

**OFFICIAL MINUTES
MUSCATINE HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION
DECEMBER 17, 2008**

The Muscatine Historic Preservation Commission met in regular session on Wednesday, December 17, 2008 at 5:15 p.m. in the lower level conference room at the Muscatine City Hall, 215 Sycamore. Members present included Mary Anne Kessler, Jane Reischauer, Dan Clark, Jo Ann Carlson and Devin Pettit. Others present included Michael Maharry (Friends of Historic Preservation), Dave Watkins (Muscatine County Supervisor) Eric Furnas (Muscatine County Building Official), Sherry Seright (Muscatine County Budget Coordinator), Charles Potter (KWPC), Jennifer Meyer (Muscatine Journal) and staff liaison Jim Rudisill.

The commission reviewed the consent agenda, including the distributed meeting agenda and the minutes of the regular November 19, 2008 meeting.

Clark advised the commission he would alter the order of the agenda to accommodate the county guests so they would not need to stay for the entire meeting, unless they wished.

Pettit also pointed out the minutes showed the Manjoine Apartment Building was located in an area that had been on the edge of Muscatine's Italian Ethnic Neighborhood. The area of Mulberry where the apartment building is located is actually within the Italian Ethnic Neighborhood, he reported.

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

Carlson moved to approve the consent agenda with the minutes correction and agenda changes; Kessler seconded; motion passed, all ayes.

The first agenda item was a continuation of last month's discussion on the role and responsibilities of the Muscatine Historic Preservation Commission in the community. This month's discussion included a specific focus on the issues of a commission budget and the recommendation of the Certified Local Government (CLG) Program to have a council representative named for the local commission.

Clark said he had talked with council member Jerry Lange, a former member of the MHPC, about the council representative position. Pettit said he had also mentioned it to council member Phil Fitzgerald. Clark said Lange still considered himself to be the MHPC's link to the council, even if he was not formally recognized.

The consensus of the commission was to support a council liaison, but no formal action was taken. The commission will continue to discuss the recommendation and decide in the future if it will ask the council to name a representative.

The commission also discussed a possible budget for the commission.

Clark pointed out one rationale for a city budget allocation is the training requirement that is part of the CLG program. Kessler said there have also been expenses, such as certificates, for the commission's annual Historic Preservation Month activities. Pettit said past expenses covered by the city have normally been handled through Muscatine City Administrator AJ Johnson's budget.

After additional discussion, Pettit moved to authorize Clark to meet with Johnson and with the appropriate rationale, request an amount to be determined as a city budget line item for the historic preservation commission; Kessler seconded; motion passed, all ayes.

The next agenda item was to review the status of the funds transfer from the commission's Community Foundation of Greater Muscatine (CFGM) accounts to the Friends of Historic Preservation accounts. During last month's meeting, Reischauer had reported the endowment fund could not be transferred, but funds in a general account could be.

The CFGM now appears to be stepping back from transferring funds at all, Reischauer said. She will continue to investigate and will report back next month.

The commission next received an update on plans to load the digitized survey and nomination reports for West Hill and the Downtown on the Musser Public Library website. Rudisill said he had not received any recent information from Sheila Chaudoin, so assumed there was still on-going coordination going on at the library.

Chaudoin had indicated a disclaimer over funding provided by the National Park Service (NPS) for some of the reports would be added to the website's home page.

Rudisill also provided an update on the 2008 Annual Report. He distributed a draft copy of the report's initial pages and asked each commissioner to review it for any errors or omissions.

The report will be placed on the MHPC's January agenda for action.

The board then discussed the possible creation of a Muscatine County CLG and possible funding assistance with the county officials.

Clark said he and Seright had held an initial discussion over those possibilities and he had then met with the supervisors earlier in the week. He had also contacted Paula Mohr, State Historical Society of Iowa (SHSI) CLG Coordinator, with several questions concerning the idea. The email exchange between them indicated Mohr strongly supported the effort, but was unsure if a joint county-city commission would be approved by the NPS. Mohr had indicated she would check on that issue and report back to Clark.

Seright said the main impetus for the county investigating the possible creation of its own CLG was the desire to seek funding assistance for a variety of needed repairs at the courthouse and the old jail. She said budget constraints complicate the repair efforts.

Watkins estimated the total cost for the old jail repairs would be in the neighborhood of \$40,000 to \$50,000. This is partially based on contacts with a repointing company that has discussed the proposal with the county. The county officials said they were interested in the CLG status as an avenue for obtaining grant money to assist with the work.

