

OFFICIAL MINUTES
MUSCATINE HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION
AUGUST 17, 2011

The Muscatine Historic Preservation Commission (MHPC) met in regular session on Wednesday, August 17, 2011, at 5:15 p.m. in the lower level conference room at Muscatine City Hall. Members present included Jo Ann Carlson, Devin Pettit, Jim Schmidt, Anna Mack and Gina Chesling. Others present included Muscatine councilmember Dyann Roby, Michael Maharry and Jim Rudisill.

With the absence of chair Jane Reischauer, vice-chair Anna Mack conducted the meeting and began with a welcome to Roby.

The commission then reviewed the consent agenda, including the distributed agenda and the minutes of the regular July 20, 2011 meeting. Pettit moved to approve the consent agenda as presented; Schmidt seconded; motion passed, all ayes.

The next discussion items were a series of Certified Local Government issues.

The first of these was an update on pending MHPC grant applications for a windshield survey of potential historic districts. Rudisill reported Reischauer had submitted an application to the Carver Trust to fund the surveys for all four potential historic districts. She had left for vacation prior to the MHPC meeting and had not reported any response before leaving, so Rudisill assumed there had not been any.

Pettit provided a summary to Roby of what the windshield survey would cover.

The next CLG discussion was on membership. Currently Ramiro Vazquez has been reappointed as a member, but he has indicated a willingness to step aside if another qualified candidate stepped forward.

Roby presented a city volunteer form that is used for city commissions and boards and said the form was also available on the city's website.

The final CLG discussion issue was the city's comprehensive plan. Rudisill said Reischauer was also leading that effort and had started developing an initial draft. Maharry also explained to Roby how historic preservation would fit into a comprehensive plan update; and the potential financial incentives, especially the 20% federal and 25% state historic tax credits.

The commission next discussed historic property and district issues.

The first issue discussed was the Alexander G. Clark National Historic Landmark (NHL) effort being developed under an Iowa Historic Resources Development Program (HRDP) grant. Rudisill reported the National Park Service (NPS) was recommending an update of the original Clark House nomination to the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) prior to a NHL application being submitted.

Rudisill said Kent Sissel had met with NPS and State Historical Society of Iowa (SHSI) staff and reported both agencies felt an updated NRHP nomination that focused on Clark's national significance would eventually enhance any NHL application. To also strengthen the NHL application, both agencies were also recommending a Network To Freedom (Underground Railroad) application be submitted for the Clark House.

Rudisill said Sissel had talked with consultant Paul Finkelman and the consultant was willing to complete the NRHP update and the Network To Freedom application under a revised HRDP contract.

Rudisill said both Sissel and he had also talked with SHSI officials and they were willing to amend the city's current HRDP contract to switch the focus of the project from a NHL application to an updated NHRP and Network To Freedom focus.

A revised contract, which was based on an agreement supplied by SPARK Consulting during the Downtown and West Hill Historic District nominations, has been developed and provided to Finkelman, Sissel and the SHSI for review, Rudisill said. He requested the MHPC approve a motion to recommend to the city council that an amendment request be filed with the SHSI of Iowa reflecting the change in focus, terminating the old agreement with Finkelman and authorizing the appropriate city officials to sign new documents.

Schmidt moved to accept the adjustments as recommended; Pettit seconded; motion passed, all ayes.

Carlson reported there was no new information on the signage issue.

There also was little new information on the status of the old county jail buildings. However, commissioners did note that Reishauer had been appointed to the newly established Muscatine County Historic Preservation Commission. Everyone felt that would help maintain communications between the two agencies. Maharry also reported the Friends bylaws include language that would encompass arrears around Muscatine, so the Friends of Muscatine Historic Preservation could extend its programs and activities to efforts developed by the county commission.

Miscellaneous reports were then presented to the commission.

Maharry said the Preservation Iowa conference held August 5-6 was a success with between 40-50 people attending. He said there had been good conversation between the attendees and the conference had provided an opportunity for the community to show off the Pearl Plaza/Button Factory adaptive reuses, Button Museum, Muscatine History and Industry Center, riverboat and several historic homes.

Maharry said next year's conference should be attended by a group from Muscatine.

Roby also noted the media coverage of the event; and said it seemed great for this activity. Rudisill told Roby that Community Development Director Steve Boka covered the registration fee for any of the commission members who attended the conference. Commission members explained to Roby the MHPC members are required by the CLG program to attend annual training sessions.

In other reports, the commission briefly discussed the proposed demolition of three properties in Muscatine. The demolitions, slated for 1012 E. Third, 510 Liberty and 6208 41st South, were scheduled to be discussed by the council at its August 18, 2011 meeting.

Maharry said he hoped the council would consider giving demolition properties in the future to anyone willing to rehabilitate them within an agreed time frame. Rehabilitation, rather than demolition, would mean less material going to the landfill and keeping property on the tax rolls, Maharry pointed out.

Mack agreed and said she maintains lists of investors who would be interested in properties to rehabilitate. Schmidt also mentioned the rehabilitators could obtain tax credits to help with their efforts.

Maharry said if rehabilitation was not feasible, the city should consider allowing salvagers onto properties slated for demolition to recover wood floors, stairways and other items for resale to other historic property owners.

Roby agreed an alternative to demolition would be ideal. She suggested the new blight designation and potential funding opportunities through the Iowa Department of Economic Development, might open new options for the city.

The final report was a brief mention by Rudisill that at a recent GIS training session, he had learned it might be possible to link the existing historic district reports available on the Musser Library site to the parcel reports available on MAGIC. He said he would continue investigating that possibility.

The meeting then adjourned at approximately 6:15 p.m.

The next regular meeting of the commission is scheduled for Wednesday, September 21, 2011 at 5:15 p.m. in the Muscatine City Hall lower level conference room.

Respectfully submitted,

Chair