

**OFFICIAL MINUTES
MUSCATINE HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION
FEBRUARY 18, 2009**

The Muscatine Historic Preservation Commission (MHPC) met in regular session on Wednesday, February 18, 2009 at 5:15 p.m. in the lower level conference room at the Muscatine City Hall, 215 Sycamore. Members present included Ramiro Vazquez, Jane Reischauer, Dan Clark, Devin Pettit, Jo Ann Carlson and Diane Mayer-Day. Others present included Michael Maharry (Friends of Historic Preservation), Kent Sissel (Alexander Clark Week/Landmark Project), 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 January 21, 2008 meeting.

There were no changes to the agenda.

Day requested a correction in the minutes to show she attended the January meeting.

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

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

The first agenda item was a review on the status of the on-going Mulberry property survey. Pettit recommended everyone stop conducting any research because the Friends of Muscatine Historic Preservation has not submitted a planned grant application to Preserve America that might have provided funding and research assistance. He also pointed out the survey work was not helping to curtail discussion on possible building demolitions along the street.

Clark said Kessler, had contacted him to apologize for not completing more research on the Jayne House. Pettit said he had developed a broad outline on the Manjoine block, which might be helpful if rumors of its potential sale and demolition are correct.

Following additional discussion, Pettit moved to suspend work on the Mulberry Avenue survey; Reischauer seconded; motion passed, all ayes.

The commission next discussed the Jayne House at 1402 Mulberry.

Clark reported the Muscatine Art Center's Building and Grounds Committee had apparently met on February 16 and planned to meet with the full art center board on February 19 with a recommendation on the house. Barb Christiansen, art center director, had emailed a copy of the committee's proposal to him for review. Clark pointed out the recommendation was dated January 15, but he assumed that was a mistaken date since he had just received the report and Christiansen's email, which was dated February 16, said the committee had met "today".

The report listed three options for the house:

Option #1

"Gift or sell the Jayne House (at a nominal cost only sufficient to transfer ownership) to the Muscatine Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) or another 501(c)(3) organization of their choosing. In addition, the Art Center will contribute \$5,000 to the HPC for use only in the actual house removal. Necessary to perfect the agreement, the house must be removed from the property within 30 days of accepting ownership.

Failure to remove the house from the property in the allotted time will result in the ownership reverting back to the Art Center and the return of the \$5,000. The HPC will be given 180 days from the date that the Art Center Board of Trustees approves the plan to offer the house to accept the offer and raise the needed funds to remove the house from the property.”

Option #2

“In the event that Option #1 is not perfected, the Art Center will offer the house for sale by public bid. The bidding will close 30 days from its start date. Necessary to perfect the agreement, the house must be removed from the property within 30 days of accepting ownership. Failure to remove the house from the property will result in the ownership reverting back to the Art Center.”

Option #3

“In the event that neither Option #1 or #2 can be perfected, the Art Center will undertake the demolition, removal, and disposal of the house.”

In addition to listing the three options, Clark said the MAC’s Building and Grounds Committee had also reported the heating system from the Jayne House had been removed and installed in the Art Center Carriage House

Clark said the options failed to describe what were the art center’s objectives for the house. He also said he was unaware of any prior discussion where the art center board of directors had gone on record to identify those objectives.

However, Pettit said he attended the December 9, 2008 meeting of the Muscatine Planning and Zoning Commission and at that meeting received a draft report of Muscatine’s 2009-13 Capital Improvement Projects (CIP) Plan. The draft was distributed to the commission members for review before it was submitted to the city council. The report contained a proposal from the art center to acquire and demolish the Jayne House for possible future expansion of the art center. Pettit pointed out the proposal was discouraging not only because of its proposed demolition, but if expansion of the art center occurred to the west, it would likely create a problem with that facility’s historic integrity.

In the final 2009-13 CIP Plan, which the Muscatine City Council approved on January 15, 2009, the proposal only called for acquisition of the property to the west of the art center for possible future expansion and the reference to demolition had been removed, Pettit said.

The wording difference between the two proposals and their timing was a concern to the MHPC members and Maharry.

Maharry pointed out when he and others had met with the art center board of directors during its January meeting, board members had stressed they had not made any decision on the house. However, Pettit’s revelation indicated that as recently as December 9, the board had developed a plan to acquire and demolish the Jayne House and use the space for expansion.

“Did they misrepresent themselves?” Maharry asked, referring to the comments made by board members during the January meeting.

Maharry also criticized the options identified by the art center board, explaining the first one was impossible to achieve because it likely was not feasible due to costs, problems with physically relocating and moving the house and other circumstances.

Because of those issues, Maharry suggested that offer had been made in bad faith. Sissel agreed those issues appeared insurmountable because of physical or financial constraints and suggested the commission needed to meet with the board to offer a proposal that did not move the house.

Maharry said such an offer, to split the property with one-third staying with the house and the art center retaining the larger portion, had already been presented at an earlier meeting of the board. However, the board never provided any response and he said it would be difficult now to provide any new proposal without knowing what the board's objectives were for the property.

Pettit said the best alternative would be to continue pursuing the split lot proposal.

Clark said the commission still needed to explore all potential options and then present a new proposal to the art center in good faith. He and Reischauer agreed to represent the commission at the art center's February 19 meeting.

Topics to be covered at that meeting or prior to it would include: asking the art center board to state its objectives for the property and identify when those objectives were adopted; continue to investigate the cost and feasibility of moving the house, while stressing the impact that would cause on the building's historical integrity; express appreciation to the board for its willingness to work with the commission, but point out the apparent lack of full disclosure that appears to have occurred during the discussion.

