

Planning Commission hears history lesson on Polegreen Church

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The Hanover Planning Commission and citizens in attendance learned about some local history at the Commission's June 19 meeting.

The Commission was considering and ultimately approved a Conditional Use Permit amendment to allow for site lighting at the Historic Polegreen Church's memorial church structure, located near the corner of Rural Point and Pole Green roads.

Del. Chris Peace of Mechanicsville was present to represent the Historic Polegreen Church Foundation, the applicant of the CUP case.

The Foundation's mission, according to Peace, is to "preserve and interpret a very important archaeological site in Hanover County."

He added, "We have acquired 112 acres around the archaeological site and systematically set about to move houses and return the view shed to its colonial

look."

At the request of Planning Director Michael Crescenzo, Peace took the opportunity to briefly explain the history of the site.

"It was named Polegreen after George Polegreen, who was a large landowner in the area of the 18th century," Peace stated.

"It became historically significant during the 1740s and the Great Awakening, when Hanover dissenters, mostly Presbyterians, challenged the established Anglican Church and risked imprisonment—risked fines from the local magistrate—to actually worship freely where they so chose."

Baptists in Chesterfield at that time were undertaking similar activities, Peace noted.

"The local congregation recruited a young minister from up north named Reverend Samuel Davies, who became one of the first licensed ministers that were non-Anglican in the colony," he continued.

"One of his young parishio-

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ners was Patrick Henry, who was brought there by his mother, who was a dissenter, which posed a unique problem for their family, because his uncle — his namesake Patrick Henry — was a reverend of the Anglican Church in this area. So he was a revolutionary person from a little boy all the way up until he gave that famous speech, 'Give me liberty, or give me death.'"

Peace commented, "Hanoverians can be proud that this was really the beginning, and the spot that marks the beginning of the successful struggle for religious and civil liberty.

"Politicians in Richmond don't always act unless the people want them to, and so Reverend Davies and his congregation there used the grass roots organization of their church and others to put the pressure on the Virginia legislature to pass the Statute of Religious Freedom, which as we now enjoy it is incorporated into the First Amendment of the United States Constitution."

Peace concluded, "I like to think that those first freedoms that we all enjoy as Americans and around the world as inspiration started here in Hanover County. It's a very special

place, and we welcome people from the community, both those who worship and have a faith of some kind and those who don't, because that's the freedom that we enjoy in America."

Before the vote on the CUP amendment, Ashland District Planning Commissioner Steve Trivett asked, on behalf of a citizen, why there was a desire to light the site.

Peace responded, "One, we've placed a flagpole on the site. As you know, if you want to fly an American flag, it needs to be lit.

"Two, Hanover County has, I think, a very wise night sky ordinance, and what we have proposed is down-lighting, illuminating the church so that people, as they pass by, will be able to see it in the evening.

"But certainly the plans are not to point light up in the air, but it will be tastefully done, and I think something that would really set it apart from other historic sites."

The CUP amendment passed with a 6-0 vote. Henry Commissioner Elizabeth Moorhouse was absent.

More information about the Historic Polegreen Church Foundation is available at www.historicpolegreen.org.