

OFFICIAL MINUTES
MUSCATINE HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION
JANUARY 21, 2009

The Muscatine Historic Preservation Commission (MHPC) met in regular session on Wednesday, January 21, 2009 at 5:15 p.m. in the lower level conference room at the Muscatine City Hall, 215 Sycamore. Members present included Ramiro Vazquez, Mary Anne Kessler, Jane Reischauer, Dan Clark and Devin Pettit. Others present included Michael Maharry (Friends of Historic Preservation), Eric Furnas (Muscatine County Building Official), Sherry Seright (Muscatine County Budget Coordinator), Charles Potter (KWPC) and staff assistant Jim Rudisill.

The commission reviewed the consent agenda, including the distributed meeting agenda and the minutes of the regular December 17, 2008 meeting.

Clark advised the commission he would alter the order of the agenda to accommodate the county guests so they would not need to stay for the entire meeting, unless they wished.

Pettit requested a correction in the minutes, explaining his discussion with council member Phil Fitzgerald had not concerned the council representative to the MHPC. He said the entire sentence should be deleted from the minutes.

There were no other changes or any additions to the consent agenda. .

Pettit moved to approve the consent agenda with the corrected minutes and agenda changes; Reischauer seconded; motion passed, all ayes.

The first agenda item was a review of Certified Local Government (CLG) activities, which included a number of discussion items. Clark reported he had talked to city administrator AJ Johnson concerning several issues. As a general impression, Clark said Johnson felt the community's understanding and appreciation of the MHPC's role and responsibilities were continuing to improve; and the examination conducted by the MHPC last month had helped with that process.

The commission then reviewed the 2008 Annual Report, which was the first item included in the overall CLG agenda category. Rudisill updated the members on two possible additional studies that might be added to the report. The studies focused on the archaeology and architecture of the Carver Corner area. Rudisill said he would talk with Planning Director Steve Boka to confirm those studies should be included.

There was also a short update on additional building renovations taking place in the West Hill that will be added to the report.

Following the discussion, Pettit moved to approve the 2008 Annual Report; Kessler seconded; motion passed, all ayes.

The commission next reviewed Clark's meeting with Johnson and the various CLG issues they discussed, including a potential MHPC budget, council representative to the MHPC and cooperation with a proposed Muscatine County CLG.

Clark said he presented the December MHPC minutes to Johnson and asked him to read the section dealing with the commission's discussion on the community/MHPC relationship. When he read the section on the appointment of a council representative to the MHPC, Clark said Johnson thought that would be problematic. Johnson explained such an appointment could create the appearance of a conflict of interest for the appointed council member, Clark told the commission.

Clark said he and Johnson also discussed the enabling ordinance that established the MHPC and the importance to commission members that the ordinance's procedures and policies be understood and followed by community residents and city officials. That led to additional discussion on the upcoming ten-year anniversary of the commission's establishment. Johnson suggested that would be an appropriate time to recognize MHPC activities and the impact the activities have made on the community, Clark said.

Clark said he and Johnson agreed that much of the previous attention given to the commission has been during "crisis" events and conducting some recognition events during less confrontational times would help to bolster the image of the commission and its mission. Johnson also believed the community was now more aware of the MHPC's purpose and more sophisticated about the need for the commission, Clark added.

Clark also reported that during the sweeping discussion on the commission and its role in the community, he raised the issue of a commission line item in the city's budget. Clark said he told Johnson the lack of a budget contributed to the perception among its members that the commission and its functions were not valued.

Clark said Johnson mentioned the commission once had a line item and he also acknowledged a budget item would provide the commission with a "seat at the table." However, Johnson indicated it might be too late to add any request this year; and when or if anything is eventually added, it would likely be a token amount, Clark added.

The two also discussed Muscatine County's interest in establishing a countywide historic preservation commission; and the desire of county officials to seek grant funding to assist with renovation of historic county buildings within Muscatine, Clark said.

Although Johnson identified some recent friction between the city and the county over other issues, he supported finding some way to assist the county with forming its own commission and other preservation efforts, Clark reported.

The assistance might include allowing staff assistant Jim Rudisill to assist with grant applications, he continued. Following that report, Furnas and Seright told the commission they felt the county could prepare any grant application, if Rudisill was available to assist with proofreading, final review and similar help or guidance.

The two also reported there had not been any response from county residents to serve as members of a possible county historic preservation commission. Clark had earlier reported that during his talk with Johnson that Johnson had mentioned the lengthy list of city residents who had applied for membership on the new city commission. Furnas and Seright both indicated they would welcome the opportunity to develop a similar list of county residents, but found the lack of response disappointing. Potter suggested a couple of West Liberty individuals who might be interested and the county officials said they would contact them.

