

Gimghoul Neighborhood Association

September 11, 2007

Mayor Kevin Foy
Town of Chapel Hill
Mayor's Office
405 Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.
Chapel Hill, NC 27514

Re: Petition to Change Representation Criteria for the Historic District Commission

Dear Mayor Foy:

On July 12, 2007, the Historic District Commission declined a petition by a Gimghoul resident to tear down a dilapidated structure, and turn it into green space. The vast majority of the neighborhood, as well as the Neighborhood Board of Directors supported the petition.

Although we disagree with the decision, it is the tone and attitude of the Historic District Commission members that are especially troubling to us. Several of the Commission members were arrogant and dismissive of our neighbor's views and opinions, stating:

"...sometimes people don't know what they have when they are so close to it. "

"If residents are willing to condone tearing down houses that are not in tip top shape, it makes me question that neighborhood's worthiness in being designated as a local historic district."

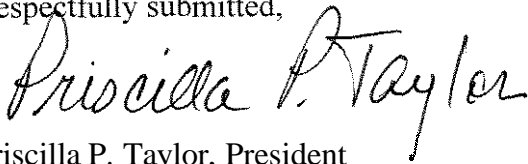
We, respectfully, disagree. From the very inception of the neighborhood in the 1920's, we enacted strict covenants to protect our neighborhood. For eighty-five years—long before there was an Historic District Commission-Gimghoul residents have shown that we know our neighborhood is a special place and that we know how to protect its unique character. It is presumptuous of the Commission to suggest that they must protect us from ourselves.

The Gimghoul neighborhood values our historic district status—both local and national. But we will not tolerate the kind of unacceptable comments and attitudes that were displayed by Commission members on July 12. In becoming an historic district, we entrusted enormous powers over our lives and our homes to the Historic District Commission. In return, we expect to be respected and valued partners in matters affecting our neighborhood.

Other issues of concern are detailed in the attached letter the Gimghoul Neighborhood Association Board sent to the Commission.

As a result of the hearing on July 12, the Gimghoul Neighborhood Board of Directors has deliberated over recommendations which will improve the review process for other Historic District proposals. We have come to the conclusion that the Commission's makeup should have more representation from those who actually live in the historic districts. We believe that more historic district residents on the Commission would give a better balance and perspective to the petition process, given the unique challenges of living in, supporting and caring intensely about neighborhood change and development. Therefore, we petition the Town Council to change the requirements for membership to the Commission so that a majority of the Historic District Commission members must reside in the historic districts.

Respectfully submitted,



Priscilla P. Taylor, President
For the Board of Directors
Gimghoul Neighborhood Association

Board of Directors:

Linda Folda

Pamela Heavner

Gretchen MacNair

Elston Miles

Vicki Panott

Gene Pease

Jim White

Catherine B. Williams

Hugh Wrigley

(Board member Benjamin Brodey abstained because of his position as Chairman of the HDC)

Attachment: Gimghoul Neighborhood Association Letter to the Historic District Commission

Gimghoul Neighborhood Association

September 11, 2007

Dr. Benjamin Brodey, Chair
Chapel Hill Historic District Commission
716 Gimghoul Road
Chapel Hill, NC 27514

Re: 734 Gimghoul Hearing, July 12, 2007

Dear Dr. Brodey and Historic District Commission members:

On July 12, 2007, the Historic District Commission did not approve the Biese application to demolish the dilapidated structure at 734 Gimghoul Road and turn the lot into green space. While the neighborhood disagrees with the Commission's decision, this letter is not about that decision—which you have the authority to make. Instead, this letter is in reference to the dismissive tone and condescending comments made by Commission members during the hearing. The Commission clearly needs reminding of the charge that we as citizens take when we volunteer for board work in Chapel Hill:

Public Charge: The Board pledges its respect to the citizens of Chapel Hill. The Board asks its citizens to conduct themselves in a respectful, courteous manner, both with the Board and with fellow citizens.

We are especially concerned that certain members of the Commission were arrogant and belittling in their disregard of the neighborhood's point of view. The Gimghoul Board of Directors took great care in its deliberations and in soliciting feedback on the demolition. The vast majority of the neighborhood supported the petition and stated so in writing. No one voiced opposition. The neighborhood Board voted unanimously to support the petition.

Quotes from the hearing show Commission members dismissing our opinion and questioning our values and credibility:

"...sometimes people don't know what they have when they are so close to it. "

"If residents are willing to condone tearing down houses that are not in tip top shape, it makes me question that neighborhood's worthiness in being designated as a local historic district. "

We, respectfully, disagree. From the very beginning, we have instituted covenants to protect our neighborhood. In the 1920's, the original deeds from the Order of the Gimghouls contained the then unusual restriction that a local committee of the Gimghouls shall review the exterior plans, cost, and location of any house that is to be built or altered. In 1950, the covenants were modified and strengthened. And in 1984, the covenants were further clarified, amended and strengthened. In each instance, the purpose was and continues to be the retention of the single family residential character of the neighborhood. Today, over three-fourths of the original houses remain and are well maintained.

For eighty-five years—long before there was an Historic District Commission—Gimghoul residents have shown that we know our neighborhood is a special place and that we know how to protect its unique character. Please don't presume to tell us that you must protect us from ourselves.

Additionally, we are truly offended by the lack of sensitivity and respect shown by the commission to some of our most loved and valued neighbors. In reference to a letter of support from Bernice Wade and Barbara Stiles, the following comment was made:

"Just because they (referring to the neighborhood representatives at the hearing) trot out the ages of the two oldest residents of the neighborhood that support it, it doesn't mean anything, because they don't have the same perspective of the value as the entire community. ..

Bernice and Barbara are the "twins" who have lived on Gimghoul for 50 years—surely they have a long term perspective on what is good for the neighborhood. Bernice and Barbara are truly our standard bearers in promoting and protecting the character of our neighborhood. They are so well respected that, in 2005, Governor Easley bestowed on them the highest civilian honor that can be granted in North Carolina, the **Order of the Long Leaf Pine**. To dismiss their opinion so blithely is, again, arrogance on behalf of the Commission.

The Gimghoul neighborhood values our historic district status—both local and national. But we will not tolerate the unacceptable comments and attitudes that we experienced from the Commission on July 12. In becoming an historic district, we ceded enormous powers to the Historic District Commission. In return, we expect to be respected and valued partners in matters affecting our neighborhood.

As a result of the hearing on July 12, the Gimghoul Neighborhood Board of Directors has deliberated over recommendations which will improve the review process for other Historic District proposals. We have come to the conclusion that the Commission's makeup should have more representation from those who actually live in the historic districts. We believe that more historic district residents on the Commission would give a better balance and perspective to the petition process, given the unique challenges of living in, supporting and caring intensely about neighborhood change and development.