

OFFICIAL MINUTES
MUSCATINE HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION
MARCH 18, 2009

The Muscatine Historic Preservation Commission (MHPC) met in regular session on Wednesday, March 18, 2009 at 5:15 p.m. in the lower level conference room at the Muscatine City Hall, 215 Sycamore. Members present included Mary Anne Kessler, Dan Clark, Devin Pettit and Jo Ann Carlson. Others present included Maryrose Peterschmidt (former MHPC member), Connie Street (Louisa County Historic Preservation Commission), Charles Pearson (Iowa Cross-Cultural Association), Dave Armstrong (local realtor) and staff assistant Jim Rudisill.

The commission reviewed the consent agenda, including the distributed meeting agenda and the minutes of the regular January 21, 2009 meeting. One correction noted was to change the date of the meeting from January 21, 2008 to January 21, 2009.

There were no other changes to the meeting agenda or the consent agenda.

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

Prior to bringing any of the agenda items up for discussion, Clark introduced Charles Pearson of the Iowa Cross-Cultural Association. Pearson said one of his initial interests had been investigating black history in Iowa and he had started working in Davenport on that issue. While working there however, Pearson said he had become aware of Clark and Kent Sissel's earlier interest with Alexander Clark; and now was becoming involved in those efforts himself.

Pearson also pointed out his organization was not focused on any specific culture, but working to show how people of all cultures had impacted the community. He recently began looking at the contributions of the strong German influence in Muscatine and expected to continue those efforts, he said. Clark thanked Pearson for his work and invited him to keep the commission informed on his progress.

The Certified Local Government (CLG) status at both the city and county level was the first discussion item. Clark said during an earlier meeting with city administrator AJ Johnson, he had discussed the possibility of attending a city council in-depth meeting to update the current council on the goals, objectives and responsibilities of the MHPC.

Clark said this meeting would likely be scheduled prior to May and include some type of PowerPoint presentation. Other commission members were invited to participate in developing the presentation and attending the meeting.

He said Johnson had reminded him during their meeting that the 10-year anniversary of the MHPC would occur in 2009, which could create an ideal time to present a list of commission accomplishments. It could also provide an opportunity to energize the community with a renewed focus on historic preservation, Clark said.

The commission also discussed the county CLG effort. Rudisill reported no Muscatine County officials had contacted him yet concerning any grant proposal for restoration work on the old jail or other county historic buildings within the city limits.

The commission then discussed possible joint training opportunities between the Louisa County Historic Preservation Commission (LCHPC) and the Muscatine Historic Preservation Commission (MHPC). Connie Street explained she was a new member of the LCHPC and was interested in obtaining some type of training that would explain how historic preservation commissions operate. However, she had not seen any opportunities for such training.

She pointed out, and members of the MHPC concurred, that state law requires annual training. The LCHPC is a five-member board and Street said she knew at least three of the members, including her, had not completed any training.

MHPC members told Street about the on-line training available through the SHSI website. Street said she would investigate that training option.

Peterschmidt said when she was a new member on the MHPC someone from the State Historical Society of Iowa (SHSI) had travelled to Muscatine and provided training. She also said private consultant Molly Naumann had provided training.

Clark said he had recently attended a program on John Brown in West Liberty and learned there was interest in that area for historic preservation and similar training. He suggested if the LCHPC wanted to organize a training event the members of the MHPC would be happy to attend.

Several commissioners recalled that SHSI CLG Coordinator Paula Mohr had reported last year that the SHSI no longer did individual training programs, but did conduct quarterly programs around the state. Mohr had suggested a joint program that could be conducted as one of the quarterly programs would be feasible.

Kessler then moved that the MHPC cooperate with the LCHPC to hold a joint training program, subject to SHSI agreeing to provide the training as part of its quarterly training program, at a site and date to be determined; Carlson seconded; motion passed, all ayes.

Carlson agreed to work with Street to contact Mohr and coordinate the effort.

The commission also discussed with Street the possibility of conducting a joint tour of historic places in the two-county area. All representatives agreed to continue that discussion. Street also mentioned items from the archaeological dig near Oakville might eventually be displayed at the Louisa County Historical Museum, but that was pending.

The commission next discussed 1402 Mulberry.

Clark described the February meeting of the Muscatine Art Center Board of Directors he had attended. He explained the first part is normally provided for citizen input, but he had remained afterwards for the rest of the meeting.

He explained that during a portion of the later meeting, the directors began discussing issues that reminded him of discussions during the MHPC meetings. The city council had just cut \$30,000 from the Art Center budget shortly before the directors met and Clark said they were concerned that few in the community knew who they were or what they were doing.

They had also observed that of the current council members, they could only recall two who had been to the museum. Clark said after hearing the discussion, he realized the art center board and the MHPC shared many of the same concerns and problems. That caused him to adopt a less confrontational approach on the various options developed by the board.

Clark said he was able to obtain a commitment that a director, whom he believed would be Mark Huddleston, a member of the board's buildings and grounds committee, would attend the next MHPC meeting. Clark indicated he was surprised and disappointed no one came.