Both the county officials and the commission members agreed the two groups should continue to coordinate any efforts to establish a county preservation commission.

Clark also reported there had not been any progress with holding a joint training program with Louisa County. He will continue those efforts.

The commission next discussed two issues dealing with Mulberry Avenue. The first item was a progress update on the Mulberry Avenue survey. Pettit reported he is continuing to work on his assigned properties. The other members indicated they had stalled on their work, but would continue as time allowed.

The second Mulberry Avenue issue was an update on the house/property owned by the Muscatine Art Center (MAC) at 1402 Mulberry. Clark reported he was continuing to communicate with Susan Jayne, a descendent of Henry Jayne, who built the house. Clark also said he had started a Friends of HPC Facebook page and nearly 100 people had already joined.

Clark said he missed the January 15 meeting of the MAC Board of Directors, but had talked to Barb Christensen later and learned there had not been any discussion concerning the property.

Clark also reported he had talked to Johnson concerning the property and its ownership. Clark said he explained to Johnson the MHPC's concerns over the lack of knowledge of the MHPC; and the appearance that city boards and commissions were not aware of each other's activities or functions.

Several others at the meeting also commented.

Pettit said if the house at 1402 Mulberry is eventually demolished - which he pointed out was included in the draft Capital Improvement Projects (CIP) plan presented to the Muscatine Planning & Zoning Commission on January 13 - constructing an auxiliary building or an addition to the art center on the vacant land would still impact the historic significance of the art center. He said a final version of the CIP did not include the demolition goal.

Maharry said he was encouraged the demolition had been removed from the development plan and the MHPC had been able to impact decisions earlier in the process, especially with the report from David Arbogast concerning the good condition of the house. He also pointed out the art center had purchased two properties on Cedar Street and wondered about their value to the center for expansion.

Kessler questioned whether the Arbogast report had as much impact as desired, since electricians and plumbers reportedly had examined the house and said it would be expensive to upgrade those systems.

Clark said the MHPC had made its case, but acknowledged the final decision would be up to the art center board. Kessler said the MHPC should continue to monitor the property and Maharry suggested the city council should be updated on the status of property.

In the meantime, Clark said Johnson had reported during their meeting that he felt there was more awareness now of the MHPC concerns and everyone would be more alert to the situation.

Reischauer next reported on the status of the MHPC funds being held by the Community Foundation of Greater Muscatine. She reported there was no additional clarification concerning the foundation's refusal to transfer the funds to the Friends of Historic Preservation. Reischauer said a new part-time financial officer had recently been hired by the foundation and she would contact that person for more information.

Rudisill next reported there had not been any additional progress on loading the digital survey reports and National Register applications for West Hill and the Downtown onto the Musser Public Library's website. He said the library was currently in the process of upgrading the site and the reports would likely not be added until that process was completed.

The next item on the agenda was a request from AJ Johnson for the MHPC to consider whether a truck parking restriction within historic districts should be incorporated into the city's traffic ordinance.

The commission had discussed the issue a few months ago, but had opted not to make any recommendation at that time because they felt the initial cause of concern had been removed. However, Rudisill said Johnson had requested a more documented review with a formal recommendation presented to him.

Rudisill said he had contacted Paula Mohr, the CLG Coordinator in the State Historic Preservation Office, and requested any information on similar restrictions in other cities. Mohr had responded that she did not have any specific information herself, but had forwarded the request to a listserv of other historic preservation officials around the country. Several of those had responded with examples, which Rudisill then distributed to the commission members. He also provided copies of Muscatine's existing traffic ordinance.

Clark assigned Pettit to coordinate the review with the city's ad-hoc parking committee and possibly the Muscatine Planning and Zoning Commission and bring a recommendation back to the MHPC next month.

Several general reports were then presented to the MHPC.

Maharry updated the commission on the Friends meeting from the week before. He said the Historic Preservation Month planning for the tour of former/current Muscatine doctors' homes planned for Sunday, May 10, would be titled "House Calls." Several properties have been identified, but additional locations must still be determined. The presentation of certificates will be conducted with the MHPC on Saturday, May 9.

Kessler reported 40 more copies of the *Rooftops of Muscatine* have been ordered.

Clark also reported Muscatine Mayor Richard O'Brien had agreed to deliver a proclamation declaring February 22-28 as Alexander Clark week in Muscatine. Mayor Walter Conway had declared the first Alexander Clark Day in February 1958. Clark said he was hoping to get a state resolution approved and was talking with local legislators. He also advised the commission that a reception would be held at the Muscatine Art Center on February 22 in recognition of Muscatine's "colored orator of the West."

The next meeting of the commission will be held Wednesday, February 18.

The commission then adjourned at approximately 6:40 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Chair