

# Heritage Tourism, Historic Preservation and City Council election

*(As published in The Oak Ridger's Historically Speaking column on October 29-30, 2012)*

In response to my request for input on the subject of last week's *Historically Speaking* column, the candidates and incumbents vying for three seats on City Council, Charlie Hensley, Chuck Hope, Ellen Smith and Kelly Callison, submitted comments. Trina Baughn indicated her comments will be submitted next week. I asked the following questions to prompt their thinking and to focus their response to address Heritage Tourism and Historic Preservation.

1. What thoughts do they have on the Manhattan Project National Historical Park?;
2. What do they think of the efforts to preserve the Guest House/Alexander Inn?;
3. What do they think of the K-25 Memorandum of Understanding (the history center there in the Fire Hall; the replica building, the viewing tower and the footprint being preserved)?;
4. What are their thoughts relative to the importance of Heritage Tourism as one of the economic development strategies for Oak Ridge; and, finally,
5. Any other thoughts they might have on historic preservation.

All who submitted comments indicated general support for the ideas of Heritage Tourism and Historic Preservation.

## **Regarding the Manhattan Project National Historical Park, the following comments were among those submitted:**

Ellen Smith said, "Oak Ridge is a place where ordinary people accomplished extraordinary things that contributed to changing the history of the world...The story of what happened in Oak Ridge needs to be made available and accessible to future generations. I am excited about the prospect of establishing a Manhattan Project National Historic Park because I believe that the National Park Service has the expertise to help us do a more effective job of telling our story and because National Park affiliation will bring more visitors into our city."

Charlie Hensley said, "I am very enthusiastic about Oak Ridge being one of the three sites [of the Manhattan Project National Historical Park]. We need to get our story out and this is one of the best possible ways."

Chuck Hope said, "I support this three-site national park concept, you can't tell the story of the Manhattan Project without a large part of what went on here in Oak Ridge. As this continues to move forward on the federal level, we here in Oak Ridge must be ready to lend support where and when needed."

Kelly Callison said, "One of the questions I believe that city council should be addressing every single time they get together is 'Why Oak Ridge?' In particular why would a tourist get off I-75 or I-40 and drive the 21 miles or 15 miles respectively to the City of Oak Ridge. The Manhattan Project National Historical Park located in the city's center would be a reason to do that. The Park would tie together all the other historical sites in the city and encourage the visitors to also take advantage of our museums, library, hotels, restaurants and retail during their visit."

## **Regarding the efforts to preserve the Guest House/Alexander Inn:**

Charlie Hensley said, "The history of the [Guest House/]Alexander Inn is inseparably tied to the development of the Manhattan Project facilities. The photo of Dr. Oppenheimer sitting in front of the existing mantle in the lobby was all I needed to see to understand the importance of this part of our history. The restoration of the [Guest House/]Alexander [Inn] as the proposed assisted living facility includes the lobby being open to the public, so the project is compatible with the preservation efforts to maintain the connections to our history."

Chuck Hope said, "If you think of Oak Ridge as a city, we have a very short history compared to other cities - 70 years is not much history. But we have been able to really pack a lot in such a short time. One key area that we need to preserve is the buildings of our early years and we have the opportunity with the Guest House/[Alexander Inn]. It is a shame that the building was allowed to get in such bad shape, but

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now we have a plan to save the structure and find a use that puts the building back on the books and to become part of the community again, I will continue to support that effort.”

Kelly Callison said, “The preserved [Guest House/]Alexander Inn ties in nicely to a rebuilt and re-energized Jackson Square where mixed use development (retail, commercial and housing) creates a real community like what has been created in Biltmore Park Town Square outside Asheville, NC. This is the kind of living that the younger members of our community have been telling us is missing. The historic K-25 memorandum has helped insure that these plans will move forward.”

Ellen Smith said, “I am very pleased by the news that the Guest House/Alexander Inn likely will be preserved and restored. It was an important part of Manhattan Project Oak Ridge; it's a treasured landmark in the lives of most long-time Oak Ridgers; and a restored Guest House/Alexander Inn will help tie the Jackson Square area together as a historic commercial district and visitor attraction.”

### **Regarding the K-25 Historic Preservation Memorandum of Agreement:**

Chuck Hope said, “This is an area where I find myself with mixed feelings. We must find a way to preserve the history of the site, while also making sure we continue to recover the land there for the future economic vitality of Oak Ridge. So, I struggle with what are the best ways to do both. From the Heritage Tourism side, some type of history interpretation site is needed to help show the scope of work done there. So, I will continue to support those efforts, while always looking for ways to continue the economic development of the site.”

Charlie Hensley said, “The K-25 facility looms as the most awesome example of this country's resolve to end World War II. No better example exists of the United States' ability to muster resources and human labor and bring into existence something so overwhelming in scope. Having worked at K-25 while a portion of the former cascade was still operating (as the purge cascade) - 23 years after the end of WW-II – this showed me directly what was accomplished in 1943-1945. From my perspective, I only regret that more of the original facility will not be available for future visitors to experience, for it will be very difficult to present to full scale of this awesome accomplishment.”

### **Regarding the importance of Heritage Tourism as a strategy for economic development:**

Kelly Callison said, “I see the Park and the preservation of our history as an anchor for our future as the Energy City. I believe we need to address both history and the future to attract a broad range of tourists/visitors for the long term. While we are preserving what has gone on before we need to seriously think about what will be an interest in the future.”

Charlie Hensley said, “Heritage Tourism is one the main opportunities that Oak Ridge can seize and support to accelerate our resurgence. Heritage Tourism combined with our growing retail sector, new industries possibly to support [the construction of] UPF [Y-12's Uranium Processing Facility], budding technology such as carbon composite manufacturing, our currently existing private manufacturing facilities, and the proposed new airport at Heritage Center (K-25 site) can all work to restore Oak Ridge, Anderson County, and Roane County back to being the hub of technology and interest for the region.”

Chuck Hope said, “If you look at economic development as a three legged stool, the three legs are a) Retail and Commercial, b) Office and Industrial, and c) Tourism. For Oak Ridge to have success we will have to develop Tourism as a vital part of our economic strategies. Heritage Tourism is shown throughout the Oak Ridge Story where so many lives were touched by what happen here in the 1940's. We must tell the history so everyone else knows it too.”

### **Other thoughts contributed were:**

Charlie Hensley said, “Oak Ridge's history, at the Oak Ridge National Laboratory, of reactor process development is somewhat overlooked in our discussion of Oak Ridge's past accomplishments. Not only the Graphite Reactor as part of the Manhattan Project, and High Flux Isotope Reactor for medical

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isotopes, but the research into technologies such as the Molten Salt Reactor, Homogenous Reactor, Health Physics Test Reactor, Gas Cooled Reactor fuels reprocessing, and Liquid Metal Fast Breeder fuels reprocessing, are all important sources for nuclear research and technologies that can be used to address much of our country's future energy needs. Also, the Y-12 role in dismantling nuclear weapons and turning the materials into fuel for power generation is very important and certainly worth describing. The importance of our contributions to peaceful uses of nuclear technology cannot be overstated in telling Oak Ridge's story."

Chuck Hope said, "I support historic preservation when and where it is appropriate and economically feasible. We must preserve the past, so we can show the progress of today, and allow it to guide us into the future. If we are able to do it in such a way that allows us to create a revenue stream for the city, then we can say it is successful. This is a effort that is normally done by a very few dedicated individuals that most often don't want the spot light put on them, but without their efforts so much would be lost, so when you see these people doing what they do, please thank them for what they are doing."



## The Candidates

A collage of campaign signs of the candidates for City Council - vote for three!