Clark said the board also notified him the 180-day period for complying with one of the three options had started following the board's vote on offering the options. He said there did appear to be some confusion by board members on how any agreement would be composed and also the involvement of the city council in any decisions. When the discussion shifted to the potential costs associated with moving the house, director Mike Knott offered to contact Goodwin Moving, Washington, for information.

Clark said he talked with Knott about Knott's contact with Goodwin and learned from Knott that Goodwin could not provide an initial cost estimate without driving the move route. Clark said Knott had reported that Goodwin said the cost for moving overhead lines could vary from \$750 to \$8000, depending on their size and other issues. Clark had reported earlier that he had been told by Sissel that overhead lines cost around \$1000 to move.

Goodwin had told Knott that just jacking a house up and setting it back down on a foundation would cost between \$28,000 and \$32,000. Knott also reported Steve Goodwin had told him persons interested in moving a house needed to purchase a lot before determining the cost of moving the house.

Clark said he did talk with Laura Liegois, director of the Muscatine Transfer Station, to obtain information on tipping fees for demolition debris and had also learned about two-thirds of the cost of demolition was for tipping fees. He said Knott had reported the estimated demolition cost provided to the board by Jerry Sulzberger was around \$30,000. Pettit said there would be an increase in the tipping fees after July 1.

Pettit also said when the draft 2009-13 Capital Improvement Projects (CIP) plan had been presented to the Muscatine Planning and Zoning Commission in December, it included \$130,000 for acquisition and \$45,000 for demolition of 1402 Mulberry.

Clark also said he had told the art center board about the interest in the house by the Jayne descendants and their desire to come to Muscatine later this year to see the house. He said he asked if the 180-day period could be extended to accommodate their schedule and was told by Huddleston the board wanted the building gone during this construction season.

Armstrong then said he had looked at several lots in the area and provided data, such as current assessed value, size, ownership and other information, to the commission. The commission discussed some of the features of each and their suitability as a potential house site.

After reviewing the list, the commission again questioned why the art center was seeking demolition of the house and what its ultimate goal was for the area. The members agreed they still were unclear why the art center wanted to clear the area. Suggestions ranged from green space to parking to building expansion, but Clark said there had not been any clear indication from the board.

Armstrong said the next step might be to get an accurate estimate for moving the house. Clark agreed that could be part of a commission decision to accept one of the board's options, but he also said Michael Maharry (Friends of Muscatine Historic Preservation) believed the commission should push back on the art center for not considering other options that could save the house.

Kessler said regardless of what direction the commission moved, she did not feel the 180 days should have started until the costs for moving the building had been determined. Peterschmidt said the art center should be asked to provide a greater share of those costs than the \$5000 it has offered. The consensus supported that suggestion.

Clark said he would attend the next meeting of the art board on March 19 and would request an increase in its initial \$5000 contribution, possibly up to \$45,000. He also invited any other commission members to attend.

Clark also said he would attend the next council meeting to discuss the city's demolition list and potential demolitions of two buildings.

The commission then discussed the possible designation of an Alexander Clark local historic district. Clark reported on several upcoming meetings or activities involving Clark or contemporary historic events associated with him. These included meeting with Musser Public Library Director Pam Collins and Photographic Archivist Sheila Chaudoin to discuss the district effort. Clark also reported that on April 23, James Hill, U.S. Park Service, would be presenting a program on the Underground Railroad in Anamosa and again on April 26 in Tipton.

Clark also reported that Iowa Governor Chet Culver is planning to proclaim Alexander Clark an outstanding Iowan. The Old Creamery Theater is also presenting a play that would focus on three important civil rights court cases in Iowa, including an 1868 Iowa Supreme Court case in which Clark's daughter Susan won the right to attend the public school of her choice in Muscatine.

The commission next discussed the upcoming Historic Preservation Month activities. Peterschmidt mentioned Barbara Sabbath as a possible Stewardship Award recipient for her work with the historic district. Carlson also agreed to contact 1st National Bank to verify its public room had been reserved for the May 9 awards ceremony.

Several miscellaneous reports and general comments were then presented.

Clark asked about the walking tour that had been discussed during past meetings. Pettit reminded him the information was being compiled by Tom and Sharon Savage using the historical information provided by the surveys.

Carlson said she had some material at one time and would try and relocate it.

Clark also announced his interest in the city's plans to upgrade and repair deteriorating walls in the alley behind River's Edge Gallery and parking lot walls between Pro Hair and the gallery. The walls are scheduled to be discussed by the city council at the next meeting. Clark said he would also discuss these walls with the council when he meets with it regarding the demolition list and other issues. Clark said there are a variety of options for the lot.

Clark also provided Pettit with a copy of the National Trust publication, "Protecting Potential Landmarks Through Demolition Review," and asked him to read it and provide the commission with comments.

Pettit presented a report on the Hershey Avenue sewer project and the straightening of Mississippi Drive.

The next meeting of the commission will be held Wednesday, April 15.

The commission then adjourned at approximately 7:10 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Chair