

OFFICIAL MINUTES
MUSCATINE HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION
APRIL 15, 2009

The Muscatine Historic Preservation Commission (MHPC) met in regular session on Wednesday, April 15, 2009 at 5:15 p.m. in the lower level conference room at the Muscatine City Hall, 215 Sycamore. Members present included Jo Ann Carlson, Mary Anne Kessler, Dan Clark, Devin Pettit, Diane Mayer-Day and Ramiro Vazquez. Others present included Jennifer Meyer (Muscatine Journal) and staff assistant Jim Rudisill.

The commission reviewed the consent agenda, including the distributed meeting agenda and the minutes of the regular March 18, 2009 meeting. Pettit requested that discussions on a demolition review ordinance and commission membership be added to the agenda. Clark requested a change in the minutes to show the Art Center budget cut was \$25,000 and not \$30,000.

There were no other changes to the consent agenda.

Carlson moved to approve the consent agenda with the corrections; Kessler seconded; motion passed, all ayes.

An update on the status of the Certified Local Government (CLG) efforts at the county level and potential coordination with Louisa County was the first discussion item.

While there has not been any recent contacts concerning the development of a county CLG or seeking help with any grant application, Clark did report that Eric Furnas had requested his assistance with researching the Civil War cannon at the courthouse.

Clark said Lee Miller had offered to help and other possibilities included Tom Savage and Jeff Shay. Clark said he would also welcome the assistance of any commission member in the effort.

Clark also told the commission he had contacted Connie Street to follow-up with the earlier discussions concerning training collaboration and other cooperative efforts with Louisa County. She had not responded back, he reported.

Carlson said she and Street were continuing efforts to contact Paula Mohr concerning joint training opportunities.

Clark reported he was considering attending the May 13 training session in Ottumwa and invited other commission members to also attend.

The commission next discussed commission membership. Pettit reminded the members his term would expire at the end of June and questioned if anyone had suggestions for a possible replacement.

He said local realtor Anna McCleary Mack might be a possibility.

Clark said he would also contact some individuals he thought might be good options. Reischauer wondered if Dave Armstrong might be interested.

Commissioners agreed to continue investigating possible replacements.

Discussions related to property and district issues were then held.

Clark said he had attended the March 19 city council meeting and raised the demolition issue with city officials, especially as it concerned two houses, 905 Oregon and 1810 Earl. Clark said both properties were approved for demolition. He also reported the Top 10 Demolition List was apparently the demolition inventory's official name, although he questioned whether or not the commission wanted to concern itself at this time with the registry's name.

Kessler noted the two houses looked bad.

At this time, Pettit brought up demolition ordinances, which he had been researching. He explained that under such an ordinance, a local historic preservation commission would have a review role in the demolition process. Pettit said he discovered two primary methods to conduct this review.

One option would be more conservative in focus and apply to known significant properties that had already been surveyed or were within a recognized historic district. A second review option would apply to any property more than 50 years old. Pettit said the second option would likely apply to nearly 80% of the properties in Muscatine.

Under either option, a report from the commission would be filed with the city council, which would have the final decision on any actual demolition. Pettit said the first option would likely be considered the most reasonable to the local city council and possibly receive greater support.

Kessler questioned if a review ordinance would delay the actual demolition period, possibly up to 30 days; and provide time for the commission to complete an investigation. She said the current system often does not provide time to conduct any meaningful historical research or documentation before the building is torn down.

Pettit asked the commission members to review the sample demolition ordinance printed in the National Trust publication "Protecting Potential Landmarks Through Demolition Review." This publication is located online at the following website address: http://www.preservationnation.org/issues/teardowns/additional-resources/demolition_review.pdf and be prepared to discuss it at the May meeting. Clark also said he had sent a request to Paula Mohr, seeking her assistance on a possible demolition ordinance. Mohr suggested contacting Dubuque historical officials for a copy of that city's ordinance.

Responding to a question from Carlson on whether or not Muscatine already had such an ordinance, Pettit said the proposal would essentially create a local designation system. Demolition permits issued for anything within that area would automatically trigger notification to the MHPC.

Clark encouraged the commission members to continue examining the ordinance issue and said he would mention it in a presentation tentatively scheduled for the city council's May 14 meeting. Clark also suggested Steve Boka could be asked to attend the next MHPC meeting to discuss it.

The next property issue discussed was the status of efforts to preserve 1402 Mulberry. Clark said he and Carlson had attended the March 19 meeting of the Muscatine Art Center Board of Directors and felt they heard a clear message.

