

OFFICIAL MINUTES
MUSCATINE HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION
MAY 18, 2011

The Muscatine Historic Preservation Commission (MHPC) met in regular session on Wednesday, May 18, 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, Jim Schmidt, Ramiro Vazquez and Diane Mayer-Day. Others present were Michael Maharry, Paul Carroll, Duffy DeFrance and Jim Rudisill.

The commission reviewed the consent agenda, including the distributed agenda and the minutes of the regular April 20, 2011 meeting. Pettit pointed out the minutes should state that Ann Meeker had notified Pettit of a pending downtown project that would fulfill all Main Street goals and that an Enterprise Zone might be one of the financial tools to implement the project. Pettit then moved to approve the consent agenda with the correction; Vazquez seconded; motion passed, all ayes.

Several Certified Local Government (CLG) issues were the commission's first discussion items.

Rudisill reported there had not limited progress on the National Historic Landmark (NHL) application for the Alexander Clark House. Kent Sissel had contacted him earlier and reported because of additional directions the project was going, including broadcasting efforts, keeping the NHL focus was difficult.

The current grant contract might need to be refined because of the different directions.

The commission also discussed membership.

The terms of Diane Mayer-Day and Ramiro Vazquez both expire on June 30. Mayer-Day has served two consecutive terms and is ineligible for reappointment. Vazquez has served one term and is eligible for re-appointment, but he has indicated a willingness to step aside if someone wishes to serve.

Currently Gina Chesling has expressed an interest. Larry Wolf also filed a general application as a city volunteer, but he currently serves on the Board of Adjustment. Christine Conley might also be interested.

Carlson said she would contact Chesling and Conley, while Reischauer said she would contact Wolf.

The commission next discussed a proposal from consultant Rebecca McCarley to conduct either one or a set of windshield survey(s) to determine the potential for historic districts in four areas of the community. The information collected could form the basis for submitting a later nomination. The potential cost could top \$5000.

Paul Carroll, who works with the Community Foundation of Greater Muscatine, said the foundation has a \$5000 limit on applications, but recommended the commission seek that much. He also reminded the commissioners of the foundation's June 15 deadline for the next round of grant applications.

Maharry also reported the Friends of Muscatine Historic Preservation could be approached for funding assistance.

Schmidt then moved to submit a grant application to the community foundation for funding a windshield survey of the Mulberry Avenue and Fair Oaks area; Mayer-Day seconded; motion passed, all ayes.

Following the decision, Pettit reported he had determined there were 210 resources on Mulberry Avenue, but in her report, McCarley had only listed 160. Pettit suggested the difference might be in the section of Mulberry each of them had identified. He had researched Mulberry from the #4 alley to Tipton. McCarley had not identified the section she was proposing for study.

Maharry also suggested the commission ask McCarley to provide a cost estimate for actually completing a historic district nomination. He said that would provide a picture of the cost for the entire process.

Under other CLG business, Duffy DeFrance explained she was a member of the Muscatine Masquers Theatre Group which owns the former Jewish synagogue on Spring Street (Seventh Street). DeFrance said the theatre group currently uses the building to store costumes and other material, but is concerned about its future.

It is possible the building is the first synagogue west of the Mississippi, but the theatre group does not have a complete history on the building, she reported. She asked if the commission knew if anyone has collected the building's history and if a historic district was being considered for that area.

Carroll said the Muscatine Center for Non-Profits was trying to centralize props and costume collections from around the community, possibly at its downtown building. He also said an effort to collect records should be made.

DeFrance said she would organize a tour of the building, but acknowledged there was a need to get more people involved. She said the Iowa Jewish Foundation might be interested, but more information on the building was needed. She also said the building must have some purpose, especially if the Masquers moved their props and costumes out.

Reischauer said she would look into conducting some research on the building.

The commission next discussed several historic property or district issues, including additional discussion on McCarley's windshield survey proposal.

There was also discussion on signage for the current historic districts.

Reischauer said five or six signs should go on the main streets into each historic district. Carlson, who had completed some research on historic district signs, had a prior commitment and left the meeting before this discussion; so Reischauer said she would contact Carlson for cost and other information.

The commission next discussed the county jail and sheriff's office and the tour held for the commission the previous week. Although a study has recommended demolition as an option for both buildings, they are both currently in sturdy condition. There is also no money available from the county for either demolition or renovation at this time.

Carroll said he had talked with several supervisors and the impression he had was the old jail would probably be safe. The sheriff's office however could eventually be demolished. He suggested the site might be a good countywide records archive location. Maharry said the supervisors should consider donating the building if there was interest in preserving it. Carroll also said he would talk with John Stevens for possible assistance in preserving the buildings.

The commission next discussed planning for the 2011 Preservation Iowa Annual Conference in Muscatine on August 5-6. Maharry reported the theme for the conference was "Turning Clamshells into Pearl Buttons".

He said the conference is expecting to draw around 120 people from throughout Iowa and western Illinois. The conference will open on Friday morning with educational sessions on successful historic projects in Iowa and Illinois. The grist mill at Wildcat Den State Park will be discussed during a morning session. Lunch on Friday will be at the Button Factory, which will offer Tom and Ann Meeker an opportunity to showcase their adaptive reuse efforts in the downtown.

Other conference activities on Friday include a tour of the button museum, riverboat tour and the Muscatine Center for Nonprofits, Maharry reported.

On Saturday morning there will be guided tours of the West Hill Historic District, Greenwood Cemetery, Old Barn, Grist Mill, Art Center and a talk from "Alexander Clark" at the Welch Apartments. The afternoon will feature historic home tours.

Carroll wondered if volunteers would be needed during the conference. Maharry said they might be, but no figure had been determined. He did report sponsorships were being recruited. Currently the Muscatine Visitors and Tourism Bureau had agreed to be a sponsor and the Downtown Action Alliance had been asked.

Under miscellaneous reports, Maharry reported signs for the May Preservation Month Award winners had been distributed and erected at 415 W. Fourth, 417 E. Third, 133 W. Second, 710 W. Fourth and 818 Mulberry. The signs will remain up through May. A press release had also been distributed and a proclamation approved at an earlier city council meeting.

Pettit reported the Downtown Action Alliance may contribute up to \$200 towards the August conference. DeFrance also suggested the Muscatine Arts Council might be willing to donate, if there was some arts/cultural event included in the conference.

Pettit also reported he had been recruited to write historic descriptions for the Grossheim photos at Pearl Plaza. After hearing that, Maharry wondered if some of the larger photos at the library might be loaned for the conference. Carroll also suggested the Friends ask for assistance from the Questers. He suggested Linda Smock be contacted. Carroll also said the window display at the Muscatine Center for Nonprofits might be available for preservation month award information.

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

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

Respectfully submitted,

Chair