historic sites. Director Denney confirmed the City has documented all designated historic sites.

Chair Shipley noted that in the past, nominations to the historic register took time that often conflicted with other City priorities, as well as taking time by property owners to pursue the process. He suggested considering how the Commission could encourage property owners to list their historic properties. Property owners would be responsible for funding the historic marker. He cited Thurston County's historic listing process, which also requires the property owner or the petitioner to fund the sign. The City of Olympia does not require owners to purchase a marker for historic properties as Olympia funds the markers.

Director Denney noted that the Olympia markers designate the site as an Olympia homestead site.

Commissioner Nicandri said during the last meeting, the Commission was tasked to review issues surrounding the Davis Meeker oak tree. Director Denney has indicated the lack of staff resources to support the Commission's work, which is why he was surprised when the November meeting was scheduled. He spoke during a recent Council meeting and complained about the lack of Commission meetings and recommended the City provide resources or disband the Commission. He inquired as to what prompted the scheduling of this meeting and the agenda topic.

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Director Denney said the meeting was scheduled based on feedback from the Commission about the lack of any activities. Rather than pursuing a discussion on the issue, the topic was added to generate ideas by the Commission on projects of interest. Tumwater Municipal Code provisions dictate the Commission's role and responsibilities to list structures on the historical register, provide information and recommendation on historic issues, and approve or deny Certificates of Appropriateness.

Chair Shipley added that the Commission also supports educational opportunities for the public.

Discussion ensued on any additional staffing resources for the 25/26 budget. Director Denney said most staffing requests from directors were denied because of an anticipated budget shortfall.

Commissioners and staff discussed the lack of resources to support the work of the Commission. Commissioner Troster noted that the Commission serves in an advisory role to the Council. The Council has not requested advice except for the issues encountered with the Davis Meeker tree. Director Denney replied that the City has a Planning Commission, Parks and Recreation Commission, Tree Board, and the Historical Preservation Commission. The City Council is considering the addition of an Equity Commission without adding additional resources. A future discussion with the Council will focus on priorities and the roles of the various boards and commissions as advisory bodies to the Council. He anticipates those conversations with the Council to occur in 2025 but until then, the department will continue to support the Commission's work.

Commissioner Nicandri shared that he often speaks very candidly to the Council during the public comment period at meetings. He spoke to the Council recently and informed the Council that the Commission only meets when there is some "dirty work" the Council wants the Commission to address, such as the oak tree. No productive outcome could be achieved spending time discussing the Commission's work plan when staff resources and a commitment to implement actions are lacking. Unless something changes regarding the availability of Director Denney and staff resources, he does not see any point in discussing the Commission's work plan. He added that he often openly ridicules the Council because of the Council's treatment of the Commission.

Commissioner Slakey offered that a step that may be necessary is formulating a plan for submittal to the Council for its support, which should serve as a measure as to how serious the Council deems the role of the Commission.

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Chair Shipley noted the Commission's budget each year is \$10,000. The Commission has spent some of the budget on a donation to the old brewhouse.

Discussion followed on the possibility of contracting support or seeking assistance from the Olympia Tumwater Foundation. Director Denney said the City contracts with the Foundation to assist in historic programming; however, it might be possible to increase the amount for assistance to the Commission. The Foundation provides tours of the Schmidt House, History Talks, and research when requested for the archives of the Brewmaster's House.

Commissioner Nicandri supported contracting with the Foundation for staff support. He supports pursuing efforts to place more historic signs in the City, which requires no infrastructure and limited staff resources. He cited examples of signs for the Oregon Trail and the Pacific Coast Highway as the City has extensive transportation infrastructure history.

Staff and the Commission discussed the City's budgeting process and sources of additional funds through grants and community fundraising for programs and special events.

Commissioner Rossiter cited a potential project of a mural on the freeway wall along Deschutes Parkway. The project received some support by the Council but he is uncertain as to the status of the proposal. The project could be of historical significance, such as recreating an historical photograph of the City that could serve as an attraction to other historic areas of the City. Another project he supports is a City gate or welcome archway over Old Highway 99 at the City boundary.