The next discussion item(s) focused on the status of the Certified Local Government issues discussed or reviewed at the January meeting. Clark said there was no new information on the budget question.

No county officials were present to report on their preservation efforts and Rudisill reported he had not received any inquiries from the county concerning grant requests.

Clark did report a committee had been formed to organize the centennial commemoration of the 1909 construction of the county courthouse. Clark said he had told committee member Don Lewis that he would be willing to assist with the committee work and to seek other members.

Clark also reported Connie Street of the Louisa County Historical Preservation Commission is still interested in conducting a joint training meeting with the MHPC, but no further planning has been done.

The commission then discussed the community foundation accounts. Reischauer had sent an email out to the commission earlier concerning the foundation's position on transferring any accounts. Clark said two accounts had been created with the foundation, but the email had not clarified why the community foundation would not approve the transfers.

Pettit asked if anyone was receiving the account statements from the foundation. He reminded everyone that Jim Nepple had been getting them. Clark said he would contact Nepple after April 15 to discuss the statements and also ask if Nepple could explain the account transfer situation since he had been involved with establishing the accounts while he was a member of the MHPC.

Pettit then presented a report on trucking parking regulations within historic districts.

The MHPC had discussed this late last year, after a business that is located within Muscatine's Downtown Historic District started parking a vehicle near the business site for an extended period. City administrator AJ Johnson had asked the MHPC to consider whether it felt the situation needed to be addressed through a regulation. At that time, the commission opted not to recommend any action, but did not generate any report or formal memo on the issue.

Johnson later contacted Rudisill and requested a more formal report with documentation. Rudisill conducted some research on what other communities are doing and provided that information at the January meeting. Clark then assigned Pettit to review the information, make further contacts and create a report that could be submitted to Johnson and possibly the city council.

Pettit said he reached three basic conclusions after reviewing the research. They were 1) few communities have specific parking regulations in historic districts; 2) most communities allow truck parking almost anywhere; 3) if parking was restricted, drivers might be forced to leave their trailers at work, causing increased pressure on trucking firms to provide more parking spaces at their sites.

Pettit said the initial problem appeared to have been resolved, but if a new problem were to develop, the city could look again at developing a regulation. However, he proposed any parking restriction be done on a citywide basis and not on a district basis.

The commission also briefly discussed the potential impact of allowing modular and/or mobile homes into historic districts. Sissel pointed out a modular home has already been constructed in the West Hill Historic District.

Rudisill reported he thought mobile homes could be more tightly restricted than modular homes, but suggested if the commission wanted to look into that, it should ask Muscatine Zoning Administrator Steve Boka to attend a meeting.

Pettit then moved to submit a report to the city administrator recommending development of a truck parking restriction in historic districts not be considered at this time; Reischauer seconded, motion passed, all ayes.

The commission next discussed the continuing efforts and activities planned in celebration of Alexander Clark, the former Muscatine resident whose 183rd birthday anniversary is this year.

Sissel reported on several events and programs, explaining there were so many planned, "it was hard to keep straight." He said the plan had originally been to hold an Alexander Clark Day, but the response to the proposal had grown so much it was necessary to plan for a week to include everything.

Clark and Sissel said the most immediate planned events would include publication of articles in the Des Moines Register and the Quad City Times; and a presentation of an Alexander Clark program at the Muscatine Art Center, which would also host an exhibit of items relevant to Clark. The art center program would attract a number of local and state dignitaries and interested citizens, the two said.

In addition to these events and activities, Clark and Sissel said they were also working on other projects that would extend over a longer period. Included in these efforts was to film a documentary of Clark's life, with an eventual goal of completing a movie of the civil rights leader's life.

There is also a continuing effort to establish the Alexander Clark House as a National Landmark. A National Park Service representative is scheduled to come to Muscatine on April 21 to continue that investigation, the two reported. A related effort to identify a four-block area around the Alexander Clark House as a separate historic district, possibly within an abolitionist and/or a cross-cultural context, is also being pursued. Clark pointed out the Alexander Clark house is one of the few homes connected with Iowa's abolitionist movement that is located within both an existing historic district and a cultural and entertainment district. Other houses, buildings and sites within the proposed area would also need to be identified and marked, the two reported. Sissel said he was hoping the MHPC would support the local district designation.

Sissel said another longer-range, but critical effort is raising funds to preserve the Alexander Clark gravestone, which was severely damaged by a tornado in 2007. The stone was toppled and damaged when a tree fell on it; and workers then improperly placed it when they set it back up. Sissel said the fundraising would provide revenue to replace the original stone with a replica and plaque and then exhibit the original in the Muscatine Art Center. The two said they were also planning to mark the cemetery and also the location of the AME Church that Alexander Clark helped found.

Sissel and Clark also said they were working on efforts to commission a bronze sculpture of Alexander Clark. Other interested volunteers are working on an Iowa black history publication that would include information on Alexander Clark and help bring visitors and tourists to Muscatine, they said.

Committee reports included an update by Maharry on the status of the Friends of Historic Muscatine tour of historic homes scheduled for Sunday, May 10, as part of the Historic Preservation Month activities. Maharry said the five properties, all associated with former physicians who lived in Muscatine, had been identified. Maharry also reported the Journal would be publishing an article on the *Rooftops of Muscatine* fundraising publication. Clark said the 40 additional books ordered had been received, with 10 going to a local bookstore.

Pettit reminded commission members of his pending retirement from the board in June. He said local realtor Anna McCleary had expressed interest in serving and suggested she might be a potential candidate. A second commissioner's term also will expire in June, but there was confusion over who that was, so Rudisill will check.

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

The commission then adjourned at approximately 7:20 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Chair