

OFFICIAL MINUTES
MUSCATINE HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION
DECEMBER 21, 2011

The Muscatine Historic Preservation Commission (MHPC) met in regular session on Wednesday, December 21, 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 and Ramiro Vazquez. Others present included Michael Maharry and Jim Rudisill.

Following the roll, the commission reviewed the consent agenda, including the distributed agenda and the minutes of the regular November 16, 2011 meeting. Carlson pointed out the page numbers were not correct. Following the review, Pettit moved to approve the consent agenda with the minutes correction; Carlson seconded; motion passed, all ayes.

The commission first discussed the grant-funded survey projects planned under the Certified Local Government (CLG) Activities portion of the agenda.

Rudisill said he had contacted consultant Rebecca McCarley and she had advised the costs she had provided for the survey work should remain valid through May 2012. This will allow the commission to use the \$6000 grant awarded by the Roy J. Carver Charitable Trust; the \$2100 grant from the Community Foundation of Greater Muscatine; and the \$1000 pledged from the Friends of Muscatine Historic Preservation as match for a planned Historic Resource Development Program (HRDP) application next year.

If the HRDP provides sufficient funding, the commission can then move forward with conducting surveillance surveys of Mulberry Avenue; Colver Street; and the Fair Oaks and Country Club Hills area as potential historic districts.

However, there has not been any contact yet with the Carver Trust or the community foundation to confirm if those funders will agree to hold their awards open through the HRDP application process. Rudisill was directed by the commission to send letters to those funders and request that action.

The commission next discussed the planned update to the city's comprehensive plan and specifically the historic resources section of that plan.

Rudisill said city planner Andrew Fangman was still indicating the historic preservation section of the plan was still on the back burner and a final draft from the commission was not yet necessary. Reischauer reported Fangman planned to use the commission draft as input for the final update version.

Pettit however reported the current schedule calls for the comprehensive plan charettes to begin in April, so some progress on developing a final draft needs to occur. He said the charettes would focus on neighborhoods.

Maharry suggested the commission consider using the first few paragraphs of the Iowa City summary to identify the city's purpose and vision for historic preservation.

Reischauer request commission members to review the documents provided and submit any comments or suggestions to her.

The next CLG discussion item was the historic property tax abatement program draft distributed last month by Rudisill.

Maharry questioned whether going back up to three years under the program would be feasible. He suggested it would be difficult to prove what work had actually been done and whether or not any historic features had actually been removed or adversely affected.

Maharry also continued to be skeptical over the two ways a property owner could qualify for the abatement. He said the procedure where the Secretary of Interior Standards are followed was fine. However, the alternative method where the commission could approve an application, even if the standards were not followed – provided no historic features were destroyed or removed - should be reconsidered.

Rudisill said Steve Boka's interest in developing an historic tax abatement program followed two basic premises. The first was to involve the MHPC in the process; while the second was to allow an abatement for any work, provided it did not destroy the historic feature. Rudisill said Boka had specifically used the example of installing siding over the existing historic siding, as long as the historic siding remained and was not damaged.

Maharry said Iowa City, which does not have a tax abatement program, requires historic property renovations to follow the secretary's standards, but the Iowa City HPC still works with the owners to resolve complaints. Pettit said the new Davenport historic preservation program also provides for negotiations with property owners. Maharry said Davenport also does not have a tax abatement program. He pointed out the proposed Muscatine program, which does provide money, would be less severe than the other two communities, which provides not funding assistance.

Maharry also said Iowa City provides a booklet, which is online, that provides some guidance to historic property owners planning to do rehabilitation work. Rudisill acknowledged the MHPC would need to adopt some guidelines for determining which properties would qualify under the procedure where the secretary's standards are not followed.

Pettit said regardless of guidelines or other policies, the ultimate decision on any tax abatement application should be whether or not a property remains a contributing building to the historic district. He indicated if any work prevents that determination, then the application should not be approved.

Maharry also suggested a two-tier method of abatement might be needed. In that case, properties that follow the standards would receive a super-abatement, while properties that follow the alternate method only receive a normal abatement. He also suggested the Friends of Muscatine Historic Preservation might be interested in assisting with the program.

He suggested inviting Boka to a future meeting to discuss the proposal. Rudisill said he would check with Boka about attending the next meeting.

Reischauer, who is also a member of the Muscatine County Historic Preservation Commission, also asked which taxes would actually be abated. After learning the program only applied to city taxes, she wondered if the county might be interested in a similar program that would apply to county taxes.

The next CLG-related issue to be discussed by the commission was possible joint activities between the city and county historical preservation commissions. Rudisill asked if this item should be left on the agenda or removed as standing issue. The consensus was to keep it on the agenda. Pettit suggested Historic Preservation Month activities in May might be a good period to plan joint efforts.

The final CLG discussion issue was the 2011 Annual Report. Rudisill reminded the commission members they needed to let him know of any training activity they participated in last year. He also asked for information any members had of changes to listed historic properties. Rudisill said the report is due in February.

The commission next discussed historic districts or properties.

The first issue was an Alexander Clark National Register of Historic Places update. Rudisill said he had not heard anything from Kent Sissel since the report he made in November. At that time, Sissel was having difficulty reaching National Park Service staff and others.

The commission then discussed potential signage of the historic districts in Muscatine.

Using a city map, it was determined 11 signs should be ordered. The map review also identified the signs' location. Reischauer said she would contact Gary Carlson to learn if HNI still intends to provide financing for the signs. Reischauer said she had been able to secure that pledge from Carlson after HNI demolished a contributing historic property in the downtown. Reischauer and Carlson also said they would talk with the city's traffic committee for approval of the sign and city assistance to erect them in the desired locations.

Miscellaneous reports were then presented to the commission.

Maharry reported the Friends had officially received a tax credit letter advising the organization that a \$30,400 credit from work completed on Tom and Cindy Kautz's home at 205 Cherry (J.C.B. Warde House). He said the Friends will file a 2011 tax report to receive the credit. He said there would be no restrictions on the use of the money.

Maharry also reported a potential buyer for his house at 417 W. 3rd Street (Olds-Munroe-Welker-Schomberg House). He said the buyer plans to develop the property into a bed-and-breakfast, but will need city approval.

Under the general Muscatine City HPC report, Carlson said there were no new developments concerning the Muscatine School District's acquisition of houses in the 300 block of East Ninth Street and their potential removal/demolition. These houses are across from the Jefferson Elementary/Central Middle School campus. Pettit said he was concerned about the district's plans for Jefferson and the potential demolition or renovation of that building. Carlson said Jefferson is scheduled for review next year, although she felt it was unlikely there would be a decision to demolish the building.

The meeting then adjourned at approximately 7:05 p.m.

The next regular meeting of the commission is scheduled for Wednesday, January 18, 2012 at 5:15 p.m. in the Muscatine City Hall lower level conference room.

Respectfully submitted,

Chair