

MINUTES
OF
MOUNT VERNON HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION
October 14, 2020

The Historic Preservation Commission met via Zoom on Wednesday, October 14, 2020 at 5:30 p.m. Members present on Zoom were Leah Rogers, Susan Hargus, Janet Budack, Donald Moore, Duane Eash, Caroline Kelly, and Guy Booth. Hugh Lifson was present via Zoom as a guest.

The Minutes of the meeting of October 3, 2020 were, upon motion, approved.

There are no design review requests, nor pre-design review requests. Under old business, Leah reported on behalf of Mary Evans that she has uploaded numerous photos of the devastation of the derecho which occurred August 10, 2020. These will be available on the HPC website. Leah also indicated that as the City is completing the remodeling of City Hall, the archival space for HPC will be moved upstairs and should be ready in the near future.

A main topic of discussion for this meeting concerns the Highway 30 master plan for zoning. This is for the area that is now included in the city limits that is adjacent to the recently-constructed Highway 30 bypass. Susan Hargus described the meeting held by the City to discuss the pros and cons of the Planning and Zoning Commission proposal to the City Council. In effect, many people feel the proposed ordinances for the highway bypass area will open up the inclusion of many retail establishments which have previously been limited to the downtown commercial area. A number of people have raised concerns that this will have a deleterious effect on the downtown business district.

In looking at the re-zoning from the perspective of historic preservation, the Commission is concerned that competition that could develop from new businesses in the highway zone could lead to businesses failing on Main Street, and the possibility of vacant buildings. Numerous comparisons were made of other small towns that opened up retail on a bypass which eventually led to businesses migrating to the bypass and causing the abandonment of businesses and buildings in the downtown area. The Planning and Zoning Commission has passed, on a 4 to 3 vote, a proposal for changing the highway commercial zoning to allow commercial businesses which had previously been restricted to the downtown area.

Overall, HPC feels that any action by the city that could cause a decay in the downtown commercial historic district would not be good for the long-term benefit of the City. It was suggested that the City is moving too quickly to adopt new zoning ordinances. It was suggested that the City should take its time and have an aggressive economic development program that recruits new and compatible businesses into the bypass area. This may be of benefit to the City, rather than passing a zoning ordinance that would allow businesses to move into an area that draws people away from the downtown commercial district. Opponents of the proposed re-zoning of the highway district area suggest that once the zoning is changed, it will be difficult to protect businesses that are in the downtown commercial zone. Guy Booth suggested that the Iowa Court of Appeals has already indicated that Mount Vernon does have a right to protect its downtown area by some restrictions to zoning. Several people from the Commission, including Susan Hargus, Janet Budack and Guy Booth plan to be at the October 19 meeting to propose

alternatives to expanding retail businesses into the land that is to be added as the highway commercial district. Leah Rogers has prepared a letter to indicate HPC's position, and it should be read at the City Council meeting on October 19, 2020. Janet Budack will read the letter at the council meeting. Other members are encouraged to attend to support the premise of not making zoning changes that would adversely affect the downtown commercial historic district.

Leah also mentioned that the terms on the Commission for Mary Evans and Grace Chamberlain are to expire. It is hoped that they both will continue to serve on the Commission and be reappointed by the City Council.

The next meeting of the Commission will be November 7, 2020 at 9:15 a.m. via Zoom.

Respectfully Submitted,

Guy Booth, Secretary