



## Amid Poll, state committee votes to not stall 'Historic District'

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For *THE BEE*

As the Eastmoreland neighborhood Poll ballots were coming in at Southeast Uplift, and just as this issue of *THE BEE* was preparing to go to press, the State Advisory Committee on Historic Preservation held a hearing in Eastmoreland to consider whether the controversial Historic District proposal should be stopped or delayed – and

Members of the State Advisory Committee on Historic Preservation looked at data and listened to testimony at a three-hour public hearing on the Eastmoreland Historic District proposal, February 17 at the Eastmoreland Golf Course clubhouse. (Photo by David F. Ashton)

voted against doing so. More details of how this came about at the end of this story. But first, continuing the Historic District story from our last issue. . .

Not in the recent history of *THE BEE* has publishing a story about an ongoing neighborhood controversy caused such an uproar as did the article written by editor Eric Norberg in the January issue about the January mailing of the Eastmoreland Neighborhood Association (ENA) Historic District Poll ballots.

The timing of the mailing of the Poll ballots reported in the article was based on preliminary information at deadline and was, at the time, set for the week of January 16.

When the polling ballots weren't received as quickly as some neighbors expected, acrimony rose to new heights, even including threats of financial ruin to this publication – made no doubt in the heat of emotion by otherwise upstanding residents of Eastmoreland.

So, here is the actual Poll mailing time line:

- **January 15** – The Poll document is finalized by the ENA Board of Directors and the Poll Committee. Instead of being sent immediately to the mailing company as originally announced and planned, the document undergoes a final review.
- **January 19** – The final Poll document is approved at an ENA Board Meeting.
- **January 20** – The finalized Poll document is sent to the mailing company, AdMail, a well-respected service firm. AdMail creates a computer image of the documents, merges the customized information with the text, prints the documents, inserts them in envelopes, and makes sure the mailing is stacked in postal carrier route order, as is required for bulk mail.
- **January 26** – Four working days after the Poll document was received, AdMail confirmed to *THE BEE* that the mailing project had been taken to the Commercial Mailing Unit of the U.S. Postal Service, and successfully mailed.

To the surprise and dismay of both the recipients and the Poll Committee, when Eastmoreland residents did receive the Poll, each Poll ballot had been customized with the name of the recipient.

“The document we submitted, as agreed to by the Committee and the Board, did *NOT* contain a field [a space to merge in information] for the recipient name at the top of it,” ENA Treasurer and Poll Committee Chair Robert McCullough told *THE BEE*. “The instructions we gave them were to insert a coded number at the bottom of the Poll that could be used by workers at Southeast Uplift – to which recipients were to return the poll for tabulation – simply to verify that it was a legitimate ballot return. The Poll ballots were to be anonymous.

“To AdMail, this was a complex mail-merge project, and they simply misunderstood,” McCullough added.

- **January 30** – After learning of their error, AdMail at its own expense sends a postcard to all Poll recipients, requesting they cut the identifying information off the top of the document before returning it to Southeast Uplift.

Meantime – the Poll aside – at public meetings, in letters to the editor, and in well-produced websites, both sides of this contentious issue have clearly set forth their data and reasoning for either supporting or objecting to a large portion of Eastmoreland officially becoming an “Historic District”, and we review them here. . .

The concerns of those who **oppose** the establishment of an Historic District include, but are not limited to, in no specific order:

- The eclectic neighborhood of homes in Eastmoreland does not embody distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction; does not represent the work of a master; and/or does not possess high artistic value;
- The process seems “rushed”, without good reason;
- Lack of clarity of what percentage of neighbors have to respond to the Poll for the Poll result to be valid;
- The results of the Poll are “advisory”, and not binding;
- State-level rules regarding Historic Districts are in flux;
- Many homeowners wonder why their highly altered homes are deemed historic or “contributing”;
- The process of establishing an Historic District seems inherently undemocratic; homeowner consent is automatic, unless they file a notarized objection (which many have done); and,
- Establishment of an Historic District diminishes the rights of a property owner, and increases remodeling costs.

Reasons in **support** of the establishment of an Historic District, according to its adherents, include, but are not limited to, in no specific order:

- Stops demolitions; a national historic district designation is the only tool left to halt speculative demolition and development;
- Helps Eastmoreland remain primarily a single-family residential neighborhood, as it was originally planned to be;
- Preserves Eastmoreland’s character and history;
- Maintains livability by preserving green space, the tree canopy, privacy, garden setting, and reducing densification;
- Meets educational and services needs of the neighborhood, by not increasing unplanned residential density;
- Supports a multi-generational neighborhood, with a variety of household sizes and ages, as currently is already found in Eastmoreland;
- Takes ownership of the neighborhood’s future; and,
- Future generations will be thankful if, before it is too late, this unique neighborhood is preserved and is worthy of joining the thousands of other Historic Districts around the nation.

When *THE BEE* visited the Southeast Uplift neighborhood coalition office just north of Hawthorne Boulevard to check on the Poll ballots received, stacks of the ballots – due on February 24, after this issue of *THE BEE* had gone to press – had already been locked in a secure file. 96 more envelopes had been received just that day.

### **State Advisory Committee holds hearing**

On February 16, the “Keep Eastmoreland Free” neighborhood group, which opposes the Historic District, invited the State Advisory Committee on Historic Preservation (SACHP) to tour Eastmoreland. At 1 p.m. on February 17, SACHP hosted a hearing at Eastmoreland Golf Course. *THE BEE* was there.

Almost every seat in the hall was filled, with some standing, as the meeting got underway; an estimated 150 people were in attendance.

Telling about the proposal for the Historic District was a representative from AECOM, the consulting firm hired by the ENA Board, who also answered questions put to it by SACHP members.

Then, numerous witnesses testified against establishing an Eastmoreland Historic District; some also spoke in favor of the proposal.

At the conclusion of the three-hour hearing, SACHP members voted unanimously not to stop nor delay the Eastmoreland Historic District proposal, allowing it to go forward.

This finding didn’t detour “Keep Eastmoreland Free” from continuing to collect signed, notarized statements of objection to the process from homeowners, adding to the more than 600 already in hand.

*THE BEE* will continue to follow this story, including the certified poll results as reported by nonprofit Southeast Uplift.

The official ENA webpage in favor of the Historic District is: <http://historicdistrict.eastmoreland.org>

The opponents’ “Keep Eastmoreland Free” website is: <http://www.keepeastmorelandfree.org>

And now, a new group called "HEART" ("Historic Eastmoreland, Achieving Results Together"), has started another new website at: <https://ihearteastmoreland.org>