

MINUTES
OF
MOUNT VERNON HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION
December 2, 2023

The Historic Preservation Commission met at Mount Vernon City Hall on Saturday, December 2, 2023 at 8:30 a.m. Commissioners present at City Hall were Mike Guerber, Suzette Astley, Duane Eash, Sherry Brayton and Guy Booth. Guests present were Mayor Tom Wieseler, and Randy Brown. Attending via Zoom was Nathan Countryman of the Mount Vernon Sun.

Minutes of the meeting of the November 15, 2023 meeting were approved.

Mayor Wieseler spent some time bringing the Commission up to date on City projects that may impact any of the historic districts. In particular, the City has hired an engineering firm to review the street scape development in the downtown area. This is the downtown commercial historic district. This project will get underway with open discussions with members of the Community to help provide input for changes that may be necessitated by Handicap accessibility and replacement of utilities and infrastructure. Mayor Wieseler also commented on the continued effort to record the history of Mount Vernon and to fill in gaps where information has not been available. In particular, the City is eager to fill in gaps in the missing additions of the Mount Vernon newspaper. Mayor Wieseler also discussed the interest of Habitat for Humanity, or other organizations looking to assist low and moderate-income homeownership. In particular, there are infill lots in the City that may qualify. According to the HPC records, there may be only two to three lots within the historic districts. Finally, the mayor expressed support and appreciation for the work the Commission has been doing. In particular, he again stressed the need for being able to receive and store archival material for historic preservation.

Sue reported that the glass negatives that had been donated by the Joe Burkhart family have been retrieved from Florida. Arlie and Jay Willems were on a family trip to Florida and volunteered to get the negatives from the Burkhart family and they are now in Mount Vernon. Sue indicates they need to be stored in archival sleeves for protection and she has ordered the material. They can be digitized by a company in Cedar Rapids at a cost of around \$1,000. There are at least 50 negatives that depict Mount Vernon scenes from some period of time in the late 1800's. Sue is going to provide an appropriate thank you gift to both the Willems and the Burkharts.

A design review issue on the agenda concerns replacement of gutters and downspouts on a house located at 510 8th St NW, which is in the Ash Park Historic District. This property is owned by Wayne Bildsteen. The Commission discussed the appropriate procedure for design review on gutters and downspouts. This generally is non-controversial, and would merely result in the issuance of a certificate of no material effect. Duane did have questions about changing of types of gutters from the older half-round gutters to the newer design. Also, he raised the question of any changes to the facia or soffits of a building in the removal and replacement of gutters and downspouts. The Commission has decided to address this issue by having a separate application for gutters and downspouts that would be similar to the application for fences and for new roofs. Because a building permit is required in each instance, the Commission would receive a copy of the building permit request, and if it is appropriate, then the chairperson could ok the request and issue a certificate of no material effect. However, if it appeared there were substantial changes to the appearance of the exterior of the building, the Commissioner could then request that the matter be presented to the full Commission for review and a decision on the

issuance of the certificate. We will work on the establishment of this separate application. However, for the request before the Commission today, Guy Booth moved to issue a certificate of no material effect. This was seconded by Duane Eash. The motion was approved.

A visitor to the Commission today is Randy Brown, who has recently purchased a house on 5th Avenue NW. It is an historic structure and he expressed interest in doing more research on the house. The Commission gave several suggestions as to where he could locate material that gives him greater historical information about the property. Mr. Brown stayed for the rest of the meeting and provided good questions and insight to go along with the Commission discussions.

Sue reported that the Maurice Foundation has made another gift to the Commission. This time, they have forwarded a check for \$2,500. This is basically an advance payment for the next year's gifting. It is decided that this gift, as well as the gift from earlier in the year, will be available to use toward payment of the development of a new design guideline booklet for the Commission. Once again, the Commission is grateful to the generosity of Steve Maurice and the Maurice Foundation.

The City has received an inquiry from Beverly Wirtz, who lives in Colorado. Her ancestors were the owners of the Wild House, which is a brick home on 2nd Avenue South. This house has been used commercially by Koppenhaver & Associates for a long period of time, and more recently, as an antique store. Ms. Wirtz has information regarding the involvement of family members in the Civil War. Sue has contacted the history museum in Cedar Rapids to see if they are interested in material that is not specifically related to Mount Vernon.

Under old business, there was further discussion regarding our input for new construction in historic districts. Sue has received information from the City of Dubuque that has printed information on general principles to be considered when new construction is proposed. This includes the use of similar materials, having similar setback requirements, dealing with the size of the building and the proposed plans as it would relate to the ambiance of the historic district. Sue is going to print a copy of some of the Dubuque material so we can review it and then determine how that information could be available for prospective builders, as well as for the Commission so we can have knowledgeable input to review a request for a building permit in the historic districts. This can be a project to work on over the next several months, and it may be appropriate, as the Smith home on 8th Avenue begins making plans for reconstruction.

Guy Booth gave a brief update on the cemetery project. He is hoping the City will respond to his request for more information about the availability of a cemetery trust pursuant to the Iowa Code. This may help in planning and in funding work in the cemetery.

In other old business, Duane asked a few questions about the demolition ordinance and how it would apply to a non-historic building for which demolition is being considered. Sue pointed out that all buildings of historical significance have been identified and the demolition ordinance includes all buildings in the City, not just in the historic districts.

The Commission also discussed again the functioning of our Commission as it relates to historic artifacts. Currently, much printed material and photographs are stored in the archival room at City Hall. Because we occasionally receive requests from people who would like to donate material, we need to clarify our philosophy on what would be important for our Commission to be cataloguing, as opposed to what information an historic preservation society may want to have. This philosophical issue can present discussion as to how to accommodate

donors if the Commission feels the material is not something that can be accepted and stored in our present facility.

The meeting adjourned at 9:45 a.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Guy Booth, Secretary