

MINUTES
OF
MOUNT VERNON HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION
Saturday, August 27, 2016

The Historic Preservation Commission met on Saturday, August 27, 2016. Commission members present included Leah Rogers, Mary Evans, Hugh Lifson, Janet Budack, Dick Thomas, Sue Hargas, Ed Sauter, Carine Klein, Patty Westerkamp, and Guy Booth.

Guests who were present include Stan Crocker, Joel Miller, Jonathon Brand, Deanne Rexroat, Kay Langseth, Chris Nosbisch, Chris Andrews, Margaret Stephens, and Marty Christensen.

Upon motion made and seconded, the Minutes of the August 6, 2016 meeting were approved.

Jonathan Brand, president of Cornell College was present so there could be a discussion on Cornell's plans for the construction of the new science center building. Concern has been expressed that in order to accommodate the new building, the college is proposing the removal or demolition of two historic houses along 5th Avenue. Jonathan discussed the college's interest in improving the communication between the college and the community generally, and specifically with keeping the Historic Preservation Commission informed as to the long-range plans of the college. The entire campus of the college is on the national historic register, so plans for construction and renovation of elements of the campus need to be reviewed by the commission. Members of the commission also expressed the ideas that more open communication from all of the parties will be helpful for the college, as well as the community.

In particular, there were questions regarding the location of the new science building and some of the design elements. It was suggested that there could be changes to the design and/or location which could alleviate some of the concerns that were being expressed.

Leah gave an excellent review of the guidelines that HPC must follow when being involved in design review. The college is interested in beginning site work in the very near future, even though construction may not start until some time in 2017. There is a question regarding the process that needs to be followed for the initial building permit. Chris Nosbisch gave a summary of the steps that should be taken to initiate the project. The issue is complex because the college does not have final construction plans for the project, but still need to come before historic preservation for approval of their initial building permit. The City, the college and HPC will want to be proactive in getting through this first step.

Discussion lasted for approximately an hour and a half. It was a very good exchange of views, and all parties benefited from becoming more knowledgeable about the need for the building and how it can better fit within the historic district.

Hugh Lifson gave a quick review of the upcoming dedication ceremony for the Mickey Woods Mural. It will be held at 1:00 on September 24 at City Hall. Hugh has made a schedule of people who will serve as speakers at the dedication. He will get information to the newspaper so citizens will be aware of the dedication ceremony.

Mary Evans gave an update on the website. The interns who worked during the summer are continuing to work through the school year. Mary feels there has been substantial progress made, and this will continue.

Janet Budack presented a list of properties that would seem to be eligible for inclusion on the national register. Dick Thomas indicated that a seminar for owners of these properties will be held so the property owners can learn the benefits of having their properties listed on the historic registry. Leah also discussed that individual houses must have a higher integrity than buildings that could generally be within a historic district. She indicates that a house must be historically significant to become qualified for the historic registry.

Vacancies on Commission – Leah noted the two upcoming vacancies in September with the expiration of both Dick Thomas' and Paul Waechli's terms. Since both are no longer residents of Mt. Vernon, their spots will need to be filled. It was noted that there are already some applications that should be on file with the City for the HPC. It was suggested that Leah also contact Dee Ann Rexroat about someone from Cornell either applying or serving in another capacity on the Commission.

New Business

Summary of Leah's talk with Paula Mohr of the State Historic Preservation Office. Paula is our CLG coordinator. She was able to provide several insights into how best to proceed with the current issues with Cornell regarding the two brick houses and the design of the new science building. The list of Design Review needs that Leah gave earlier in the meeting came from that discussion. Leah also talked with Paula about the State Code regarding safe egress and historic buildings and she noted that there is a provision for "equivalency" for historic buildings that helps to mitigate the potential loss of historic integrity in adapting openings and yet providing sufficient egress. Leah will obtain more specific information about this and recommended this for a topic of future discussion with Cornell particularly regarding Platner House and Harlan House. Paula also recommended that someone from the Commission attend the ADA and historic buildings seminar that is scheduled for Friday morning at the Preservation Summit. Leah cannot attend this seminar because she has to present at a seminar at the same time. So if someone else can attend, it would be very useful.

Preservation Summit – Leah noted that she will be attending both Thursday and Friday but will be coming back to Mt. Vernon in the evenings. If someone would like to carpool, just let Leah know. Leah will also be moderating the seminar on moving historic buildings on Thursday afternoon and will gather as much information as she can that may be relevant to Mt. Vernon. It was also suggested that we get a list of Mt. Vernon attendees from Paula Mohr once the Preservation Summit has ended since it will be helpful to know if any residents attended thus showing an interest in historic preservation.

Other new business –Marsha Dewell has indicated that there are two building permit applications coming in that will need design review as soon as possible. One is that of Chris Andrews, a local resident, who was in attendance at the meeting. Chris presented some photographs of his property at 610 5th Avenue NW in the Ash Park District. He and his wife are rehabbing the house including work on the front dormer, painting the house, and rehabbing the porch. He had found that the porch was very rotted and had gotten into the project before realizing he needed both a building permit and a design review for that project. So his paperwork has now been submitted to the City and he will return when the Commission can hold the design review. We noted that we do not review paint colors but can provide advice if wanted.

Mary Evans requested that The Sun conduct an interview with Dick Thomas, Ed Sauter and Guy Booth about the Historic Preservation Commission since it is now over 30 years old. Margaret Stevens indicated that she would have to talk it over with the editor before The Sun could commit to that.

It was also reported that Sara Kelley has talked with Dean Borg about conducting the oral history interviews discussed at the last HPC meeting. Dean has responded positively and does have the recording equipment needed for such interviews.

Meeting adjourned around 11:30.

Respectfully Submitted,

Guy Booth, Secretary