



MEMORANDUM

DATE: January 10, 2024
TO: Deschutes County Board of Commissioners
FROM: Tanya Saltzman, AICP, Senior Planner
RE: Historic Landmarks Commission Update – Recruitments and Reappointments

Staff seeks Board of County Commissioners (Board) approval for appointment of three new Historic Landmarks commissioners and one new ex-officio commissioner, as well as direction on reappointments of current commissioners.

I. HLC OVERVIEW

Since 2011, the HLC has served as an advisory body for issues concerning historic and cultural resources for unincorporated Deschutes County and the City of Sisters and reviews development applications for alterations to designated historic sites and structures. The cities of Redmond and Bend have independent historic preservation review bodies. The Deschutes County Comprehensive Plan Section 2.11 Cultural and Historic Resources and Deschutes County Code (DCC) Chapter 2.28, Historic Preservation and Historic Landmarks Commission, establish the legal basis for the HLC.

II. BACKGROUND

Until recently, the HLC had five voting members and one ex-officio member. In spring of 2023, two committee members—including the then-Chair—resigned and another, longtime Commissioner Sharon Leighty, passed away. Staff initiated recruitments for all three positions to coincide with May Preservation Month. Low interest caused staff to extend the recruitment one month until the end of June, and then again until August 15. Recruitments were posted on the HLC website and social media, the CDD e-newsletter, and promoted via staff’s professional networks. Ultimately only two applications were submitted for the three open positions.

On November 1, 2023, the Board held a public hearing¹ concerning legislative options to temporarily suspend the HLC in times of low participation, giving review authority to the Planning Division.

¹ <https://www.deschutes.org/bcc/page/board-county-commissioners-meeting-138>

Ultimately, the attention from the public arising from the hearing generated a new wave of support and interest in the HLC, as evident in the testimony provided. The Board then directed staff to reopen the recruitment once again for a month, during which time 10 additional applications were received, for a total of 12.

Staff assembled a selection committee comprised of two current HLC members, the Director of the Deschutes County Historical Society, and the Community Development Director from the City of Sisters. The committee conducted 9 interviews on January 5 and 8 and selected three potential new commissioners, plus an ex-officio member.

II. COMMISSIONER CANDIDATES SELECTED

New HLC Candidates

The selection committee agreed that the caliber of the nine applicants who met the basic criteria was extremely high and selecting only several was quite a challenge. The majority of applicants were retired or semi-retired, with experience ranging from military and high-level federal government jobs to academia to hands-on preservation. Many had experience in various types of committees or volunteer organizations and several also had experience applying code criteria to decisions. Many emphasized the need for outreach and education. Overall, the quality and enthusiasm of the applicant pool suggested an exciting new revitalization of the HLC to come.

Ultimately the three finalists selected by the committee are as follows:

1. **Lore Christopher (Sunriver area):** Lore has extensive experience in the city of Kiezer with its heritage museum and with the preservation of the old Kiezer School. She is eager to pursue outreach activities and her enthusiasm for preservation is underscored by her enrollment in many preservation- and museum-related classes.
2. **Eli Ashley (Tumalo area):** Eli applied during the initial recruitment for the HLC. His experience restoring historic theaters—most notably in Tacoma—will be invaluable to the group, as well as his familiarity with Deschutes County historic resources. Eli also brings a familiarity with boards, governance, and bylaws.
3. **Marc Hudson (Three Rivers):** Marc comes from a conservation and planning background throughout the country, currently working for the Oregon Agricultural Trust, and has significant experience with historic landmarks commissions and similar bodies. He is interested in issues of indigenous heritage and resources, as well as rural/agricultural heritage and has hands-on preservation skills as well.

Please note that the term duration of the new commissioners vary according to what position they would be filling, as all were vacated mid-term. Those terms are outlined in the final section of this memo.

Request for Additional Ex-Officio Member

Another candidate, Lillian Syphers, presented an opportunity for the Board to appoint an additional ex-officio member. Lillian, who applied during the initial recruitment period, possesses a lifelong interest in historic preservation beginning when she grew up in Klamath Falls, and currently is employed by the County Clerk's office. While she aims to gain more knowledge regarding historic preservation, the selection committee was impressed by her desire to expand public outreach and communication strategies beyond what has been done before and to explore new methods to reach a wider audience. The selection committee placed a high value on these goals, particularly given the recent challenges facing HLC participation, and considered an ex-officio position to be the most appropriate fit.

Deschutes County Code (DCC) 2.28.040 allows for ex-officio members as follows:

2.28.040 Administration

A. The Landmarks Commission is composed of five voting and an undetermined number of ex-officio members.

- 1. The voting members must reside within the County.**
- 2. The membership of the Landmarks Commission shall, to the extent possible, be representative of the various geographic areas of the County.**
- 3. The Mayor of Sisters may appoint one Commissioner to represent the City of Sisters or delegate it to Deschutes County.**
- 4. The Board shall appoint at least four Landmarks Commissioners.**
- 5. If the City of Sisters delegates their appointment to Deschutes County, the Board shall appoint a fifth Landmarks Commissioner.**
- 6. The ex-officio members shall be appointed by the Board.**

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D. Ex-Officio Members.

- 1. In addition to the five voting members, there shall be an undetermined number of Commissioners called "ex officio members" who will act in a non-voting, advisory capacity to the Landmarks Commission and County staff.**
- 2. These ex officio members shall not be entitled to vote and are not required to reside within Deschutes County.**
- 3. These persons shall be representative of organizations including, but not limited to, the United States Forest Service, United States Bureau of Land Management, the County building division, the American Institute of Architects, the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs, Bums Paiute Tribe, and Klamath Tribes.**

The HLC currently has one ex-officio member, Chris Horting-Jones. Allowing a second ex-officio member would round out the HLC to seven commissioners total, which staff believes is manageable logistically and desirable for its opportunities for multiple voices and experiences.

Reappointments

In addition to the recruitment of new commissioners, all three existing current commissioners have terms that are due to expire on March 31, 2024. Staff seeks Board approval for their reappointment for an additional four-year term for each.

IV. RECOMMENDATIONS

Staff recommends the Board approve the following:

New appointments:

1. Lore Christopher: term beginning immediately until March 31, 2026
2. Eli Ashley: term beginning immediately until March 31, 2026
3. Marc Hudson: term beginning immediately until March 31, 2024 (filling existing remainder of term) with immediate reappointment to March 31, 2028

New Ex-Officio appointment:

1. Lillian Syphers: New 4-year term ending January 17, 2028 (or March 31, 2028 to be consistent with others if possible)

Reappointments of current commissioners:

1. Rachel Stemach: reappointment until March 31, 2028
2. Dennis Schmidling: reappointment until March 31, 2028
3. Chris Horting-Jones (Ex-Officio): reappointment until March 31, 2028