Watkins said the county was hoping the city could provide assistance with any grant application. He said county staff would conduct any legwork, with the MHPC or other city staff providing review services.

Seright also said the county was seeking anyone interested in serving on a county historic preservation commission. She said the county had been working on the commission formation for over two years, but had not been able to complete the process.

Kessler then moved to assist Muscatine County with its efforts to obtain grant funding for restoration efforts at the old jail or courthouse, subject to Clark meeting with Johnson and receiving city approval for Rudisill to work on the review; Reischauer seconded; motion approved, all ayes.

The commission next discussed the house at 1402 Mulberry, which the Muscatine Art Center (MAC) purchased earlier this year. Clark summarized the events leading up to a restricted tour of the property on December 3, including the rumors the center planned to demolish it for green space. David Arbogast, a Davenport architectural conservator, was commissioned by local resident Tom Kautz to attend the December 3 tour and develop a report on the condition of the house for presentation to the MHPC. Clark presented copies of that report to the MHPC members and guests and said he had already forwarded a copy to MAC Director Barb Christensen.

In the report, Arbogast described the condition of the house as being “in better condition than most houses of its age. It is structurally quite sound with no evidence of settlement.” He went on to report “there are some areas of deterioration which prevent the house from being in excellent condition.”

Later in the report, he acknowledged the property’s “shabbiness”, but had determined with some basic repair and restoration work, it would not be “unreasonable to see another fifty years of service life from the building.”

He suggested the house could either be restored on site or moved to a new site. He also proposed if the house was moved, the MAC donate it to a non-profit group and provide the money the center would have used to demolish it for repair work.

Clark said one of the biggest questions that had been raised over the reported demolition was if the center had the authority to demolish the building without council approval. He said the MAC Board of Directors did not feel it needed authorization from the council, although it would need a city demolition permit. Clark also said one of the biggest hopes was a plan would emerge to preserve the building.

Michael Maharry, president of the Muscatine Friends of Historic Preservation, also said he and other Friends members hoped the house could be restored, possibly by dividing the property; or moved to a new location.

Pettit pointed out the MAC board had requested public opinion on the issue and he wondered if there had been any reaction to the comments from the MHPC and other preservation proponents.

Maharry said he had reminded board members at the tour about the public opinion request, but Clark said there had not been any reaction, although he had been told any proposals for restoring the building needed to be in writing.

Maharry also said he felt Arbogast had made valid opinions in the report, and the MHPC could now use it to make an objective determination on the negative or positive impacts of saving the house. He emphasized the report did not uncover anything unsound about the building and based on that, offered his opinion the house did not need to be torn down.

Pettit then moved to accept the Arbogast report on 1402 Mulberry and present it to the Muscatine Art Center and other groups; Reischauer seconded; motion passed, all ayes.

Clark then provided the following website which contains information on the house: <http://muscatinepreservation.org/1402mulberry>

Clark also said he would be attending the MAC Board of Director's meeting the following day. Maharry asked if the MHPC would be asking the MAC board what the next steps would be or where the issue will go from here. He said he wanted to know if the center board would now deliberate the issue, seek more public input or other information.

Seright reminded the group that a petition drive started by one individual had contributed to saving the old barn that had been located on the former county home and was now part of the Muscatine Discovery Center complex. Watkins agreed and said the organization that was eventually formed was required to raise funds for the barn's preservation. Maharry indicated a petition drive might be a possible option for 1402 Mulberry, especially since the MAC board had specifically asked for public input earlier.

Clark said reports on 1402 Mulberry had already attracted interest. He said in addition to questions from Lange, who also lived on Mulberry, a descendant of the house's original owner, Henry Jayne, had also contacted him. Clark said Susan Jayne, who lives in Indiana, had learned about the potential demolition of her great-grandparent's house while doing family history research.

Clark said he would present this information during the MAC board meeting and ask if the board had any additional steps proposed.

Maharry, Reischauer and Kessler then gave a short report on the Friends of Historic Preservation. No meeting is planned in December. The Friends are focusing on the roof book project and the upcoming tour of historic homes in May. There have been 24 copies of the Rooftops of Muscatine sold, with the possibility of two additional sales known.

The next meeting of the commission is scheduled for Wednesday, January 21, 2009

The meeting then adjourned at approximately 6:45 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Chair