

Assessment Report: Historic Heritage Grants 2016-2022

January 27, 2023

Oak Ridge's Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) is proud of its Historic Heritage Grants and appreciate Ann Schneider's role in its conception and early execution. This innovative approach to protect and save a small town's historic structures, both within and beyond the limits of our Historic District, has been called a model for other North Carolina towns.

Our Historic Heritage Grants have helped owners of historic properties to complete critical repairs which might not otherwise have been possible. The grants also help motivate property owners to assess needs, and to plan repair and restoration projects. The process serves to strengthen and preserve Oak Ridge's rich historic heritage and delivers value to our town. The requirement that property owners contribute at least an equal amount in matching funds – which they often exceed – ensures that the town doesn't bear the full burden of these improvements. This approach is consistent with state statute and affords the town a strategy for contributing to the preservation of its Historic District, which has been called Oak Ridge's signature achievement by former resident and noted preservationist William Schmickle. A copy of the 2022 materials for the grants is attached.

A summary assessment of the successes and challenges of the Historic Heritage Grants is provided below, followed by a series of recommended changes to the program based on our experiences with and observations of grant projects, as well as feedback from property owners.

Successes

In the first six years of the Historic Heritage Grants, we disbursed \$22,800 in grants to support \$125,435 in structural and exterior improvements for 15 projects at key historic properties in Oak Ridge. This represents average annual grant disbursements of \$3,800, leveraging an average of \$17,106 per year in matching funds. Overall, the matching funds represent an impressive 5½-fold impact or a 4.5:1 return on the Town's investment. (These figures do not include grants in the current fiscal year, since grant funds have not yet been fully paid out, pending receipt of final grant reports.) A list of the projects supported follows, and a financial summary of grant amounts and matching funds leveraged is attached.

2016

\$2,000 awarded to the Oak Ridge Foundation to support the repair and restoration of the front and side entrances of Alumni Hall (1914), one of the primary buildings at the Oak Ridge Military Academy and part of the Oak Ridge Military Academy Historic District. Alumni Hall is also a key contributing structure to the Oak Ridge Historic District.

\$2,000 awarded to Gary and Myra Blackburn to support reconstruction of balustrades atop the porch roofs on both sides of the Larkins House (c. 1933) and replacement of window awnings to match early photos of the house. The Larkins House is a contributing structure in the

Oak Ridge Historic District and was recognized by the Town of Oak Ridge with a historic marker in 2016.

\$1,000 awarded to Theresa Hammond and Roy Nydorf to support the restoration and replacement of exterior window shutters for the front and sides of the Sanders-Blaylock House (c. 1815), which is a Guilford County Historic Landmark located just outside the Oak Ridge Historic District. The Sanders-Blaylock House was recognized by the Town of Oak Ridge with a historic marker in 2008.

\$250 awarded to Barry and Susie Westmoreland to support the replacement of the front half of the roof of the J. L. Sawyer House (c. 1919) with shingles designed to mimic the dimensional appearance of the original cedar shake roof. The Sawyer House is a contributing structure in the Oak Ridge Historic District and was recognized by the Town of Oak Ridge with a historic marker in 2014.

2017

\$2,000 awarded to the St. James African Methodist Church to make much-needed architectural repairs to the church's bell tower and windows. The church site was purchased in 1889 by Oak Ridge's oldest African American congregation. Its sanctuary served as a classroom for African American students until a schoolhouse (no longer extant) was built nearby, circa 1915. The cemetery behind this historic church includes graves from early 1900s.

\$2,000 awarded to Amy Klug to clean and repaint the Old Mill of Guilford's iconic red waterwheel. The original water-powered mill was built in 1767 and later moved downstream in 1818 to the current structure. It is among the oldest operating gristmills in the country and is included on the National Register of Historic Places

\$800 awarded to Frank and Linda Kelleher to restore the historic entryway of the Mattie Benbow House. Built c. 1920, this modest Dutch Colonial home once served as the parsonage for the local Methodist Church and is located in the Historic District.

\$300 awarded to Samantha and Scott Dell to restore the c. 1935 tobacco barn at 4405 Stafford Glen Court in Oak Ridge. The small barn was once used to cure tobacco on the Tilley Farm. Secondary structures like this tobacco barn are rapidly disappearing from our local and state landscape and are an important reminder of the agricultural and rural roots of our community.

2018

2,000 awarded to the St. James African Methodist Church to make architectural repairs to the church's soffits and fascia's and to paint the entire structure. The HPC recruited volunteers to help wash, scrap, caulk, and paint the Church.

