

**OFFICIAL MINUTES
MUSCATINE HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION
OCTOBER 21, 2009**

The Muscatine Historic Preservation Commission (MHPC) met in regular session on Wednesday, October 21, 2009 at 5:15 p.m. in the lower-level conference room at the Muscatine City Hall. Members present included Dan Clark, Jane Reischauer, Ramiro Vazquez, Jo Ann Carlson and Mary Anne Kessler. Others present included Devin Pettit, Kent Sissel and staff assistant Jim Rudisill.

The commission reviewed the consent agenda, including the distributed meeting agenda and the minutes of the regular September 16, 2009 and the regular August 19, 2009 meeting. The August 19, 2009 minutes were included since there had not been a September business meeting because a quorum was not present. There were no corrections or additions to the consent agenda.

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

The first agenda item discussed was a short report by Clark on the joint Muscatine-Louisa County training program held at the Pearl City Station on September 17-18. The item was included by Clark under the Certified Local Government (CLG) agenda category. Clark said he felt the training went well and everyone who participated had felt welcomed.

Clark said during the training session, Jack Porter, SHSI Preservation Architect, visited the Civil War Monument in the court house square. Others who also were present for that viewing were Muscatine County Administrative Services Director Eric Furnas, Muscatine County Budget Coordinator Sherry Seright, Clark and Rudisill.

Although Porter acknowledged he did not have the expertise to offer a definitive answer to the obvious deterioration of the statue and other concerns, he did encourage the county officials to take steps to preserve the monument. One method he suggested was to create a reproduction of the soldier that sets on the top of the monument's column and store the original statue in a safe place.

He also pointed out grant funding might be available to assist with any preservation; and encouraged the county officials to seek additional professional advice.

Clark also reported that Lee Miller had told the county supervisors that further inspections of the monument indicated the column was not about to fall, as had previously been feared. Miller spoke on behalf of a committee including leaders of the Muscatine VFW and American Legion. An inspection by E&H Restoration revealed the plaques on the sides of the monument could be removed; new names added; and then remounted without damage. E&H also believed the soldier could be removed from the top of the monument without causing any damage.

The next CLG item discussed was an update on efforts to identify an Alexander Clark recognition area in a small two-block area centered along Third Street between Chestnut and Pine.

Rudisill reported on preservation consultant Rebecca McCarley's concerns over naming any area as a local historic district. She said that identifier has a specific

definition for historic preservationists and should only be used in the right context and with proper supporting action by the city council.

Sissel, who owns the former home of the 19th-century civil rights leader, reminded the commission that he had insisted any description of the proposed recognition area not include a local historic district label.

He explained part of the problem would be the city's lack of qualified staff to implement a local historic ordinance or other guidelines. He also said he was trying to identify the area with a focus on abolition or similar site specific issue.

Clark said that focus would mesh well with a recent discussion he had with SHSI Archaeologist Doug Jones concerning the former Congregational Church (now Pro-Hair). Clark said Jones was especially excited to learn the pre-Civil War building still existed, because there are few such buildings in Iowa..

Sissel said he supported identifying the area as an Alexander Clark Neighborhood, which would allow the Greater Muscatine Chamber of Commerce and Industry to connect the various abolition/civil rights resources in the area and market it. Sissel suggested a brochure with that specific focus could be published and potentially used in day trip marketing. He also pointed out the area was included in a cultural and entertainment district, although he said that program did not appear to be generating much traction for historic preservation or economic development.

Pettit agreed if the area was identified under a site specific focus, organizations could then market it more effectively.

Kessler said she supported attaching the abolitionist tag to the area because of the greater marketability of the movement rather than a single individual..

One potential marketing problem might be staffing, since the GMCCI no longer has Amanda Landers Each who was manager for the Culture and Entertainment districts, and the CVB staff is stretched very thin. Clark however said the Muscatine Downtown Action Alliance was planning to establish a part-time position and whoever was hired for it might be able to provide some promotional activities.

The abolitionist focus might also work better in establishing a National Historic Landmark (NHL) for the area. Sissel said he had discussed his efforts to get the former Clark home listed as a NHL with Cornell University Professor Paul Finkleman, an expert in constitutional law relating to slavery.

Finkleman had suggested using abolition and integration themes to develop the NHL application; and had actually offered to write the application himself and make the formal presentation to the review committee. Other proposed development for the potential NHL site could be a statue of Clark, plaques, institutionalizing of Clark's former home and other efforts. Sissel estimated the total cost for the proposal could reach about \$1.2 million.

Sissel said Finkleman might come to Iowa in mid-January to talk at Muscatine, Des Moines, Oskaloosa, and possibly Iowa City. In the meantime, Clark said any discussion with the council would be premature and suggested the first contact should be with the new city administrator.

The commission next discussed the status of various historic properties around the community. The first property was the Henry Jayne House at 1402 Mulberry. The city council did approve the sale of the house to Brian Costas and commission members discussed possible further involvement. Clark explained a comment he made had been incorrectly reported in an edition of the Muscatine Journal. He said he did not "pledge" the commission's support for Costas to complete a National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) application for the property. Rather, he had told the Art Center board several times the commission was doing research that would be needed for a nomination and would gladly "help" a buyer who might want to apply.

Kessler said Costas had also bought the house adjoining the new site and was planning to live in it while working on the Jayne House. She suggested the commission take a wait-and-see approach to NRHP assistance. Clark said he had informed state officials about the sale and planned move and he would advise Costas about communicating with the state as Costas proceeded with the project.

There was no report of any change in the status of the Weed Park Cabin.

Reischauer reported the owners of 311 Green had rejected an offer of \$15,000 for that property, but commission members acknowledged an email from Anna Mack explaining a \$30,000 offer would be acceptable to the owners from anyone planning to restore the building. Commission members agreed there was no reason to ask for another tour of the house and there was no further action.

The members briefly discussed other house tours, including one of the Weed House on Oakview Drive. Neither Dave Armstrong nor the commission has apparently been in touch with either concerning a possible tour.

Reischauer then provided a short report on the existing commission funds with the Community Foundation of Muscatine. She said there is \$209.35 in a permanently restricted fund under the Muscatine Cultural Alliance. Another \$256.26 is in a temporary restricted fund. She is now receiving the MHPC financial reports from the foundation.

There was no Friends of Preservation report since that group did not have a meeting. Instead, those members had attended a Resource Enhancement and Preservation (REAP) Regional Assembly.

The meeting then adjourned at approximately 6:20 p.m.

The next regularly scheduled meeting of the commission would be Wednesday, November 18, 2009 at 5:15 p.m. in the Muscatine City Hall lower level conference room.

Respectfully submitted,

Chair