

Historical Advisory Committee (HAC) Minutes
March 11, 2026
Meeting held at Centennial Park in Port Charlotte

Committee Members

Deborah Fitch
Karen Hartman-Absent
Dianne Munson
Theresa Murtha
Clare Riggs- Absent
Pat Spence
John Valickas

County Staff – Libraries & History

Jennifer Zoebelin
Mechelle Simes

County Staff – County Attorney

Tom David

Public Attendees

Commissioner Stephen Deutsch
Gene Murtha

Roll call

Dianne Munson does the roll call; We have a quorum.

Approval of minutes

Diane Munson calls for approval of the December minutes. John Valickas seconds. Motion passed 5-0

Citizen Input

Gene Murtha- Suggested engaging Charlotte–DeSoto Builders Association for technical guidance and potential contractor participation. Shared successful public–private partnership models (e.g., AC Freeman House, History Center’s early collaboration with Team Punta Gorda).

Member Input- NA

Agenda Items:

Meeting Location Update (Future HAC Meetings)

Update from Staff (Jennifer):

Mid County Regional Library is slated to reopen late April/early May. This will be the last HAC meeting at the current location; plan is to return to Mid County for future meetings (likely starting with June). Time remains the same; staff will confirm for June.

Action Item (Jennifer): Confirm June meeting room at Mid County Regional Library and notify HAC.

Meeting Cadence (Frequency & Annual Schedule)

Discussion—Members debated quarterly vs. every other month.

Concerns: limited agenda items, seasonality (summer travel), maintaining continuity.

Motion (Theresa, 2nd by John): Move HAC to bimonthly meetings (every other month), aiming to skip summer months, using an initial schedule of five meetings per year.

Initial schedule adopted:

March, May, September, November, January (the following year)

(Discussion acknowledged that Nov–Feb gap is 3 months but aligned with holiday season.)

Vote: Passed 4–1

Decision: Adopt bimonthly cadence with the initial five-meeting schedule.

Outreach & Public Information Materials (Flyer)

Context: Claire (absent) designed a double-sided flyer to promote local history resources (county branding, marker information pulled from website).

Motion: (John, 2nd by Theresa) Accept the flyer layout/content “as proposed,” recognizing it uses existing county website content.

Discussion: Some members had not fully reviewed the paper copy during the meeting; consensus to proceed and allow edits if needed later.

Vote: Passes 5-0

Decision: Proceed with Claire’s flyer.

Action Items:

Jennifer: Email the PDF to HAC members. Print copies for events, History Center, and library usage. HAC Members: Review and send any minor edits back to staff.

County Markers & Website Access

Discussion:

Historical markers listing is on the county website; some members reported difficulty finding it (esp. on tablets).

Access notes:

Live Oak Park marker currently inaccessible pending park reopening.

Airport marker address adjusted due to renovations.

External statewide marker database may include incorrect attributions (e.g., Hickory Bluff mounds attribution to DAR)—county to review/clarify.

Action Items:

Jennifer: Show members where marker info lives on the website (post-meeting).

HAC Members: Propose corrections/updates for external databases; consider a committee effort to audit public data for accuracy.

Marker Replacement — Placida Bunkhouse

Context: Existing historical marker at the Placida Bunkhouse is 20 years old and includes an erroneous phrase (“trail-side stop and interpretive center”) that did not come to fruition; sign shows wear.

Staff Guidance: Replacement of county markers is feasible; typical lead time 6–9 months.

Motion (John, 2nd by Theresa): Replace the Placida Bunkhouse marker with updated wording (removing the outdated phrase).

Vote: Passes 5-0

Decision: Proceed with marker replacement (updated wording to be drafted).

Action Items:

Jennifer:

Initiate replacement order (acknowledging 6–9 months).

Draft revised text and route for HAC review/approval.

HAC Members: Provide content suggestions; ensure historical accuracy and clarity.

Fundraising Authority & Process (County Attorney & Fiscal Guidance)

Legal/Fiscal Summary (Jennifer & Tom David):

HAC is authorized by ordinance to raise funds for preserving historical structures and amenities—either general fund or project-specific donations—subject to county fiscal controls, administrative oversight, and any Board-required approvals.

HAC decisions to raise funds should be made by motion and vote to create a clear public record. Donations must be made out to the Board of County Commissioners and will be deposited into a dedicated project line (within History Services budget).

Use of funds ultimately requires appropriate Board authorization; HAC can recommend expenditures.

In-kind services/construction (e.g., donated roofing) require appropriate agreements, insurance, permits, specs, and potentially a public–private partnership structure.

Commissioner (Steve Deutsch):

Suggested exploring partners (e.g., Mosaic for phosphate heritage, Seminole Gulf Railway), and possibly using an existing 501(c)(3) as fiscal agent to simplify donations and qualify donors for tax benefits.

Emphasized the need for a plan, design, governance, and Board-approved framework before fundraising or contracting work.

Public Comment (Gene):

Suggested engaging Charlotte–DeSoto Builders Association for technical guidance and potential contractor participation.

Shared successful public–private partnership models (e.g., AC Freeman House, History Center’s early collaboration with Team Punta Gorda).

Decisions:

No formal votes recorded in this section; consensus to pursue fundraising with a clear governance process and potential 501(c)(3) partner.

Action Items:

HAC (John):

Draft a fundraising plan for the Placida Bunkhouse (scope, budget ranges, governance, donor designation language, fallback use of funds if project stalls).

Identify potential partner 501(c)(3) to serve as fiscal agent (or use county donation line if preferred).

Begin stakeholder outreach (Mosaic, Seminole Gulf Railway, Charlotte–DeSoto Builders Association, local foundations).

County Attorney (Tom):

Advise on agreement templates for donor services/in-kind contributions and fundraising governance language.

Commissioner Deutsch:

Available to meet/advise on plan structure and Board presentation.

Jennifer:

Coordinate on project line setup and administrative path for HAC-designated funds.

Field Trip (Site Visit) — In Lieu of a Meeting

Discussion:

Staff can provide a 15-passenger van; field trip would occur in lieu of a regular meeting (no votes taken during the trip).

Past trips ran 9:00 AM–12:00 PM with multiple historic sites.

Potential stops suggested: Placida Bunkhouse, McCall cattle/Doc Point, Civil War skirmish site, El Jobean historic district, cemeteries, trailhead sites.

Decision: Tabled to next meeting for selection and logistics.

Action Items:

All members: Propose sites and logistics; confirm availability for a 3-hour window on a second Wednesday.

Interpretive Sign — Placida Bridge Tender Site (On Water)

Context: A previous waterway marker was vandalized twice and removed. Members still wish to commemorate the bridge tender house location (photo shows last train leaving Boca Grande by the trestle).

Staff caution: On-water installations are vulnerable; requires coordination with parks, sign shop, and possibly administration/Board for feasibility.

Motion: (Theresa and 2nd by John) Recommend installing interpretive signage (not a historic marker on land), with wording to be refined by staff and HAC.

Vote: Passed 5-0

Decision: Move forward with a feasibility check for interpretive signage at/near the trestle location (installed to minimize vandalism and align with county standards).

Action Items:

Jennifer:

Confirm sign shop capability and installation feasibility; coordinate with parks/admin.

Draft interpretive text and share for HAC review.

HAC Members: Provide text edits and placement suggestions (including anti-vandalism considerations).

Meeting Adjourned 9:58am

Next meeting is on March 11, 2026, at 9am, in the Centennial Park large conference room in Port Charlotte. All HAC meetings throughout 2025 will be held here.