

OFFICIAL MINUTES
MUSCATINE HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION
NOVEMBER 16, 2011

The Muscatine Historic Preservation Commission (MHPC) met in regular session on Wednesday, November 16, 2011, at 5:15 p.m. in the lower level conference room at Muscatine City Hall. Members present included Jo Ann Carlson, Devin Pettit, Jane Reischauer, Ramiro Vazquez and Anna Mack. 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 October 13, 2011 meeting. Following the review, Carlson moved to approve the consent agenda; Pettit seconded; motion passed, all ayes.

The first discussion item was a review of the grant-funded survey projects being considered under the Certified Local Government (CLG) Activities portion of the agenda.

The Roy J. Carver Charitable Trust has awarded a \$6000 grant to the commission for reconnaissance surveys of Mulberry Avenue, Colver Street, Fair Oaks and County Club Hills areas of the community. Based on various cost scenarios provided by consultant Rebecca McCarley, the MHPC had submitted a \$24,100 application to the trust. The Community Foundation of Greater Muscatine had previously awarded a \$2100 grant for the surveys and the Friends of Muscatine Historic Preservation had also pledged \$1000.

Rudisill distributed copies of emails exchanged between McCarley, Reischauer, Pettit and himself in which they reviewed various options for completing the surveys with the lower amount of funding.

Pettit said after reviewing McCarley's latest recommendations and considering she would not be able to begin any work until next summer, he favored applying for an Historic Resources Development Program (HRDP) grant in May. Assuming the organizations that have already pledged or awarded funds do not withdraw their support, the MHPC could request a high enough HRDP award to conduct all four reconnaissance surveys.

Hopefully, the reconnaissance surveys would be detailed enough to allow National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) nominations to move forward, Pettit said. He was more confident of that possibility with the smaller survey areas rather than with Mulberry Avenue. He said McCarley had identified the smaller areas as having a more unified development, while Mulberry had developed throughout the last half of the 19th and first half of the 20th centuries. He also suggested the MHPC could ask another consultant to provide cost estimates for the surveys, but he doubted they could provide a competitive bid since McCarley had completed so much prior work in the city.

Reischauer and Maharry agreed with the grant match for the HRDP already met, that option offered the best opportunity for getting the most survey work completed. However, Maharry also pointed out that even if the reconnaissance surveys were determined by the State Historical Society of Iowa (SHSI) as providing enough research for an NRHP nomination, money would still need to be raised to actually submit the nominations.

Also, if no HRDP is awarded, Pettit suggested the MHPC then pursue a survey of the Fair Oaks area, using the available funding. McCarley will need to be contacted to confirm her fees for the surveys will not change through the first half of 2012.

Pettit then moved to apply for an HRDP grant award in May to conduct four reconnaissance surveys, using the existing awards as the cash match; and to continue to use McCarley as the city's consultant for the project; Vazquez seconded; motion passed, all ayes.

Following the vote, Rudisill was directed to contact McCarley and confirm her fees will remain constant through the HRDP application period; continue to provide updates to the original grantors; and send a copy of the Carver grant application to the MHPC members.

The next CLG discussion issue was a review of the historic resources section of the city's continuing comprehensive plan update. Rudisill distributed copies of the Burlington, Iowa historic preservation plan, an executive summary of the Iowa City plan and a copy of a historic resources plan developed by Reischauer. Reischauer's plan has been submitted to city planner Andrew Fangman, who is updating the city's overall comprehensive plan. Rudisill requested commission members to review the material and present comments at the next meeting.

Information on a possible property tax abatement program designed for historic properties was the next discussion item. Rudisill presented a draft of a possible tax abatement program for Muscatine to the commission members. In addition to the draft, he also presented a copy of the city's current urban revitalization tax abatement program and a pamphlet describing an historic property tax abatement program the City of Dallas, Texas has implemented.

He provided a short review of the draft and a few key points that Muscatine Community Development Director Steve Boka indicated he wanted to see in any final abatement program. These points included a desire to have the MHPC take an active role in the approval process for any tax abatement; and that the program not adhere strictly to any standards, provided there was no destruction of historically significant features.

Maharry said the last point concerned him because it would encourage people to install features that could negatively impact a historic property. He did not feel that any program that allowed that would be a step in the right direction.

Rudisill said any development of a program that would give the MHPC design review authority was unlikely at this time, but the tax abatement program perhaps could be a step in that direction. Reischauer also said if the program was enacted, it would at least reduce the claim by some landowners who are unwilling to repair their buildings because of fears it will raise their taxes. Pettit suggested developing a mechanism to prevent contributing buildings being converted to non-contributing. He said communities of a similar size as Muscatine are providing some type of review process and questioned why Muscatine could not. He also suggested a group of West Hill property owners could initiate a drive to seek a local historic district.

