

Official Minutes
Muscatine Historic Preservation Commission
Downtown Historic District Public Hearing
January 18, 2006

The Muscatine Historic Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed downtown historic district on Wednesday, January 18, 2006 at 7 p.m. in the Muscatine City Hall Council Chambers. Members present included Jay Brady, Diane Mayer-Day, Dan Clark, Jo Ann Carlson, Maryrose Peterschmidt and Jim Nepple. Staff present included Jim Rudisill. Others present included Rebecca Lawin McCarley, Gary Carlson and approximately a dozen local residents and building/business owners.

McCarley presented a Power Point presentation on the proposed district, earlier survey and other information. She described the process used to establish an historic district and explained a formal public hearing on the proposal would be conducted in January as part of the process. Owners will also have an opportunity to vote against the proposed district through a mail-in referendum system.

The State Nomination Review Committee will meet February 10 to consider the application, which is a joint effort between the City of Muscatine and the Greater Muscatine Chamber of Commerce and Industry. If the committee approves the application, it will be forwarded to the National Park Service for federal action. If approved there, final listing on the National Register of Historic Places will be done in April or May 2006.

McCarley said 114 resources have been identified in the proposed downtown district. Of those, two are already listed on the National Register (Welch Apartments and Trinity Episcopal Church); 93 are contributing buildings; one is a contributing object (Statue of Liberty in front of city hall); and 18 are non-contributing buildings.

Carlson outlined the impact the establishment of the historic district would have on buildings that are also part of the cultural and entertainment districts approved earlier this year for Muscatine. Most of the historic district would be part of either the Pearl City or Melon City Cultural and Entertainment Districts. Property owners of historic buildings in those districts would qualify for federal (20%) and state (25%) tax credits for repairs and restoration work. Up to \$4 million in state tax credits will be available annually for 10 years under recently approved legislation, he told the group.

One property owner asked if the city intended to apply for a larger future preservation grant. McCarley said there were no plans at this time for additional grant proposals. Brady said the first step is to get the district approved and then if the business owners or local residents wish to pursue a grant proposal the HPC could assist.

The owner also wondered about funding to upgrade facilities. Nepple said the community foundation might be a good funding source for such activities. Carlson reminded people at the meeting that the cultural and entertainment districts themselves do not have a funding source. Only tax credits are available for rehabilitation work.

Another participant asked how handicap accessibility rules could affect buildings in the historic district, especially churches. McCarley said the designation itself would not affect those guidelines.

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One owner asked if there was any possibility of additional restrictions at the local level. McCarley said there is no local designation ordinance and if the city did wish to develop one, it would need to go through the same process as any ordinance. That would mean public hearings and multiple approvals of any proposal.

McCarley then held an informal poll of those at the meeting and the majority of those present supported the downtown designation plan. Two or three of the owners said they were unsure of their position. There were no objections.

The meeting adjourned around 8 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Chairperson

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The Muscatine Historic Preservation Commission met in regular session on Wednesday, January 18, 2006 at 5:15 p.m. in the lower level conference room at the Muscatine City Hall. Members present included Jay Brady, Diane Mayer-Day, Dan Clark, Jim Nepple, Jo Ann Carlson and Maryrose Peterschmidt. Others present included Rebecca McCarley, Devin Pettit, Gary Carlson, Mary Anne Kessler and Jim Rudisill.

The consent agenda was reviewed. There were no changes to the distributed agenda. There were also no changes to the distributed minutes from the December 13 HPC meeting. Clark moved to approve the consent agenda; Nepple seconded; motion passed, all ayes.

The historic plaque program developed by MAPS was the first discussion item. Clark reported the plaque committee had not met since the last meeting, although the program's first signs have been presented. Carlson said reports he had received indicated everyone felt the first plaques were great. Clark said Jim Hetzler had talked to Steve Boka about possible changes in the city's sign ordinance.

