

OFFICIAL MINUTES  
MUSCATINE HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION  
MARCH 26, 2013

The Muscatine Historic Preservation Commission (MHPC) met in regular session on Tuesday, March 26, 2013, at 5:15 p.m. in the city council chambers at Muscatine City Hall. Members present included Devin Pettit, Jane Reischauer, Julie Wolf and Jim Schmidt. Others present included local resident Mary Beveridge, consultant Rebecca McCarley, Michael Maharry and Jim Rudisill. Following the roll, the commission reviewed the consent agenda, including the distributed agenda and the minutes of the regular January 22, 2013 meeting. Pettit moved to approve the minutes as submitted; Wolf seconded; motion passed, all ayes.

The first Certified Local Government (CLG) activity discussed was the city's proposed historic property tax abatement plan.

Pettit reported the city council generally appeared to be supportive of the plan, which would provide a property tax abatement to contributing historic properties located within established historic districts. The program would also apply to individually recognized historic buildings located outside historic districts. Future districts could also be added.

McCarley asked what the specific criteria to obtain the abatement would include.

Pettit said the Secretary of Interior Standards would not necessarily need to be followed to qualify. They would need to ensure that no harm is done to significant historic architectural features that would change the status of the property from contributing to non-contributing.

Under the program, the Muscatine Historic Preservation Commission would review the abatement applications for any contributing property of a historic district. Pettit also said the abatement would not be available for any residential conversion to two or more units. Commercial properties would not be affected by the conversion restriction.

Muscatine Community Development Director may be asked to attend the next meeting to provide more details.

The next CLG item was action on the commission's 2012 CLG Annual Report.

Pettit asked about the expiration dates included in the report. Rudisill explained with the changes in membership, the terms of two members needed to be extended so that only one member's term would expire annually. Since Reischauer and Pettit's terms were both expiring in 2013, it seemed the most appropriate to extend their terms.

Wolf moved to approve the 2012 CLG Annual Report; Schmidt seconded; motion passed, all ayes.

The commission next discussed historic property/district issues.

Rudisill provided a report on the status of the Alexander Clark National Register update. He reported there was significant uncertainty over whether the project would be finished or not. Kent Sissel had fallen and injured his arms/hands, so he has been unable to write or complete other portions of the project.

Deadlines for completing the work have passed without progress; and Muscatine Finance Director Nancy Lueck has warned the HRDP grant provided to fund the project should either be spent by June 30, 2013 or returned to the state.

Rudisill said he would continue to pursue the issue with officials from the State Historical Society of Iowa and Sissel.

Consultant Rebecca McCarley then reported on her work with the Fair Oaks and Culver Street Reconnaissance surveys. She presented an initial draft of the work and an invoice for work completed. She said the field work is basically done, although research is continuing.

Once all the research has been completed, McCarley will complete a report for both Fair Oaks and Culver. Those should be finished by the end of April.

McCarley said she had looked at the south side of Washington as a possible extension of the anticipated Fair Oaks Historic District, but had decided its development did not match with the rest of the area. She also discovered the original 1926 plat for Culver Street had included around 16 additional properties on Isett and Oak. There were also two other properties that appeared associated, but had not been part of the original plat.

McCarley said she was pleased the commission had decided to conduct reconnaissance surveys of the two areas and not more cursory windshield surveys.

Pettit said he was impressed with the amount of detail contained in the reconnaissance survey, indicated he felt it was much closer to the intensive level surveys than he had expected.

Schmidt reported on the research he and Jo Ann Carlson had been conducting at the courthouse. He said about 25% of the houses built in the areas had apparently been spec homes constructed by the Titus finance company. McCarley reported several of the homes were billed as six-room cottages with modern conveniences.

Following more discussion, Schmidt moved to approve McCarley's \$4,842 invoice; Pettit seconded; motion passed, all ayes.

The commission next discussed a recent inspection of 518 W. Third with Steve Armstrong. McCarley pointed out the house had a number of nice historic features. Maharry suggested the realtor notify financial institutions of the property's historic features.

Several miscellaneous reports were presented.

Reporting for the Friends of Muscatine Historic Preservation (FMHP), Maharry updated everyone on the updated building codes, including the historic building code, Dubuque is now using. McCarley said Dubuque had written its own code and also said there was a historic building code section in the International Building Code. She said communities must adopt that section, but if Muscatine wished to do that, it would likely first need to define what it would apply to.

Maharry also reported on the Jefferson School and the possible effect to that building because Supt. Bill Decker is leaving the district. He said some people felt there had not been much regard given to historic preservation in the study that was prepared on options.

He said there was little in the report on historic tax credits, economic benefits of keeping the building and the potential savings if that was done. FMHP has contacted Preservation Iowa and may ask the school district to review costs for restoring the building and potential to save tax money for Muscatine. Maharry said he was hopeful the school would not move quickly on any demolition with Decker leaving the district. He continued to be concerned about the quick demolition decision and that the consultants' report indicated preservation was not a big deal.

Pettit pointed out the demolition cost estimate on the building was \$500,000.

McCarley suggested the Jefferson School could be a potential Technical Advisory Network (TAN) project. She said Doug Steinmetz could do part of the TAN if the building was determined eligible for the National Register; or he could do an actual study on it. She said a timeline on the project indicated demolition would occur in about one year, following construction of a new school.

McCarley suggested the old building could be re-adapted to an apartment.

Pettit said he continued to be concerned over the future of buildings across the street and on Mulberry. He said the school had purchased the building across the street and planned to demolish those to make way for a parking lot. He said if that happened, two likely significant houses on Mulberry could be in jeopardy because they would lose their back yards.

Maharry said Steinmetz could perhaps do a couple of scenarios with different cost estimates.

Maharry also reminded the commission of the preservation awards that would be made in May; and encouraged the members to be thinking of possible nominations.

Schmidt also reported on calls he had received from radio reporters wanted to do a feature on current historic preservation projects in the community.

The meeting then adjourned at approximately 6:30 p.m.

The next regular meeting of the commission is scheduled for Tuesday, April 2, 2013 at 5:15 p.m. in the Muscatine City Hall lower level conference room.

Respectfully submitted,

---

Chair