

MINUTES
OF
MOUNT VERNON HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION
August 14, 2019

The Historic Preservation Commission met at 5:30 p.m. on Wednesday, August 14, 2019 at the Visitors Center. Members present were Caroline Kelly, Ed Sauter, Machele Pelkey, Hugh Lifson, Suzette Astley, Leah Rogers and Guy Booth. Guests present were: Brittany Lass and Brad Lass and Cari Morgan from Cornell.

A discussion of the Minutes of August 3, 2019 indicates that Hugh Lifson would like to have further clarification regarding the mural that was destroyed. Hugh indicates that even though the artist intended the mural as a critique on slavery, it needs to be recognized as an iconic depiction, not as a support of slavery.

The first design review agenda item is presented by Brad and Brittany Lass. They reside at 615 7th St. NW in the Ash Park Historic District. Mr. and Mrs. Lass are interested in erecting a fence in their backyard. The proposed fence would run on the rear portion of the lot along the east and west lot lines, and across the north lot line. The east and west side would be a black chain link fence and the north portion of the fence would be wood, approximately 5 to 6 feet in height. The fence is needed to provide an area for their dog. This fence would be similar to other fences in the neighborhood that have been constructed in recent years. Upon motion by Suzette Astley, seconded by Hugh Lifson, a certificate of no material effect was approved.

The second design review request was from Elias Schroeder, who resides at 703 5th Ave. NW. This house is also in the Ash Park Historic District. Elias has previously been before the Commission to receive a certificate of appropriateness for the front porch renovation at his house. Elias reports that the County is still holding the permit open, and is requesting that Elias add a hand rail on the front porch. Elias is proposing a small and simple black hand rail that will be constructed in the center of the steps. The Commission does not need to approve the construction of the rail, and a new certificate of appropriateness is not necessary. However, the Commission does approve the design submitted by Elias, which has evidently been approved by Linn County Planning and Zoning.

The major design review issue presented by Elias for this meeting relates to the new siding for the house. Elias has made a valiant attempt to remove the old vinyl siding which may have been put in place in the mid-70's. He had hoped to remove the siding and repair and renovate the original wood clapboard siding. However, he reports that when the vinyl siding was put on the house, the nails that were used has caused the wooden siding to split, and it is impossible to repair siding. Consequently, he is proposing using a wood composite clapboard appearing material made by Diamond Kote. The clapboard will be 4.5" wide, which is the same as the original siding on the house.

In addition, Elias desires to remove windows in the house, both on the first floor and second floor. He provided elevation drawings of the house. The rear of the house would remove the 3 large windows in the sleeping porch, and the matching windows on the first floor. These windows would be replaced with a small window on the first floor and a smaller window on the second story. He is also replacing two other windows, one next to the door and one on the second story above the door. The proposed plan eliminates a substantial portion of the window

treatment at the back of the house. Hugh likened the plans to an Adolph Loos design. The back of the house is not observable from the street. The Commission, after much discussion, approved the proposed plans, but requests that Elias use windows that are as large as possible.

Elias also is proposing the removal of the three panel windows on the north side of the house and the south side of the house. He is planning to renovate the upstairs sleeping porch which has the large windows. The windows are not energy efficient, nor is that part of the house insulated. Consequently, that area of the house gets cold enough to freeze water during the winter. This will add important living space to the residence if the windows are changed and insulation is put into the walls.

The replacement of these windows, both on the first floor and the second floor will have a significant change in the historic nature of the building. However, it does seem to be necessary to make the house livable for this family. The Commission has requested that Elias use a vertical trim board on both the north and south elevation of the house which delineates the portion of the house that may have been added for the sleeping porch, and that indicates the portion of the house that is being changed. The Commission agreed that the vertical trim board is necessary, and recommended that Elias use the largest windows possible to meet his needs and to retain the significant window space of the house.

Finally, there was a request by Elias to change the window on the dormer in the roof at the front of the property. It currently is half-covered with louvers. He had proposed to cover the entire window in the dormer with louvers. Instead, it has been requested that he replace the louvers with a window and if any louvers are necessary, that they be placed in a small portion of the window, or adjacent to the window.

