

OFFICIAL MINUTES
MUSCATINE HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION
JANUARY 18, 2012

The Muscatine Historic Preservation Commission (MHPC) met in regular session on Wednesday, January 18, 2012, at 5:15 p.m. in the lower level conference room at Muscatine City Hall. Members present included Devin Pettit, Jane Reischauer, Gina Chesling and Jim Schmidt. 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 21, 2011 meeting. Pettit requested an additional agenda item to discuss the Mississippi Corridor project. Following the review, Pettit moved to approve the consent agenda with agenda change; Schmidt seconded; motion passed, all ayes.

The first agenda item was Certified Local Government (CLG) activities; and the first of those activities was a discussion on the status of the MHPC's planned reconnaissance surveys of four potential historic districts. At last month's meeting, the MHPC agreed to delay implementing the surveys until after it submits an additional funding request to the State Historical Society of Iowa (SHSI) in May.

Rudisill said he had notified the Community Foundation of Greater Muscatine and the Roy J. Carver Charitable Trust (and the Friends of Muscatine Historic Preservation), which have all approved pledges/grants of support for the project, of the delay. He said none of the funders had responded. Commission members agreed the lack of any response likely indicated the funders did not object to the delay and would not withdraw their original support.

There was a brief discussion on whether or not to conduct additional funding solicitation between now and May, since any SHSI grant could be less than the amount needed to complete all four reconnaissance surveys. Rudisill asked if property owner contacts might be helpful. Pettit said he was inclined to keep that funding option open for future historic district nominations.

In a related discussion, Maharry questioned why the four areas identified for reconnaissance surveys had been selected; and how consultant Rebecca McCarley had settled on her priorities. He suggested Iowa Avenue, or a portion of that street, should be considered a prime candidate. Commission members agreed Iowa Avenue was a strong survey candidate and indicated they were unsure why McCarley had not identified it as a higher priority. There was some speculation involving unified development or some combination of significance and feasibility (low-lying fruit), but there was no clear answer.

The next CLG discussion item was the status of the comprehensive plan update.

Rudisill said he had not been advised that city planner Andrew Fangman was ready to develop the historic preservation component of the plan. Pettit suggested if MHPC members had any recommendations for the plan to contact Fangman directly. He also reported the Muscatine Planning and Zoning Commission intended to begin tackling rezoning once the comp plan update was completed.

The commission next discussed the property tax abatement program draft distributed in November. At the discussion of the draft in December, Maharry had suggested a two-tier abatement be developed. One tier would provide owners who follow the Secretary of Interior's Standards break; while the second would apply to those owners who only want to rehabilitate their property without worrying about the standards. Maharry termed it a fork in the road.

Tier 1 work would restore, rehabilitate or replace historic features in the most historically sensitive manner. Tier 2 would not be as sensitive, but even under Tier 2, the program would still require no demolition of historic features in order to be eligible for the abatement. Maharry said such activities as roof and foundation repairs would like fit into Tier 1 status regardless of any standards because those elements are hidden from view or have other issues that have already affected their historic integrity. He said the key goals for the program should be to enhance the historic nature of the property and rehabilitate deteriorated historic properties.

Schmidt said the commission would need to develop guidelines to follow when approving the abatements, especially if they did not follow the Secretary's standards.

Maharry also suggested an example showing the benefits of an abatement be developed to provide a better understanding of how the program would operate. Rudisill said he would develop a generic example of a possible savings for a property owner using the abatement program and a Tier 2 abatement percentage table.

A discussion on joint activities involving the Muscatine (City) and Muscatine (County) Historic Preservation Commissions were then discussed. Reischauer reported the county commission was working on establishing the county as a CLG. She said the plan is to have the designation by the spring of 2013.

Rudisill next reported on the 2011 Annual Report. He said much of the report was completed, but he continued to need the assistance of the commission to identify work completed in 2011 on historic properties either within a recognized national historic district or individually listed on the National Register. Commissioners indicated they would review the building permits list and list work they knew to have been completed on target properties. Rudisill said the deadline for submitting the report is in February.

The next agenda items were discussions involving historic properties and districts. The first of these items was an update on the revised nomination of the Alexander Clark House to the National Register of Historic Places. Rudisill said Kent Sissel had reported he is back in touch with the National Park Service (NPS) after losing contact with several of the NPS staff for the past several months.

Sissel had also reported Paul Finkelman would be in Japan for the next several weeks, but would be continuing to work on the Network to Freedom and the National Register nominations.

The remaining district discussion involved signage.

Reischauer reported no recent new activity on that issue. She will get updated designs and costs to Gary Carlson of HON. Carlson had earlier agreed to cover the costs of the signs.

Reischauer will also develop a proposal on sign size and other details and bring it back to the MHPC for review before going to the city traffic committee for approval to post the signs.

Several miscellaneous reports were then given to the board.

Pettit reported the Downtown Action Alliance (DAA) is scheduled to meet next month to discuss future activities. He said Friends are the technical member of the DAA, but he did want the commission to be aware of the meeting and objectives.

Rudisill also asked if anyone had received the email from Paula Mohr describing two meetings on historic preservation efforts and local economic activity. None of the members recalled receiving the email and Rudisill said he would forward it to everyone.

Maharry then presented a report from the Friends of Muscatine Historic Preservation. He said a sheriff's sale was scheduled for the Sawyer-Rehwaldt House at 609 W. Second on January 31, 2012.

Maharry also reported the Friends are seeking tax help to file a 2011 tax return. The organization must file a tax return to receive the \$30,400 historic tax credit donated to Friends by Tom and Cindy Kautz. Maharry said the organization had not been able to locate anyone yet. Reischauer suggested Maharry contact local tax attorney Jim Nepple, a former member of the Muscatine (city) Historic Preservation Commission and a current member of the county HPC.

Discussions and planning also need to begin for May Preservation Month activities, Maharry said. He also reported a local realtor had told him house showings were up, so that could point to increase market activity. He said his own property at 417 W. Third had recently been approved for a variance by the Muscatine Planning & Zoning Commission. With the variance, a prospective owner would be able to operate a bed and breakfast business on the property. Maharry said the prospective buyer must still sell a house in Colorado before purchasing the Muscatine property.

Maharry also reported he had recently been asked to serve on a state committee that is researching the development of a comprehensive plan for historic preservation.

In a final discussion item, Pettit notified the commission of an upcoming city council agenda item concerning the Mississippi Corridor Study. Pettit said the study must be amended to include development of a 4(f) statement. The statement is necessary for the former Puritan Ice/Testrake property on Green/Grandview. Proposed development at the Hershey Avenue/Green Street Intersection (Carver Corners) is expected to impact the buildings, which have been determined eligible for the National Register of Historic Places. A 4(f) statement is required to examine potential alternatives to the development to determine if there is any feasible option to removing the buildings.

The meeting then adjourned at approximately 6:50 p.m.

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

Respectfully submitted,

Chair