Nepple said he had heard if the proposed historic district is approved some owners might wish to get their own signs or plaques for their buildings. He said the owners would be unlikely to spend as much for their signs as the MAPS' signs cost. He also said he had reconsidered his concerns about the sign program and now felt more comfortable with its direction. Clark agreed the HPC needed to be involved with any future discussions.

Brady asked Nepple and Clark to obtain copies of other local sign ordinances that Hetzler might obtain.

McCarley then provided an update on the CLG 2005 West Hill Survey Project. She reminded the commissioners of the upcoming February 1 deadline for getting some first drafts completed. She also told the HPC she expected all drafts in by February 1, but that the late fee penalty for some would be delayed until March 1.

Kessler offered to volunteer to provide some photography. Nepple also reminded the commission that he would do some photography. McCarley will provide some of the photo logs and other photography material.

McCarley also reported that Christine Conley had requested a work day at the library. The commission agreed to meet Tuesday, January 14, at 6:30 p.m. at the library for a work session.

McCarley is completing the preliminary report and will provide two copies to Rudisill. Brady requested one for his review. The report will need about a dozen preliminary reports with photographs. The report is due in Des Moines on February 17. That will require a labeling work night, which was tentatively set for Monday, February 13 at 5:15 p.m. at a site to be arranged. The next regular HPC meeting will be held Tuesday, February 21, at 5:15 p.m. in the lower level conference room at city hall.

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The next discussion item was an update on the downtown historic district designation. McCarley reported everything was moving forward, with the state review committee scheduled to meet on February 10 in Des Moines to consider the city's applications. Nepple moved to develop a letter of support and authorize the chair to sign it; Mayer-Day seconded; motion passed, all ayes. Brady said he would develop the letter.

There was also discussion concerning a request from the Carver Charitable Trust to be excluded from the historic district. According to a letter from the Trust, they are concerned the designation might affect control of their property. McCarley said she did not believe the state would approve dropping the Trust property from the district. She also said the concerns of the Trust were not valid, since they dealt with local designation. She said there is currently no mechanism in place for local historic designations.

The commission next discussion the status of the Murphy bed donation. Nepple reported only one response had been returned for the beds and there did not seem to be any interest. He also said they did not appear to have any value.

The HPC agreed to drop the proposed project.

The HPC briefly discussed funding support in the city's upcoming budget but did not take any action.

There was no report from the Research and Development Committee, although Clark did ask if the proposed barn demolition at the Muscatine Discovery Center would require a demolition permit. Brady also wondered if the HPC should send a letter to the county board of supervisors in support of the barn's preservation. Members agreed that was a good idea and Brady said he would draft a letter.

Nepple then moved to endorse the barn preservation project; Clark seconded; motion passed, all ayes.

The Education Committee provided a brief report on Historic Preservation Month activities. Nepple suggested organizers give Melanie Alexander a call. Carlson said if his board approves, he could send a notice on the activities out as part of the chamber newsletter.

Nepple reported owners around the corner of Mulberry and Eighth and Ninth Streets had done a good job of cleaning up their neighborhoods and might be good candidates for recognition. Brady said the committee should come to the next meeting with a tentative plan for this year's activities.

One possibility is to develop a list of the ten most endangered historic buildings in the community. Kessler said the mayor of Ft. Smith, Arkansas does his own list.

McCarley also suggested the Welch Apartments restoration as a potential award recipient. Nepple said that could be extended to both Chris Ales and Jim Barry. Rudisill

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also mentioned the volunteers who had assisted with the downtown and West Hill surveys.

Brady reported he had met with the Kiwanis earlier in the week and provided an update on the responsibilities of the HPC and explained the two surveys.

Carlson asked if an electronic copy of the downtown nomination and the associated Multiple Property Documentation application were available in electronic form. McCarley said that could be provided once the state approves the nominations.

The Projects Committee had no report.

The meeting then adjourned at 6:45 p.m. in order for commissioners to attend the downtown historic district public hearing at 7 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Chairperson