



METROPOLITAN HISTORICAL COMMISSION

METROPOLITAN GOVERNMENT OF NASHVILLE AND DAVIDSON COUNTY

METROPOLITAN HISTORICAL COMMISSION (MHC) SPECIAL CALLED MEETING MINUTES September 14, 2026

The Special Called Meeting of the Metropolitan Historical Commission was called by Chair Linda Wynn for 12:00 p.m. in the Conference Room of the MHC office, Sunnyside in Sevier Park, 1113 Kirkwood Avenue, with the purpose of discussing proposed changes to the Certified Local Government Program for Metropolitan Nashville and Davidson County.

Attendance

Commissioners: Dr. Clay Bailey, John Bridges, Gary Burke, Dr. Don Cusic, Kaitlyn Jones, Dr. Jane Landers, Sandra Parham, Betsy Phillips, Dr. Marisa Richmond, and Chair Linda Wynn were present. Jay Brothers, Dr. Erica Hayden, Dr. Bill McKee, Vice Chair Laura Rost, and Tom Wood were not present.

Staff Members: Caroline Eller, Scarlett Miles, and Trevor Porter were present. Justin Marsh (Metro Legal) was present.

County Historian: Dr. Lea Williams was present.

Guests (present but not speaking): Steven Elliott, Erica Gilmore, Hannah Herner, Ann Roberts, Robin Zeigler

- I. CALL TO ORDER, ROLL CALL, AND WELCOME – *Chair Linda Wynn*
Chair Linda Wynn called the meeting to order at approximately 12:07 p.m. She verified that a quorum was present after the roll call of attendance. Two commissioners arrived after roll call.
- II. PUBLIC COMMENT
Chair Wynn opened the floor for Public Comment. Seeing no members of the public wishing to speak, Chair Wynn moved on to the next agenda item.
- III. DISCUSSION OF CERTIFIED LOCAL GOVERNMENT PROGRAM PROPOSAL
Chair Wynn invited Executive Director Caroline Eller to lead the initial discussion

about proposed changes to the Certified Local Government (CLG) Program operations for the Metropolitan Government of Nashville and Davidson County. First, Director Eller recognized Justin Marsh, attorney with the Department of Law. Mr. Marsh has attended MHC meetings in the past and is serving as legal counsel for the MHC.

Director Eller began the discussion with a quick overview of the CLG program, which was established through 1980 and 1992 amendments to the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966. She also detailed CLG requirements and benefits. The City of Nashville's original CLG agreement dates to 1985 and is one of the earliest in the state. The agreement was revised in 1996; it designates Ann Reynolds, former director of the Metropolitan Historical Commission, as the CLG contact. Later, the former director of the MHC [after Ms. Reynolds] delegated the CLG contact to the former historic zoning administrator when historic zoning was still under the department, in part to address historic zoning-specific questions on the CLG annual report.

Director Eller then recounted recent events leading to the meeting today. Earlier this year, she asked the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO)/Tennessee Historical Commission (THC) to add the MHC to the CLG contact list. The list is informal and doesn't particularly align with Nashville's CLG agreement in that it had the former historic zoning administrator as the contact. Due to divided oversight between MHC and MHZC, the SHPO did not have any issues with having two CLG contacts for Nashville. On August 27, Director Eller was contacted by the Mayor's Office Chief of Operations due to concerns regarding CLG notifications related to the Capitol Hill Redevelopment District National Register of Historic Places nomination, which came before the MHC at its August 2025 meeting, and concerns that the Planning Department and TDOT [Tennessee Department of Transportation] were not notified about it. Director Eller explained to the Mayor's Office what the MHC duties are as part of the CLG program and noted that the SHPO is responsible for National Register notifications. As an aside, THC staff confirmed that notifications for the Capitol Hill Redevelopment District nomination were sent to the Mayor's Office, MHC, and Tennessee Department of General Services, who passes it along to TDOT, as the State is the owner of the Victory Memorial Bridge. The Mayor's Office responded the next day by saying that they had decided to designate historic zoning/planning staff as the CLG contact. That email did not detail any restructuring or changes to the Commission's authority or role, but it says that the contact would be tasked with "fully ensuring coordination" with Director Eller and her team "on the relevant aspects of the CLG." The following week, Director Eller received an email from the Metro Planning Department Assistant Director which contained a forwarded message that was sent to the Metro Historic Zoning commissioners. It announced a new preservation policy analyst position that would focus on developing preservation policy, advancing long range preservation planning, coordinating with the Historical Commission and its staff, and overseeing Certified Local Government

responsibilities on behalf of Metro Nashville. This includes National Register, preservation grants, Section 106, CLG reporting, and any additional responsibilities the CLG designation carries. The email also stated that the Mayor's Office had contacted the SHPO with directives about how Metro Nashville will engage with the CLG program and new processes for the Historic Zoning Commission [National Register nomination recommendations to the State Review Board].

