

# Dixon touts historic preservation in MOA talk



STAFF PHOTO BY REGGIE PONDER

Sambo Dixon addresses an audience at Museum of the Albemarle in Elizabeth City on the topic of historic preservation in Edenton.

BY REGGIE PONDER

Editor

Attorney and Edenton Town Councilman Sambo Dixon told an audience at Museum of the Albemarle in Elizabeth City last week that historic preservation and the town's character as "a functioning village" are critical to Edenton's quality of life — and its economic future.

Dixon addressed the meeting of the Guild of Museum Friends at the museum Thursday morning.

People move to Edenton because they want to live in a village — a place where they can walk to work, know their neighbors and sit on their porch, Dixon

said.

"People really think it's cool to live in a village," Dixon said.

Cynthia Mastro of the Guild of Museum Friends introduced Dixon to the audience as someone who is passionate about historic preservation.

"His work has not gone unnoticed," Mastro said, noting Dixon's selection as the 2013 recipient of the Ruth Cannon Cup — the state's highest award in historic preservation.

Dixon explained that Dixon said it was grandmother, more than anyone else, who taught him to appreciate the value of where he was from. His said his grandmother was an early leader in pres-

ervation efforts.

"She was saving things right and left," Dixon said.

He said he still thinks about his grandmother all the time and recalls how she wanted him to preserve historic structures in the community.

An important part of that for him has been restoring the historic garden at his own home, he said.

"This is what really brought me to preservation," Dixon said.

He said his own kids have spent many days cleaning out old houses as part of what he calls the "SWAT team," with "SWAT" standing for "save a worn-out architectural treasure."

But the work is all worth

it because it instills pride in the community, he said.

"It gives you such pride when you go home," Dixon said.

Dixon said Kadesh AME Zion Church is his top preservation priority right now. The priority of that historic structure is part of a larger concern to address historic preservation in African-American neighborhoods, he said.

"We need a diverse community, a place where everybody can feel comfortable and where they can succeed," Dixon said.

Dixon mentioned the town's plans to build a new police station that will be a

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positive addition to a predominantly African-American neighborhood.

The facility will not be a "faceless building," Dixon insisted.

"We're going to build something that looks like it grew there a hundred years ago," Dixon said.

The rehabilitation of houses and other structures in African-American neighborhoods is a vital part of what Edenton is doing to preserve the town's heritage, Dixon said.

The town has great African-American architecture, he said.

Dixon also talked about a number of historic houses that have been relocated to Edenton.

A relocated historic house can fill a vacant lot and vastly improve a neighborhood, he said.

"I can't tell you what this does for our community," Dixon said.

Dixon urged those who attended the session to do the same kinds of things to preserve historic structures in their own community.

It takes dedication, he

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*"We need a diverse community, a place where everybody can feel comfortable and where they can succeed."*

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**Sambo Dixon**

Edenton Town Councilman

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said. It can mean spending weekends working on old houses instead of going to the beach, he said.

Dixon said all towns and cities should adopt an anti-demolition-by-neglect ordinance.

"It has been an amazing tool for preservation in our community," Dixon said.

Another important tool is historic preservation tax credits, he said.

Dixon said it's important for people to encourage state officials to keep the state's historic preservation tax credits.

Preservation in Edenton really started with the Cupola House, Dixon said.

"It's really what set the tone in Edenton, when people in Edenton finally said 'we're not going to let this happen in our community,'" Dixon said.

The Booth House was another early save and the Iredell House was saved in the late 1940s, he said.

The Edenton Tea Party Chapter, National Society Daughters of the American Revolution led the way in the preservation of the Iredell House, he noted. The house is now a state historic site.

"The thing that it has spawned is the saving of outbuildings," Dixon said.

"We try to save everything in Edenton."

Outbuildings from Bandon Plantation were restored and relocated to the Iredell House site, he explained.

The Swain Auditorium and Chowan County Senior Center was another important bit of historic preservation, Dixon said.

"It's just a perfect example of why not to tear down a building," Dixon said.

People who went to school in that building have a place to come to when they come home to Edenton, he said.