

OFFICIAL MINUTES  
MUSCATINE HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION  
JANUARY 22, 2013

The Muscatine Historic Preservation Commission (MHPC) met in regular session on Tuesday, January 22, 2013, at 5:15 p.m. in the city council chambers at Muscatine City Hall. Members present included Devin Pettit, Jane Reischauer and Julie Wolf. 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 December 4, 2012 meeting. Pettit moved to approve the minutes as submitted; Wolf seconded; motion passed, all ayes.

The commission first discussed Certified Local Government (CLG) activities, including the city's continuing effort to establish a historic property tax abatement plan.

Pettit reported the historic property abatement plan would focus on current and future historic districts and buildings, while a second program would focus on in-fills. Reischauer asked if on-site carriage house reconstruction would be considered in-fill.

Maharry pointed out the proposed abatement schedule for qualifying historic properties would be at 100% for five years, which he felt was a strong incentive for historic preservation.

The commission would continue to review and comment on the proposal, Reischauer said.

Rudisill next provided an update to the commission on Muscatine's 2012 CLG Annual Report. The deadline for the report is February 28, so final approval of the report will be on the February MHPC agenda. He asked all commission members to provide updates on training and any knowledge they may have concerning work done on any properties listed individually or as contributing buildings to a historic district on the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP).

The commission next discussed issues related to historic districts and property.

The first issue was the status of the Alexander Clark NRHP Update Nomination. Rudisill said he had talked with Kent Sissel earlier and had also contacted state officials in an effort to determine the viability of moving forward with the nomination paperwork. Sissel had thought about attending the MHPC meeting to determine if the commission members wanted to continue developing the nomination or wanted to pursue possible links Clark may have had with the Underground Railroad. Federal and possibly state officials appear to favor pursuing Clark's Underground Railroad association, according to Sissel.

Maharry agreed it was also his understanding federal officials were interested in developing the Underground Railroad association.

Rudisill also reported Sissel wanted to talk to the commission about its interest in pursuing efforts to include Clark in the Museum of African-Americans in Washington D.C.

Rudisill said the state contacts he had talked to had indicated they had not heard recently from Sissel and did not offer any opinion on how the commission should move forward. The Historic Resources Development Program (HRDP) grant is scheduled to expire in May 2013.

Rudisill said he would continue to contact Sissel and request an update.

The next issue discussed was the status of the Fair Oaks/Colver Street Reconnaissance Survey Project.

Consultant Rebecca McCarley is continuing to work on the project. Former MHPC member Jo Ann Carlson and current commissioner Jim Schmidt are also providing some research help. Both are examining transfer books to develop a better ownership chronology for the properties located in each study area.

Pettit said the research would not be used directly in the current study, but would be important for a future NRHP nomination of either potential district. Pettit, who provided Carlson and Schmidt with the training to conduct the research, also suggested other MHPC members might find the training helpful. He offered to schedule another session, possibly on January 23.

The commission next discussed historic districts and properties.

Pettit said he had given a TV interview on the Jefferson School issue. He reminded the commission that one of his basic concerns was the school's purchase of properties across the street from the Jefferson School. The school purchased the properties to use for future parking. Pettit said the superintendent has pledged to relocate those buildings instead of demolishing them, but that would still impact historic homes on Mulberry Avenue by reducing their back yards. That could potentially lead to them becoming targets for demolition.

Maharry said a recommendation should be made to the school to establish a buffer zone between the Mulberry properties and any future parking lot. He also suggested the older of the homes across from Jefferson, which have already been acquired by the school, might be a good candidate for controlled deconstruction. He said under that process, the building could then later be reconstructed in another site. He said any salvage material could be taken to Iowa City for recycling.

Pettit said the new Jefferson School would be scheduled to open in 2016 and wondered if the Friends could take on any salvage project.

Pettit also reported on the tour of the Walnut Street Church building earlier in the month. The current owners are planning to demolish the building because of excessive deterioration. Reischauer said she had taken pictures of the building and would get them to Rudisill.

In other reports, Rudisill updated the commission on a Community Development Block Grant application the city would be submitting for downtown revitalization. Maharry said owners should be notified of the potential for historic tax credits.

Maharry also reported the 2012 tax credit application for the courthouse had not been funded, but likely would be in 2013

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

The next regular meeting of the commission is scheduled for Tuesday, February 26, 2013 at 5:15 p.m. in the Muscatine City Hall lower level conference room.

Respectfully submitted,

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Chair