

September 25, 2018

To: Chapel Hill Mayor and Town Council

From: Historic District Commission

Subject: Recommendation to the Town Council for Appointments to Fill  
Two Historic District Commission Seats

In its September 24, 2018 meeting, the Historic District Commission voted unanimously to recommend the appointment of John Sweet and David Schwartz to serve on the Commission.

I am providing this memorandum to inform you of the reasons discussed and relied upon by the Commission for these recommendations.

**David Schwartz** is a lifelong Chapel Hill resident and UNC graduate who has deep personal and professional experience, training and expertise involving the core issues the Historic District Commission grapples with as a quasi-judicial body charged with preserving the special character of each of the Town's three local Historic Districts. Over the years, David has lived in two of the Town's three Historic Districts—McCauley-Cameron and Franklin-Rosemary—but now makes his home and raises his family outside of the Town center in the Little Ridgefield neighborhood. A year ago, the Mayor and Council expressed their desire to see a diverse group of Town residents appointed to the Commission, including people who live in a variety of neighborhoods in Chapel Hill. Schwartz's nomination honors this guidance.

In addition, David Schwartz brings valuable professional expertise to the work of the Commission. As a Ph.D. in the field of environmental psychology, Dr. Schwartz has unique expertise in the "the psychological processes that underlie how people experience the natural and built environment, and how the design of the built environment affects individuals' psychological functioning and well-being." Chapel Hill recognized this relationship between the built (and unbuilt) environment and people's lived experiences when it concluded that each of the Town's current Historic Districts has a distinctive special character that was worth preserving for future generations. The most challenging aspect of the Commission's public business as a quasi-judicial body is to review evidence and consider arguments about the relationship between proposed changes and each District's "special character." Dr. Schwartz brings extensive academic training and professional expertise to this process. In recommending Dr. Schwartz, with his expertise in environmental psychology and the built environment, we are mindful of the requirement in State law (160A-400.7) that "A majority of the members of such a commission shall have demonstrated special interest, experience, or education in history, architecture, archaeology, or related fields." In addition, Dr. Schwartz would bring to his work on the Commission a longstanding interest in local history, architecture, and urban design.

**John Sweet** is an historian at UNC as well as a homeowner within the Franklin-Rosemary Historic District. He recently completed a partial term, serving as an HDC member from early 2016 through June 2018. John brings to his work on the Commission deep professional expertise. A prize-winning

historian, John is the author or editor of numerous books and articles, including *Bodies Politic: Negotiating Race in the American North* (2002), *Envisioning an English Empire: Jamestown and the Making of the North Atlantic World* (2005), and *Biography and the Black Atlantic* (2014). He received his Ph.D. in 1995 from Princeton University and his work has been recognized by a series of post-doctoral fellowships and other major grants from institutions that include Hopkins, Brown, Penn, Yale, National Humanities Center, the Mellon Foundation, and the National Endowment for the Humanities. As an associate professor in UNC's Department of History, John teaches a range of classes on Colonial, Revolutionary, and Early National North America, the history of sexuality, and the histories of slavery and of the trans-Atlantic slave trade. In recent years, he has taught a First Year Seminar on the history of Chapel Hill's cultural neighborhoods and landscapes.

During his time on the Commission, Sweet has served as Deputy Vice Chair and as Vice Chair, and since the fall of 2017 has led an HDC committee tasked with updating the Commission's Design Guidelines. In this role, John has worked closely with members of the town's Planning Department staff and developed new relationships with officials in the North Carolina State Historical Preservation Office in Raleigh, whose involvement and experience are critical to this project.

At the same time, John has also been working to bring up-to-date and make accessible basic documentation about the Town's Historic Districts and the historic resources within them. So far, he has led a \$3,300 collaboration between the Town, the Webb Foundation and Preservation Chapel Hill, that hired a consultant to update existing materials and complete missing documentation and inventories of historic resources within the Gimghoul, Franklin-Rosemary, and McCauley-Cameron Historic Districts—a project that was completed on schedule in May 2018. And, he has organized volunteers to make high-quality scans of hundreds of photographs images from the last major inventory of Chapel Hill's historic resources, conducted by Mary Beth Gatza under the direction of Catharine Bishir in 1992. So far, all of the photographs from Gimghoul and Franklin-Rosemary have been scanned and the scanning of the McCauley-Cameron photographs has begun. Cognizant of the requirement in the Town's LUMO Chapter 8.6. that the Town update its maps of historic resources within Historic Districts periodically, John is also working with experts on GIS story-maps at UNC and hopes during the fall semester to develop a website to make these resources freely available.

Meanwhile, John has led an HDC committee working with Town Planning staff to develop a proposal for revisions to the LUMO involving the Historic District Commissions, including a series of productive Committee meetings over the course of the summer.

The Commission is pleased to be able to recommend to the Council two high qualified applicants who embody both the kinds of expertise emphasized in state law and the variety of perspectives the Council has in the past sought. Dr. Sweet's professional contributions to the work in progress to revise our Design Guidelines, update our inventories of historic resources and make them available through a public GIS interface, and to revise the HDC provisions of the LUMO are important to the work of the HDC at this time. We are also confident that Mr. Schwartz will bring deep experience, dedication to public service, and professional expertise to this Commission.

These appointments will bring our current membership to nine. My personal recommendation is that the tenth seat be left vacant, and that the permanent membership of the Commission be reduced to nine, so as to avoid the potential for tie votes. I note that Council's current rules—prescribing that five votes are sufficient for Boards and Commissions to take any action – make possible the curious result

that action might be deemed taken by a tie vote of 5-5. By reducing our membership to nine members, Council will have fixed this problem.

Finally, we are glad to have received a number of recent applications, and will undertake to invite these applicants to appear and introduce themselves at our coming meetings, so that they may experience and appreciate the work done by the Commission. Even so, it will greatly advantage our work to proceed with the appointments recommended last night by the Commission, so that we can bring our full membership to nine, and thus help assure the attendance of a quorum at our regular meetings.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Robert Epting". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent "R" and "E".

Robert Epting, Chair  
Historic District Commission  
Deputy Chair, Chapel Hill Historic District Commission