Director Eller's concerns are that this restructuring does not align with the MHC and the MHZC duties as outlined in the Metro Code, does not align with the CLG agreement from 1996, and is not supported by the content of the 2025 Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) [established when Historic Zoning staff and roles were placed under the Planning Department in 2025]. CLG Update was placed on the draft agenda for the MHZC's September 16 meeting without the knowledge or input of the Historical Commission. This restructuring may strip MHC of the ability to make independent decisions about historic resources and create public confusion, especially regarding National Register nominations going through a design review board. The meeting today is to discuss the proposed restructuring and review a draft commission statement to be sent to the MHZC, Planning Director, Mayor's Office, and Metro Council.

Commissioner Richmond asked if this proposal originated from within the Planning Department or somewhere else. Director Eller responded that it is unclear. She had the initial discussion with the Mayor's Office contact on that staff member's second to last day with Metro and has had no further communications within Metro about the matter except from the Planning Department's email, which was sent to her after it was sent to the Historic Zoning commissioners.

Commissioner Jones [MHC representative to the MHZC] reported that she received the email from Planning that was sent to the MHZC. The email referred to a directive from the Mayor's Office. She asked if Metro Government is the CLG and does the Mayor's Office decide how the agreement is administered. She also asked if the MHC's statement is directed at the Mayor's Office and what additional communications the MHC has had with the Mayor's Office. Director Eller reported that her last direct communication with the Mayor's Office was on August 28. Commissioner Jones asked if the Mayor's Office is the CLG, is this their decision to make. Director Eller acknowledged that the 1996 CLG agreement says that the CLG is the City of Nashville, not Metro Government, indicating the outdated nature of the agreement. However, the issue is more than a CLG contact issue, it is about the restructuring of roles and responsibilities across departments and moving one commission's roles to another without discussing the matter with the commission members or the department's staff.

Commissioner Phillips asked how the restructuring wasn't discussed with the MHC and expressed concern that this is a power grab by the Planning Department. She

questioned how one commission can take the duties of another commission without review and approval by the Metropolitan Council. She asked Mr. Marsh if there is any precedent for one commission taking over the duties of another commission without discussion with the other commission. Mr. Marsh said he is not aware of any precedent for this. Commissioner Phillips asked if it was legal. Mr. Marsh said Metro Legal hasn't found anything in the Metro Code that speaks to this. The Charter mentions interactions with other bodies but doesn't expressly state that communications must go through the MHC. Commissioner Phillips said the Code appears to put these responsibilities with the MHC. She reiterated concerns that Planning is reorganizing these responsibilities without discussion, and the Mayor also believes he can reorganize these roles, but the Metro Council has not had the opportunity to review these changes. She expressed feeling disrespected and angry.

Commissioner Jones asked where in the Code the CLG duties are outlined. Director Eller said these types of duties would not be contained within the Code, for MHC or otherwise, because the code is general. Mr. Marsh agreed. Commissioner Phillips asked if they were addressed in the agreement with the State. Director Eller pointed out that the Code, 2.12 8.060, does speak to Powers and Duties and those which are listed are related to Section 106, National Register, and architectural survey. Chapter 2.13 0.020 regarding MHZC doesn't indicate any plan for preservation staff beyond historic zoning staff at the Planning Department.

Commissioner Phillips asked how the Preservation Policy Analyst position will differ from the Historic Zoning Administrator. Director Eller said it was her understanding that this position would focus on developing preservation policy, advancing long range preservation planning, coordinating with the Historical Commission and its staff, and overseeing Certified Local Government responsibilities on behalf of Metro Nashville, plus additional bullet points within each program area. It will be outside of Historic Zoning but within the Planning Department.

Davidson County Historian Dr. Williams [also a sitting member of the MHZC] expressed concerns that this is a lot of responsibility for one person (the Preservation Policy Analyst role), responsibilities of the MHC are being drastically reduced to a few programs and an advisory position only, which the analyst doesn't have to listen to, as he reads the position description. Dr. Williams stated that he does not support this. He would like to know who came up with the plan to move these responsibilities.