\$2,000 awarded to Amy Klug to restore the stone wall on the Old Mill of Guilford property which lines a road that once connected Alcorn Road to what is now NC 68. The road is an integral part of the mill's history and has been photographed countless times.

2019

\$2,000 awarded to Kyle and Anna Smythe for Brick re-pointing and installation of chimney caps at the Charles Benbow House. The home, built circa 1823, is a rare example in Guilford County of a brick structure built pre-Civil War, is listed on the National Register of Historic Places, and is among the show places of the Historic District.

\$2,000 awarded to Drew Donnell to support the restoration and repair of the original skylight and install new roof shingles on the D.L. Donnell Stone House. Built in 1923, the D. L. Donnell (Stone) House was originally a log house (c. 1900s). After it burned, D.L. Donnell re-built using locally gathered stone.

2020

\$2,000 awarded to Amy Klug to restore the Old Mill of Guilford's Stone Steps that lead to the creek. The stone steps are an integral part of the mill's history and have been photographed countless times.

2021

\$700 awarded to Amy Klug to restore the Old Mill of Guilford's Stone Retaining Wall. The stone wall serves as a retaining wall that protects the below-grade storage area. The area near the retaining wall was replanted by the Oak Ridge Garden Club.

\$2,000 awarded for an out-of-cycle award to Ralph and Joyce Biggs to stabilize the foundation of the H. C. Garner House. The house was built in 1918 by Harry and Mary Stack Gardner and in recent years has served as a commercial property. It is a contributing structure in the Oak Ridge Historic District. Maintaining and finding viable uses for historic structures ensures their preservation and the town's historic heritage.

2022

\$1,400 awarded to Drew Donnell to remove a tree trunk and dead branches at the Donnell Stone House. The tree trunk displaced a gabled roof on the 99-year-old home and dead branches were a hazard to the structure. The Donnell Stone House is a contributing structure in the Oak Ridge Historic District. *(Project not yet complete, so grant funds not yet disbursed.)*

\$2,000 awarded for an out-of-cycle grant award to the Oak Ridge Foundation for the Front Porch restoration of Maple Glade. Maple Glade is one of the jewels of the Oak Ridge Military Academy Campus. The home is often used for school photographs, such as Graduating Class Members, and the graduation ceremony is held on the front porch. *(Project complete, but grant funds not yet disbursed pending receipt of final grant report.)*

Challenges

Grant Timeline Issues:

Scheduling with specialized contractors and suppliers can be difficult for property owners. Over the years, the Historic Heritage Grants Committee (HHGC) has heard of the difficulties property owners have had in scheduling estimates provided by specialized contractors and suppliers in time to make a grant application under our March deadline. There are also times when a property owner's project schedule – and the availability of contractors and supplies – does not align with our grantmaking schedule, which requires that projects start after July 1 and are completed in approximately nine months. Occasionally, difficulty in securing the required matching funds has also caused delays. In addition, we have received a few requests for out-of-cycle grants when unforeseen issues have arisen that require urgent attention for a variety of reasons. In rare cases, delaying the start of a project may lead to further property damage. In the current economy, a delay may entail increased costs or difficulty in securing a contractor. Fortunately, with Town Council's approval, we have been able to fund two out-of-cycle grant requests over the past few years.

Application Numbers:

We have received an average of 3.2 applications per year, highlighting the ongoing challenge of encouraging historic property owners to take advantage of the Historic Heritage Grants. Often, the greatest challenge for property owners is putting together the required project estimates and having funds available for the required match.

Recommendations

Increase Grant Amount:

The maximum annual grant amount of \$2,000 has not changed since the inception of the Historic Heritage Grants in 2016. As we move forward in this changing economy, the HHGC would like to request that the maximum annual grant amount for non-profit property owners be increased to \$4,000, while increasing the maximum annual grant amount for all other applications to \$3,000. If these increases are approved, we would request an increase in annual grant funding for the program from \$5,000 to \$8,500. We believe this increase will help motivate historic property owners to initiate renovation and restoration that will benefit our community.

Increase Flexibility for Grant Applications:

The HHGC would like to continue its consideration of grant applications under an annual deadline, while adding the option to submit applications at other times of the year, so long as the applicant can provide a clear justification. In cases where the justification is not clear, we would encourage applicants to submit under the annual deadline. We understand that this change will require careful management of our grant budget in order to ensure that funds are available when needed. Since peer review is essential to the consideration of all applications and to upholding the Historic Heritage Grant program's high standards, we would shift to an

annual agreement with our outside reviewers, whereby we could call on their expertise whenever we accept an application. Currently, we pay two reviewers \$100 each annually; in recognition of their service and willingness to accommodate out-of-cycle applications, we propose increasing this amount to \$150 each (for a total of \$300 annually).