Rudisill urged the commission to review the draft and discuss it at the next meeting. Once a revised draft is developed, he will present it to Boka for his review and comments.

The commission next discussed a joint meeting with the Muscatine County HPC.

Rudisill reminded the commission of comments he had made at an earlier meeting about which commission should be responsible for monitoring certain historic buildings. He had suggested even county-owned buildings that were located within the city limits should continue to be monitored by the city HPC. He had contacted CLG Coordinator Paula Mohr for her input. Mohr had indicated either or both HPCs could include a monitoring statement in their respective annual reports.

She did feel in any effort to shape the management or any rehabilitation of a county-owned building should come from the county commission since its members would likely more closely identify with the county supervisors, who had appointed them.

Reischauer, who is member of the county commission, also reported Mohr had held a teleconference with the county commission at its meeting earlier in the month. She said Mohr had recommended the county commission focus on getting an inventory of historic resources in the county area. Reischauer said another focus of the county commission will be gaining CLG status. She said Mohr also felt the two commissions should strive to work together, especially on education and outreach efforts.

Pettit suggested a good place to start with coordinating efforts would be with Historic Preservation Month activities in May. Maharry said the Friends might be interested in assisting.

The final CLG-related issue discussed by the commission was the 2011 Annual Report.

Rudisill reminded commission members to provide him with any training they might have taken during 2011. He said the members who attended the Preservation Iowa conference in August would qualify for that training, but if others had taken anything, to let him know.

He also requested the members provide him with any monitoring reports on historic buildings that had been altered this year.

The next discussion items covering issues relating to historic properties or districts.

The first was an update on the revision of the Alexander Clark National Register of Historic Places nomination. Rudisill said Kent Sissel had contacted him earlier to report on difficulties Sissel was having with reaching any National Park Service (NPS) personnel in Omaha.

According to Sissel, his previous contact at the Omaha NPS office was not responding to his calls or messages and he was not having any luck reaching anyone. He said a contact in Washington DC might be able to provide some assistance and he would keep the commission informed.

In the meantime, Sissel said he was unsure of the project's status since he had not been able to talk with any NPS officials.

Signage for the two national historic districts was the next discussion issue.

Because the project stalled, its status was unclear at this point. Both Reischauer and Carlson said they would review their previous work and report back to the commission. Reischauer said she would also contact Gary Carlson at HNI and confirm its continued support for helping finance any signs.

Several miscellaneous items were then discussed under the reports portion of the agenda.

Maharry said he had received a letter from the Department of Revenue confirming a \$30,000 historic tax credit had been reserved for the Friends. This credit relates to work completed on Tom and Cindy Kautz's home at 205 Cherry (J.C.B. Warde House). Although Maharry said the letter reporting the reserve had arrived, no actual check had come.

Maharry also reported seeing a Quad City/Burlington chapter of Youthbuild had been recognized for completing rehabilitation or building of homes. He pointed out the Muscatine has all the components for starting a Youthbuild chapter in the community, including a community college, housing and youth. He said under the program lenders can donate deteriorated historic homes, which the Youthbuild team can then rehabilitate and eventually sell.

Reischauer said a general contractor would likely still need to be used to oversee the work. Maharry said he planned to talk with the Quad City/Burlington chapter to discuss the program and determine if any collaboration can be provided.

He reminded the commission the West Hill Historic District has a few properties with yellow tags and police tape and was concerned over the potential impacts of the tape on the neighborhood's attitudes.

Maharry also reported on the recent school board meeting he and former MHPC member Dan Clark recently attended. Maharry said the school district has purchased two properties and likely are looking at a third and maybe more parcels near the Jefferson school, possibly with the intent to clear the lots and use them for parking. Pettit said two homes on Mulberry might also be potential acquisitions by the board.

Maharry said he and Clark, along with two other residents, voiced concerns over that possibility and urged the school board to consider options other than demolition. He said if the houses are demolished the city would lose around \$5000 annually in property tax revenue.

Maharry also reported seeing the Iowa City HPC had recently awarded 26 preservation awards in one year.

Carlson then provided a short report on the house that was moved from the art center to Iowa Avenue. She said dirt was now around the house and it appeared work had been renewed.

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

The next regular meeting of the commission is scheduled for Wednesday, December 21, 2011 at 5:15 p.m. in the Muscatine City Hall lower level conference room.

Respectfully submitted,

Chair