Commissioner Phillips asked Mr. Marsh if Metro Legal's stance is that this is above the board. Mr. Marsh responded that in reviewing Federal and State Laws and the Metro Code, they have not found anything illegal about changing the point of contact for the CLG. Commissioner Phillips asked about the legality of the restructuring of duties from MHC to Planning. Mr. Marsh said the Code speaks to general powers and not a point of contact. The CLG agreement is with the local

government. Commissioner Landers asked about the MOU if it is just an agreement and doesn't have legal weight. Director Eller pointed out that under Division of Duties, Section II.9, the MOU states the Historic Zoning Administrator will consult with the MHC Executive Director regarding National Register eligibility when reviewing demolition permit applications, and steps followed during the 90-day hold. Section V.4 states that Planning will ensure the MHZC is provided with all necessary training to maintain its status as a CLG [though the city, not MHZC, is the CLG]. She reiterated that the CLG agreement with the city and this provision only speaks to fulfilling the MHZC's training requirements.

Chair Wynn asked if the changes will negate the CLG agreement. Commissioner Phillips pointed out that by naming Ann Reynolds, a paid staff member of the Metro Historical Commission, as the CLG contact that the CLG duties were placed in this department. Mr. Marsh replied that the agreement also says the local government shall notify the SHPO if the contact changes. Additionally, because the agreement names a specific person, it does not clearly specify the department.

Director Eller reiterated that this is about more than a change on a contact list, this concerns a change in a commission's authority and how the MHC operates, requiring it to coordinate its programs through an outside party in another department.

Commissioner Jones said that she couldn't speak to how this was communicated, acknowledging that it appears it was not well-communicated, but this sounds like a new position that will span the Planning Department and the MHC and bring everyone together. Commissioner Phillips expressed concerns that this position meant to span departments is in Planning, and why not put the position with the MHC.

Chair Wynn expressed concern about the communication about these changes, rather the lack of communication and collegiality, and what it indicates for interdepartmental communications going forward. Commissioner Phillips stated this feels like a takeover, and Commissioner Landers mentioned the lack of respect.

Commissioner Jones asked if there has been any additional communication with the Mayor's Office or Planning to bring leadership together. Director Eller reported that this all happened within a matter of days, from a question about NR notification to a new position and commission role restructuring, so she has been working to explore the MHC's options. She does have a meeting set for next week with the MHC's new contact in the Mayor's Office. She has also reached out to the State Historic Preservation Officer, Miranda Montgomery, for clarification about the current CLG agreement.

Commissioner Bailey asked how this item is noted on the MHZC's agenda for September 16. It just says "CLG Update." Chair Wynn and Commissioner Landers

expressed that the “update” may actually be a “done deal.” Presumably it is moving forward now without any discussion, and several commissioners expressed concerns about the lack of discussion and courtesy. Commissioners also expressed concerns about the reduction in programming of the MHC and what is next on the long-term agenda. Chair Wynn stated that everything appeared to work well until the last year or two and now there seems to be a problem with how the MHC has been administering preservation programs. Dr. Williams wondered who would be setting Nashville’s preservation priorities. Commissioner Phillips responded Planning, apparently. She again expressed concern that these changes have been made without consultation. Chair Wynn expressed concern that with regard to National Register nominations, Planning will be focused on architectural criteria and not the history criteria. The MHZC is a design review board. Commissioners also discussed CLG grants, clarifying that grant funds are distributed to the MHC and not a Metro General Fund. Commissioners questioned who will now manage grants that have been recently awarded and/or are awaiting contracts. A lot of MHC’s work has been funded by grants and this leads to more questions.

Commissioners discussed next steps, whether a public relations campaign was appropriate. With the item being on the MHZC agenda in just two days, the MHC decided to issue a statement. Director Eller presented a draft statement for the MHC to review [copies were in the packets at each commissioner’s seat], which she read aloud. Commissioners offered various comments to amend the draft statement.

IV. VOTE ON COMMISSION STATEMENT

Commissioner Richmond moved to approve the draft statement as amended. Commissioner Phillips seconded, and the motion passed. Commissioner Jones abstained from the vote.

V. ADJOURNMENT

Commissioner Landers moved to adjourn the meeting. Commissioner Cusic seconded. Chair Wynn adjourned the meeting at approximately 1:16 pm.

Respectfully submitted Monday, September 21, 2026.
Scarlett C. Miles

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