

Katie Woodruff and the Town Staff should be commended on Staff Report
By John Samuel Graves, III

Grandson of John Samuel Graves, Sr., the original owner of the Graves House.

Katie Woodruff, Neighborhood Preservation Planner and Project Manager for the Staff Report on the Petition to Demolish the Graves House, is to be commended for the completely “dead on” findings of her report. It is a model of sanity and measured thinking. The BHPC had this Staff Report before them on May 2, 2012 when they voted to allow the Graves House to be demolished. If the members of the commission had read and digested the Staff Report it is hard to imagine how they could have found for demolition! Some of Katie’s and the staff’s findings are:

“Town Staff finds that the application as proposed is not consistent with the principles set forth in the Old Town Bluffton Master Plan. The Old Town Master Plan states that *the built environment, in particular the historic structures scattered throughout Old Town, should be protected and enhanced.*”

“The Old Town Master Plan encourages preservation of historic structures and states that *decisions made now, and in the future, should be driven by preservation and protection. It is good for maintaining the community character and quality of life that makes Old Town what it is today, and it contributes to the economic success and stability of the Town.*”

As for the two engineer’s reports presented at the BHPC meeting the Staff Report states:

“Both reports recommend removal of the existing structure instead of renovation. However, **neither report demonstrates beyond reasonable doubt that the structure is in complete failure.** As a result, it is the opinion of Town Staff that the structure is redeemable.”

One engineer’s report states that “the rear addition of the Graves House is in a state of complete failure.” The Staff Report replies:

“As this addition is not part of the original structure, Town Staff would support the removal of the addition and construction of a new, perhaps larger addition in accordance with the Architectural Standards in Article 5 of the Unified Development Ordinance. Additionally, the porch is in poor condition with few salvageable materials. Town Staff would also support the removal of the porch provided it was reconstructed to match the existing porch in style, size and material.”

As to the importance of the Graves House:

“Town Staff finds that the structure is of importance to the Town of Bluffton. Demolition of the structure will negatively impact the character of the surrounding area as the existing structure has historic, architectural and aesthetic significance.”

The final word of the Staff Report: “Town Staff recommends the Historic Preservation Commission deny the application to allow the demolition of the Contributing Structure located at 85 Calhoun Street.”

The city staff stood firm and did the right thing for the Graves House, the Graves family and the town of Bluffton. The Graves family is forever grateful. On the other hand, the BHPC, except for two members, for whatever reason, chose to ignore the city’s Staff Report. **The most astonishing vote to demolish came from the President of the Bluffton Historic Preservation Society!** The story of the vote to demolish the Graves House is one of the saddest episodes in Bluffton’s recent history. Once these old contributing structures are taken down they are gone forever. Over 104 years of history were destroyed by two people in just a few minutes time! (The vote to demolish was 5-2. If just two more commissioners had chosen not to demolish, the house would have been saved!)

The single most egregious fact about the vote to demolish the Graves House is this: the BHPC participated in, and indeed made it possible for “developers” to “flip” the property beneath a contributing structure for extreme personal profit at the cost of condemning the historic structure itself. This reason alone should have garnered a unanimous vote against demolition!

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