Commissioner Slakey supported the gate/archway project as there are many cities across the nation that feature similar structures, such as Las Vegas and Reno, which are visited by millions of people each year. Visitors are greeted by signs welcoming them to the city. The historic nature of Tumwater could be displayed in some kind of sign or gate that welcomes people to Tumwater.

Chair Shipley added that during his travels, he has viewed many entry signs into cities. Today, the City lacks any welcoming signs to the City. Many towns in California often appear to be competing through the placement and the type of welcoming signs.

Commissioner Slakey suggested sponsoring a contest with high school or college students to design an entry/welcoming sign reflecting the historic nature of Tumwater.

Commissioner Nicandri addressed the fundamental problem of the lack of resources to support the Commission. Potential solutions could include



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using the Commission's budget to hire support or transferring the funds to another department that has the staffing resources to support the Commission's efforts, such as the street department.

Commissioner Nicandri asked about the identity of the current Director of the Public Works Department. Director Denney advised that after Jay Eaton retired, the Department was split into the Transportation and Engineering Department and the Water Resources and Sustainability Department. Brandon Hicks is the Director of the Transportation and Engineering Department. He had previously served as the Assistant Director under Jay Eaton.

Commissioner Nicandri asked about the amount of funds the City expends annually for the maintenance of the Crosby House and the Brewmaster's House. Director Denney advised that maintenance is ongoing at both houses. Within the next year, the City will expend approximately \$400,000 to repair the Crosby house foundation and replace siding and gutters.

Commissioner Nicandri complained that the City is spending \$400,000 on a white elephant. The City has two such white elephants which approximate \$500,000 a biennium to maintain, are not open to the public, and the City lacks the funds to maintain. Each biennium, money is invested in the two sinkholes. He suggested the City should seriously consider selling both houses.

Commissioner Rossiter inquired about the process for transferring the Commission to the Transportation and Engineering Department for supporting the Commission. Commissioner Nicandri surmised that it likely would entail either the Mayor or the City Administrator documenting the change attaching the Commission to the Transportation and Engineering Department. He suggested the Commission could offer a motion.

Commissioner Slakey suggested action transferring the Commission to another department would likely not result in any additional staff resources or hours devoted to historical issues. The City is experiencing a serious budget issue and staff resources have been reduced. It is important for the Commission to be practical and pragmatic. Complaining will not result in any positive outcome. She would prefer the Commission move forward constructively and explore possibilities the Commission could pursue. The Parks and Recreation Department has served the Commission well for many years and like other departments are facing a difficult time with limited staff resources. It may require the Commission to be creative in generating some support for some historical projects. Some great ideas were offered by Commissioners for an entry/ gate that should be pursued.

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Commissioner Sinclair said she supports the entry/gate proposal, as it is nearly impossible to distinguish where the City of Olympia ends and the City of Tumwater begins.

Commissioner Slakey recommended the Commission generate some proposals to pursue some of the suggested projects that would also afford an opportunity to meet on a regular basis.

Commissioner Nicandri asked for some technical assistance to develop a slide show for a presentation on a proposal for a series of transportation-related markers. Director Denney affirmed that staff could provide some support.

**OTHER BUSINESS:** Chair Shipley suggested acknowledging the service of John Freedman with a letter thanking him for his service in support of the City of Tumwater.

**MOTION:** **Councilmember Nicandri moved, seconded by Commissioner Slakey, to request a letter to John Freedman recognizing and thanking him for his service to the Olympia Tumwater Foundation. A voice vote approved the motion unanimously.**

**NEXT MEETING DATE:** The next meeting is scheduled on January 16, 2025.

**ADJOURNMENT:** **Commissioner Sinclair moved, seconded by Commissioner Nicandri, to adjourn the meeting at 8:12 p.m. A voice vote approved the motion unanimously.**