Encourage More Applications:

In several cases over the past few years, HPC members have worked closely with potential applicants to help them develop eligible projects and locate specialized contractors and suppliers appropriate to their project. Moving forward, we plan to continue and possibly increase our efforts in this area by targeting potential projects and reaching out to property owners.

Conclusion

The Historic Preservation Commission and Historic Heritage Grant Committee appreciate this opportunity to submit our assessment of the Historic Heritage Grant program. We welcome questions and comments from staff and Town Council, and hope that our recommendations will be approved. We believe this program plays a vital role in our community and that the recommendations included in this report are in our town's best interests.

Attachment:

Historic Heritage Grants 2016-2022: Financial Summary

Historic Heritage Grants 2016-2022: Financial Summary for Assessment Report

January 27, 2023

Year Grantee	Grant Award	Anticipated Project Cost	Actual Matching Funds	Approved Expenditures	Project Description
1 FY 2016-17					
Alumni Hall ORMA - Oak Ridge Foundation	\$2,000	\$16,000	\$19,500	\$21,500	Restoration of front and side entrances
R.P. Larkins House - Blackburn	\$2,000	\$7,000	\$5,350	\$7,350	Reconstruct balustrades
Sanders-Blaylock House - Hammond & Nydorf	\$1,000	\$5,000	\$4,239	\$5,239	Restore window shutters
J.L. Sawyer House - Westmoreland	\$250	\$2,800	\$2,625	\$2,875	Replace front half of roofing
Annual Totals	\$5,250	\$30,800	\$31,714	\$36,964	
2 FY 2017-18					
Tobacco barn - Dell	\$300	\$2,000	\$2,177	\$2,477	Restore tobacco barn
Stafford/Linville House Steps - Kelleher	\$800	\$1,600	\$1,120	\$1,920	Restore historic entry steps
Old Mill - Klug	\$2,000	\$4,000	\$2,580	\$4,580	Clean & paint water wheel
St. James AME Church	\$2,000	\$3,000	\$1,000	\$3,000	Restoration of bell tower
Annual Totals	\$5,100	\$10,600	\$6,877	\$11,977	
3 FY 2018-19					
St. James AME Church	\$2,000	\$4,853	\$4,949	\$6,949.00	Soffit and fascia repairs and paint entire church
Old Mill - Alice Y. Klug	\$2,000	\$4,269	\$2,269	\$4,269.00	Stone wall repair
Annual Totals	\$4,000	\$9,122	\$7,218	\$11,218	
4 FY 2019-20					
Charles Benbow House - Smythe	\$2,000	\$8,675	\$29,441	\$31,441	Repointing bricks, restore and caulk windows
Donnell Stone House - Donell	\$2,000	\$9,250	\$8,878	\$10,878	Skylight restoration, repair roof & replace copper flashing
Annual Totals	\$4,000	\$17,925	\$38,319	\$42,319	

5	FY 2020-21						
	Old Mill - Klug		<u>\$1,750</u>	<u>\$3,500</u>	<u>\$2,450</u>	<u>\$4,200</u>	Restore stone steps
	Annual Totals		\$1,750	\$3,500	\$2,450	\$4,200	
6	FY 2021-22						
	Old Mill - Klug		\$700	\$1,400	\$700	\$1,400	Restore stone retaining wall
	H.C. Gardner House - Biggs		\$2,000	\$17,357	\$15,357	\$17,357	Out-of-cycle grant - Replace structural foundation beam
	Annual Totals		\$2,700	\$18,757	\$16,057	\$18,757	
7	FY 2022-23						
	Donnell Stone House - Donell*		\$1,400	\$2,800	TK	TK	Tree removal from roof and house
	Maple Glade ORMA - Oak Ridge Foundation*		\$2,000	\$4,450	TK	TK	Out-of-cycle grant - Maple Glade front porch restoration
	Annual Totals		\$3,400	\$7,250	\$0	\$0	
			\$26,200	\$97,954	\$102,635	\$125,435	
		<i>Average annual totals for 2016-2022</i>	\$3,800.00		\$17,105.83	\$20,905.83	
		<i>Average grant amount for 2016-2022</i>	\$1,520.00				

* Awaiting grant report; grant funds not yet disbursed