

OFFICIAL MINUTES
MUSCATINE HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION
JULY 20, 2011

The Muscatine Historic Preservation Commission (MHPC) met in regular session on Wednesday, July 20, 2011, at 5:15 p.m. in the lower level conference room at Muscatine City Hall. Members present included Jo Ann Carlson, Devin Pettit, Jane Reischauer, Jim Schmidt, Anna Mack and Gina Chesling. Others present included city planner Andrew Fangman, Michael Maharry and Jim Rudisill.

The commission reviewed the consent agenda, including the distributed agenda and the minutes of the regular June 15, 2011 meeting. Carlson moved to approve the consent agenda as presented; Pettit seconded; motion passed, all ayes.

Reischauer next welcomed Chesling to the commission as a newly-appointed member.

Fangman then presented an overview of the blight designation that was recently presented to the city council and described some of the potential impacts of the designation on historic properties and districts.

He explained an initial step in the process was to consolidate the city's Urban Renewal Districts and identify basically designate the city as one urban renewal area. In addition, areas that would qualify as "blighted" would be identified. Fangman said there was basically no difference between an Urban Renewal Area and a Blighted Area, except for length of designation. An Urban Renewal Area designation sunsets after five years while a Blighted Area designation remains until the city changes it.

To be considered blighted, an area needed to include (1) deteriorating buildings that are not safe for human occupation (2) a property the city is either mowing or shoveling snow (3) a property with at least \$1000 in delinquent taxes or (4) a property with more than one of the earlier issues.

Reischauer asked what the proposal would mean for Muscatine's historic districts.

Fangman said there was nothing definite at this time, but he envisioned there would be additional tools available in those districts to help restore houses and other buildings. Those tools could mean a potentially greater role for the MHPC. One such combination could be the city offering tax abatements for renovation work within a blighted area, with the MHPC signing off on any activity involving an historic property.

He said there were several other directions the city could also go, but whatever role the commission takes should come from the commission. Input from the commission will also be needed as he updates the city's comprehensive plan. That process is currently moving forward, although the work to date has been primarily technical updating. Fangman distributed pages from the 2002 master plan detailing historic preservation information. He said he will be developing new maps for the comp plan and requested background information on the city's current and potential historic districts. Pettit reported most of the information would be contained the reports developed by Rebecca McCarley as part of the surveys and nominations of the Downtown Commercial and West Hill National Historic Districts.

As the comp plan update enters into the second phase of policy and guideline review, Fangman said he will return to the commission for more input. He suggested between two or three pages of historic information that would describe historic preservation efforts in the community.

Fangman said there was no firm time schedule on either completing the blight designation or the master plan, although he expected the master plan update to be completed by the end of the year.

Pettit said the commission could attend the charettes that will be held as part of the master plan update and also the Muscatine Planning and Zoning Commission meetings where the plan will be discussed.

Commission members also discussed earlier historic planning work and directed Rudisill to provide copies of the Molly Naumann, Susan Appel and the 1977 Architecture of Muscatine reports to each member.

Reischauer also pointed out the commission needed to begin setting priorities for historic preservation in the community and determine what changes it would like to see in the city's master plan. She said she would be reviewing the current comp plan and present any proposed changes to the members.

Rudisill was directed to begin adding a comp plan update item to future agendas.

The commission next held officer elections.

Carlson moved to nominate Reischauer for chair; Pettit seconded the nomination.

Carlson then moved that nominations cease and Reischauer be approved as chair; Pettit seconded; motion passed, all ayes.

Carlson next moved to nominate Anna Mack as the vice-chair; Pettit seconded the nomination.

Carlson moved that nominations cease and Mack be approved as vice-chair; Pettit seconded; motion passed, all ayes.

The next discussion items were part of the commission's CLG activities and included a review of grant applications for windshield surveys of four potential historic districts.

Reischauer reported the Community Foundation of Greater Muscatine had approved a grant of \$2100 for the work; and she would attend the check distribution ceremony on July 28.

Pettit pointed out the CF check would likely be enough to complete a survey of either Mulberry Avenue, which would cost \$2900; or the Fair Oaks area, which McCarley had given a \$2700 quote to complete. Commission members agreed those two were the most significant of the four originally proposed in the grant application and earlier commission discussions.

Rudisill was directed to ask McCarley for any example of a windshield survey she has completed.

After further discussion, Pettit moved to accept the Community Foundation grant; Mack seconded; motion passed, all ayes.

The commission next discussed membership.

Carlson said she would contact Christine Conley to determine her interest in serving.

The commission then moved into discussions on historic properties or districts in the community.

The first issue discussed was an update by Rudisill on the effort to nominate the Alexander G. Clark House as a National Historic Landmark (NHL). Rudisill reported Kent Sissel was continuing to discuss with state and federal officials the need to update the original National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) for the Clark House before an NHL application can be made. Sissel is also talking to the National Park Service about developing a Network to Freedom (Underground Railroad) application for the house.

Both the NRHP and the Network to Freedom nomination/application could be done simultaneously by Paul Finkelman, the same consultant who was going to do the NHL nomination. Rudisill said Sissel had advised him the city's Historic Resource Development Program (HRDP) grant that had been awarded for the NHL nomination could be amended to cover the cost of the other nominations. Rudisill said he had talked with Ralph Christian and Kristen Vander Molen, State Historical Society of Iowa staff members who would need to approve any amendments, and they had confirmed Sissel's report.

Rudisill will continue to give updates on the potential amendment.

The commission then reviewed the continuing issue over the status of the old county jails. Maharry reported county officials were apparently arranging to meet with consultants on jail renovation.

The next discussion item was planning for the upcoming Preservation Iowa conference in August.

Maharry said 40-50 people are expected to attend. He presented a short review of the schedule, especially for Saturday's tours of homes. No final decision on the homes has been reached.

He also reported sponsorships and advertising were still being received; and he encouraged MHPC members to consider attending next year's Preservation Iowa conference.

In other reports, Pettit said the Mississippi Drive Corridor project had been referenced in numerous Iowa Department of Transportation reports.

The meeting then adjourned at approximately 6:50 p.m.

The next regular meeting of the commission is scheduled for Wednesday, August 17, 2011 at 5:15 p.m. in the Muscatine City Hall lower level conference room.

Respectfully submitted,

Chair