The board felt the house was its property; it wanted to expand, but didn't want to reveal any plans; and it wanted the house gone, Clark reported. He said the board agreed there should be cooperation and good faith between city agencies with overlapping missions, but it was not interested in dividing the property, which was the proposal suggested by Michael Maharry of the Friends of Muscatine Preservation and others.

Clark said he was prepared to attend the board's April 16 meeting and would like Maharry to also attend to demonstrate the commission and others were acting in good faith. He also reported the art center had originally talked to Goodwin Moving of Washington concerning a possible relocation of the house. Clark said he had talked to Patterson Moving Company, also of Washington, about the same issue; and that company would be willing to make a presentation.

Commission members then reviewed the list of possible locations for the house if it was moved and the possible problems or benefits with those sites. These included near the corner of Iowa and Fulliam; an empty lot near St. Mary's Church; and the corner of Eighth Street and Cedar among others. Clark also reviewed his proposal to move the house to the lower west end of its own lot. He will present that proposal to the art center.

Pettit and Kessler each questioned the possibility of the art center board providing time to salvage parts of the building, if demolition becomes imminent. Kessler also said she would talk to the neighbors about their concerns.

Carlson also suggested the Unity Hospital Board of Directors could be contacted to explain why it did not tear down the large historic house it purchased several years ago near its Mulberry Avenue entrance. Other commissioners pointed out that house was converted into a facility to question and treat abused children, which required a more residential atmosphere than the main hospital could provide.

Vazquez said the house had potential. However, he estimated it would cost over \$100,000, assuming the house itself was free, to move and renovate the building. The limitation was where to go with it.

Kessler said the role of the commission should not be to financially support the preservation of the house, but to try and find someone who would provide the financing. Pettit agreed that task should fall to the Friends of Muscatine Preservation. Vazquez wondered if someone did step forward, if the city would provide any help with restoration efforts.

Clark said he felt the consensus of the commission was to return to the art center board and continue to pursue any possibilities that develop.

The next agenda item was the donation of four historic Muscatine postcards by the Sidney (NY) Historical Association. Two of the cards show the same scene – the Muscatine High Bridge. There is also a postcard showing the Hotel Muscatine and another showing Lock & Dam #16. Pettit moved to accept the donation and transfer custody and ownership of the postcards to the Musser Public Library, subject to its acceptance; Day seconded; motion passed, all ayes.

Rudisill said he would send a thank you to the association.

The commission next discussed the upcoming 2009 Preservation Month activities.

Clark said he had discussed with A.J. Johnson about the possibility of providing an update on commission activities to the city council during its May 14 meeting. It was also pointed out that several commission members would not be available on May 9 for award presentations. Clark mentioned the possibility of presenting the awards during a council meeting.

Clark and Carlson will develop a Power Point presentation for the council meeting, if Johnson agrees to the update proposal.

The Friends of Historic Preservation will conduct the tour of homes on May 10.

A partial list of award winners was announced, including: **Paint:** Dave Armstrong for 200 Ash Street; **House Restoration:** Michael Tompkins for 116 W. 8th Street; **House Porch Restoration:** Harry & Connie Pett for 511 W. 2nd Street; **Commercial:** Heinz USA for stewardship of the historic streetcar barn; **Individual** – Devin Pettit for meritorious services to the cause of historic preservation; and Barbara Sabbath for stewardship of the historic Rhoda Smalley House.

In other discussion, Pettit announced that two additional historic preservation plaques would be installed on May 4, at 1 p.m. on the Gaeta Building (The Brew), highlighting the Italian association in Muscatine; and the Isett Warehouse (Smith Sales), commemorating its identification as the oldest commercial building in Muscatine.

The plaques are a joint effort of the Downtown Action Alliance Design Committee, Greater Muscatine Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the Rotary.

Clark announced that Maharry would be the guest on his weekly radio show on April 28, 2009.

Clark also reported that he and Kent Sissel had recently met with Pam Collins and Sheila Chaudoin at the Musser Public Library to discuss Sissel's proposed local historic district (related to Alexander G. Clark) and any potential or possible threat to the neighborhood. They also discussed parking issues, especially the work scheduled for this year at the two city lots on West Third Street west of Chestnut Street. Clark said Randy Hill agreed the MHPC would be included in the design conference before the work begins. They also discussed the need to continue monitoring parking issues.

Reischauer also requested support for the proposed graffiti ordinance that is being developed by a local committee.

The next meeting of the commission will be held Wednesday, May 20, 2009 at the regular time and place.

The commission then adjourned at approximately 6:55 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Chair