

OFFICIAL MINUTES
MUSCATINE HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION
MAY 21, 2008

The Muscatine Historic Preservation Commission met in regular session on Wednesday, May 21, 2008 at 5:15 p.m. in the lower level conference room at the Muscatine City Hall, 215 Sycamore. Members present included Diane Day, Jane Reischauer, Jo Ann Carlson, Jerry Lange, Devin Pettit, Mary Anne Kessler and Dan Clark. Visitors present included Steve Boka, Director of Planning, Zoning and Building Safety. Staff present included Jim Rudisill.

The consent agenda, including the distributed meeting agenda and the minutes of the regular April 16, 2008 meeting, was reviewed. Pettit requested the agenda be amended to include discussion on a telecommunications tower proposed to be erected along Cedar Street. There were no changes to the distributed minutes.

After the review, Carlson moved to approve the consent agenda with the additional discussion added; Reischauer seconded; motion passed; all ayes.

The first agenda item was a discussion with Boka concerning possible changes to the city's electronic message center (EMC) ordinance. Boka explained the Muscatine Planning and Zoning Commission is reviewing the 2006 ordinance because of concerns over some recently erected EMCs. Boka said one of the most frequently discussed EMCs has been the one installed at the Taco Johns on Grandview Avenue. Although existing EMCs are located in commercial or industrial districts, Boka said there have also been discussions over the equipment in residential areas. He said they could be installed in those areas by churches, bed and breakfast businesses and other permitted or conditional users.

Boka said the planning commission was divided over whether or not the signs need to be more heavily regulated, so he was seeking additional guidance from other interested groups and organizations regarding the signs. He said the opinion of the MHPC concerning the regulation of EMCs in historic districts would be especially helpful. Boka said he did not want the MHPC to be placed in a position where it would be identified as adopting a "we don't want EMCs" in a historic district.

Although he stressed he was open to any suggestions or proposals, Boka said he personally felt that EMCs would conflict with the image of an historic district and should be regulated.

Pettit agreed and said they should be limited. However, he pointed out there was the potential of having up to 85% of Muscatine eventually located within an historic district, which could substantially impact the locations of EMCs. Most of that potential area however would be in residential districts that likely would not create a strong demand for the signs. He said the MHPC could use the issue to develop educational efforts aimed at maintaining the historic nature of the districts.

Clark asked if historic would trump commercial development when it came to the signs. Boka said it would if the ordinance was written that way. He said there could be some provisions allowed for special situations or users who were not strictly residential.

Lange said it would be desirable to not have EMCs in historic districts and wondered if the regulation would carry over to the city's two cultural and entertainment districts. Both Pettit and Clark pointed out those districts were not historic districts and likely would not be affected by any EMC proposal.

The consensus from most of the other MHPC members was in support of developing some EMC-limiting regulation within historic districts. Boka said any regulations would only govern what goes outside of individual businesses or buildings and any signs placed in windows or that would not protrude out from a building would not be subject to the regulation.

Kessler said the Wood Fire Grille sign painted on the side of the Button Factory restaurant was a good example of advertising that used a historically-accurate technique.

Boka also said variances could be granted by the Muscatine Zoning Board of Adjustment, which currently has the authority for other non-conforming uses. He explained the ultimate decision on any regulation would rest with the city council, but he had not wanted to present anything to that body until the MHPC had discussed it.

The next item discussed by the commission was the status of the Mulberry Avenue survey work and progress by the members.

Pettit said recent computer problems had prevented him from completing much, but the problems now appeared to be resolved. He said some individuals had talked to him about the possibility of a grant funding the work, but the high cost and continued difficulty of raising any match made that option unlikely.

Reischauer also said she had not been able to make much progress because of conflicts with work. She said the courthouse is normally closed when she is not working and she has been unable to take any time off from her job to work on the survey.

Kessler said she might have more time now to work on the project because school will soon be out for the summer. She said she might be able to do courthouse research on other commissioners' properties.

The other commissioners indicated a similar lack of progress or did not report.

The commission next discussed the historic preservation month activities held jointly with the Friends of Muscatine Historic Preservation (Friends) on May 3.

Pettit said he felt the joint effort had gone well.

Carlson reported the corrected certificate for Robert "Tony" Martin was being completed and would be delivered as soon as it was done.

Clark said he had photos of the presentations and both Reischauer and Kessler urged him to submit the images to the Muscatine Journal for possible publication on its "Faces" page.

Clark will do that and make a DVD of the images that he will provide to Rudisill. He will also investigate placing the images on <http://www.muscatinepreservation.org>, which is the Friends website.

In a related development, Kessler said the Lesnets had talked to her and would be interested in having their house on any fall tour of homes that might be planned. Clark reported during a recent trolley tour he conducted, which included the Peter Musser House on Mulberry, which the Lesnets owned, he was able to correct the mistaken impression the house was not being properly maintained. Clark said riders complained the owners were allowing the property to deteriorate because the paint was peeling. He said he pointed out to the riders the Lesnets were following proper and standard procedures by not using high pressure or abrasive paint removal practices that would harm the historic brick.

The commission next discussed its membership.

Day reported she is interested in being re-appointed to the commission for a second term. Rudisill advised her to contact Fran Donelson by either email, letter or phone call and advise Fran of that decision.

Lange's term also expires on June 30, but he is ineligible for re-appointment because he has served for two consecutive terms. Rudisill said he had talked with Donelson and no one is currently on the list of potential members maintained by the city. He also reminded members that specific categories of individuals should be appointed to the commission if they are available in the community and willing to serve. Among these would be contractors, architects or other individuals involved in the historic construction field.

Commissioners identified Terry Eagle, Jim Schmidt and Tom Bankhead as potential members, but there was no decision made on asking anyone to serve.

Pettit then reported on a certified letter he had received concerning the installation of a telecommunications tower on the Grace Lutheran Church property along Cedar Street.

Eckhardt Research in Iowa City investigated the Area of Potential Effect (APE) for the proposed 150-foot tall tower and determined there would be "No Adverse Effect" on historic properties. Pettit however said some likely historic properties along Mulberry Avenue appear to fall within the APE and could be impacted.

That impact would probably be limited to the tower being visible, meaning residents of those Mulberry Avenue historic properties would likely see a blinking red light. No other impact would be expected.

Commissioners who live along Mulberry Avenue indicated they were largely unaware of any adverse effect from other towers in the area and the consensus appeared to be not to oppose the tower's construction.

There were then brief discussions on the condition or status of carriage houses at the Grossheim House (110 E. 8th Street) and the William and Julia Nesselbush House (504 W. 4th Street). Pettit said he had received a report from Dave Armstrong on a possible complaint by the city on the Grossheim property, but when he looked at it, the building did not seem to be in any critical disrepair.

Rudisill reported he had talked with the attorney for the property owner of 504 W. 4th and explained possible emergency and other grant funding available to assist in repairs of that carriage house. He had not heard anything back and assumed the owners were looking at other options. Few repairs have been made on the property and Rudisill said city officials might soon run out of patience for the owner to begin repairs. That could mean action to demolish the building.

Clark also reported on roof repairs made by Heinz to the former street car building on its plant property. Clark said the repairs had resulted in the removal of the skylights. He reminded the commission that during an earlier tour of the building, Heinz officials had said there would be a considerable increase in roof repair costs if the skylights remained.

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and he was hoping to get some guidance from the MHPC on allowing EMCs in historic districts.

The meeting then adjourned at 6:25 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Chair