

OFFICIAL MINUTES
MUSCATINE HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION
JULY 18, 2012

The Muscatine Historic Preservation Commission (MHPC) met in regular session on Wednesday, July 18, 2012, at 5:45 p.m. in the city council chambers at Muscatine City Hall. Members present included Devin Pettit, Jane Reischauer, Julie Wolf and Jim Schmidt. Others present included Jim Rudisill. Following the roll, the commission reviewed the consent agenda, including the distributed agenda and the minutes of the regular June 20, 2012 meeting. Pettit moved to approve the minutes as submitted; Wolf seconded; motion passed, all ayes.

The first discussion issue under the Certified Local Government category was on the proposed property tax abatement program for historic buildings. Rudisill reported on a new idea presented by Muscatine City Administrator Gregg Mandsager that would replace the 10-year, 80-20%, graduated tax abatement table for historic buildings with one that would offer a three-year, 100% abatement schedule. Rudisill said Mandsager felt more people might apply if they could see a quicker turnaround on their renovation costs.

Mandsager had also suggested the three-year, 100% schedule could apply to new homes in both historic districts and other development areas as a way to increase construction on in-fill lots throughout the community.

Commission members indicated some uncertainty over Mandsager's new construction proposal within historic districts and requested Rudisill to ask Mandsager to attend the next meeting to provide more background on his suggestion.

Generally the consensus of the commission was to support the three-year, 100% abatement schedule, although Schmidt did suggest allowing residents to pick which schedule they wished to follow. However, several questions were raised over the possibility of providing an abatement for new construction within a historic district.

Both Reischauer and Schmidt wondered what stake the commission would have in non-historic new construction in a historic district. Several commissioners said they opposed providing any support for incentives that might be offered to demolish any building in a historic district in order to build something new. Wolf also suggested any new building should be sympathetic to the historic district's existing architecture to receive any property tax abatement. She also questioned whether any abatement should even be offered for new construction within a historic district.

Reischauer said the new construction proposal might offer an opportunity for the city to implement a two-tier abatement policy. One tier would provide a schedule for new construction, while the second tier would offer an abatement policy that would offer incentives that favored the preservation of the existing architecture.

Reischauer asked the commission members to continue reviewing the proposed abatement programs and provide Rudisill with any comments.

The commission then discussed the next comprehensive planning meeting to be held August 14 at the Zion Lutheran Church. The meeting will focus on development proposals for the River Center Planning District. Reischauer and Pettit both indicated they planned to attend.

The next discussion issue was the commission membership.

Rudisill reported that Ramiro Vazquez had submitted his formal resignation. Rudisill said there were no applications to fill the current two vacancies on the commission.

Reischauer directed Rudisill to contact Iowa State CLG Coordinator Paula Mohr to determine if the commission membership could be reduced.

The commission next discussed issues related to historic districts and property.

Rudisill said Kent Sissel had contacted him earlier to report on the project's status. Sissel had reported some reservations about continuing with the project because of family issues, but was continuing to talk to state, federal and local supporters. Sissel had not reported any new completed work.

The signage of historic districts was then discussed.

Reischauer said she would send a thank-you to HNI for its contribution towards the signs. Rudisill said he would provide Reischauer with an MHPC letterhead.

The commission then discussed its failed Historic Resources Development Program grant application to fund four reconnaissance surveys in the community. Reischauer said the commission needed to discuss its options and request the continued support from its funders: Carver Charitable Trust, Community Foundation of Greater Muscatine and Friends of Muscatine Historic Preservation.

Reischauer said she favored asking the funders to support formal reconnaissance surveys of Fair Oaks and Colver Street, since they both were restricted developments that were completed about the same time. If all the funding support is not reauthorized, the commission will need to determine the next direction, most likely to completing a reconnaissance survey of just Fair Oaks.

Reischauer then moved to seek approval from the funders to support a reconnaissance survey of Fair Oaks and Colver Street; and if the funders decline, to seek support for just a Fair Oaks reconnaissance survey; Schmidt seconded; motion passed, all ayes.

Reports were then presented.

Reischauer said Muscatine County might be looking again to rid itself of the old sheriff's office. She said Jim Nepple had been working on a contract for tax credits on the building. She said the Friends were seeking to have any tax credit funds go to the Community Foundation of Greater Muscatine for future historic preservation of county buildings.

Pettit also reported control of the church at Sixth and Walnut had apparently been transferred to Tom Meeker.

The meeting then adjourned at approximately 6:30 p.m.

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

Respectfully submitted,

Chair