Elias also described the addition of window trim and door trim which will be consistent with the original trimming of windows and doors. A good deal of the trim had been destroyed when vinyl was placed on the house. Upon motion made by Caroline Kelly, seconded by Hugh Lifson, a certificate of appropriateness was approved, subject to the recommendations made by the Commission as set forth above.

The final design review on the agenda is for the property of Suzette Astley at 703 5th Ave. NW. This property is also in the Ash Park Historic District. The garage, which is attached to the rear of the house needs a new roof. Suzette is proposing to have a new roof with shingles that are similar to the roof on the remainder of the house. These will be a dark-colored asphalt shingle. Upon motion made by Ed Sauter, seconded by Caroline Kelly, a certificate of no material effect shall be issued.

Under new business, Leah indicates that Robert Murphy has submitted his resignation as a member of HPC. Robert has taken on significant additional work in his place of employment, plus being involved in the development of the business he and his wife, Denise have in the downtown historic district. These changes in his work requirements has made it difficult for him to attend meetings, and he would like to make sure that the Commission does have people who are able to participate at the regular meetings. Robert's resignation was accepted by the Commission with the Commission thanking Robert for his contribution to the Commission while he was a member.

Under new business, Cari Morgan from Cornell College presented information regarding new lighting that is being installed on campus. Some of the lighting will be exterior lighting on buildings that need an update. The exterior lighting on Bowman Hall, Law Hall and College Hall will all keep the lighting that is similar to the historic exterior lighting of the building. There will also be new lighting fixtures on the campus along the sidewalks and streets. The new lighting will be LED lighting. It was discussed that the lighting should be consistent in color. Cari indicates that the exterior lighting will be white/blue light. The college needs to order the lighting equipment, so even though this is a pre-review on this issue, the Commission indicated by consensus that the request is appropriate. Cornell will be seeking a permit through the City of Mount Vernon, and this matter will come back on the agenda for final approval.

Leah asked if any members had attended the Maquoketa Historic Preservation Seminar. Four or five members did attend the meetings. She also announced there is a historic preservation seminar in Dubuque on September 6 and 7. It appears the conference is highlighting the maintenance of wood windows, and will deal with energy efficiency in historic buildings. Members are encouraged to get their continuing education requirements fulfilled by attending these types of conferences.

Suzette Astley made a recommendation that we have a membership chair for the Commission. The duties of the chair would be to help members be consistent in attendance at the meetings, and to make sure Commission members give advanced response to their attendance plans for each scheduled meeting. Suzette's proposal was well-received by the Commission, especially when Suzette indicated she would voluntarily serve as the membership chair person.

Ed and Machele reported that they have met with the City Administrator, Chris Nosbisch and with Heather Flynn, a member of the zoning administration. They discussed information that the Commission would like to send to owners of historically significant properties, and owners of properties in the historic districts. It is felt that an informational letter may be helpful to the building owners so they understand the procedures that need to be followed when any changes are made to the exterior of the buildings. Machele has previously prepared a proposed document that shows the required steps to be taken when changes in a property are going to be made. Ed and Machele indicated that the meeting was very positive, and the City administration is also interested in having owners be as informed as possible about maintenance of their buildings. Machele also discussed having an update of the design booklet that was printed a number of years ago. This would provide good information to anyone who is purchasing or who owns property in the historic district, or is on the historic register. The printing of the material can probably be taken care of through city equipment. Leah indicates that Cornell is planning to have a reception when the Seth Thomas clock and bells project had been completed. This should take place some time in the fall. Leah also reported that Mary Evans may need to take a leave of absence because of family issues that need her attention. Mary will make the decision if she does want to have a formal leave of absence. Mary's work with the Commission has been outstanding and she deserves a break so she can focus her attention on the family issues.

The next meeting of the Commission will be September 7, 2019.

Respectfully Submitted,

Guy Booth, Secretary