

MINUTES
OF
MOUNT VERNON HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION
September 7, 2024

The Historic Preservation Commission met at Mount Vernon City Hall on Saturday, September 7, 2024 at 8:30 a.m. Commissioners present at City Hall were Mary Evans, Duane Eash, Randy Brown, Sherry Brayton, Mike Guerber, Donnie Moore, Sue Astley, and Guy Booth. Others in attendance included Chris Nosbisch, Mt Vernon City Administrator, and Lori Boren, Assistant City Administrator, Nathan Countryman from the Mount Vernon-Lisbon Sun, Michelle Webber-Murphy and Meagan Webber-Bennett.

Minutes of the July 17, 2024 meeting were approved.

The first item of business is design review for approval of signage at 101 1st St NW. This property is in the historic commercial district. Michelle Murphy and Meagan Bennett introduced themselves and indicated they were purchasing the real estate office of Molly Jo Wolfe. Because of the change of ownership and personnel, the large sign on the east side of the building is being reworked to include new information about the agency. The sign will be the same size. There will be changes in the names on the sign to identify the new ownership. Further, there will be two smaller signs that will be in the front window of the building that identify the new owners. The signage has been approved by the City of Mount Vernon. Upon motion by Mary Evans, seconded by Duane Eash, a certificate of no material effect was approved. Both Michelle and Meagan provided some biographical background. They both live in the community, have children in the school district, and are excited to be taking over the real estate office of Molly Jo. Molly Jo will continue to be involved in the business for a period of time.

The next item of business concerns new lighting that will be installed on 1st Street from the 1st Street building east of the Highway 1 intersection and continuing to Memorial Park. Chris Nosbisch described this as a unique project. Alliant Energy has asked the City of Mount Vernon to allow them to install 24 new lighting fixtures along 1st Street. These are unique in as much as some of the poles contain wi-fi connections, some of the poles will have music broadcasting capability, and 8 of the poles will have a digital screen so the city does not have to use individual cloth banners to advertise city events. Chris and Lori have both been to Platteville, WI where Alliant Energy has initiated the only other lighting program that is being paid for by Alliant Energy. Chris and Lori both indicated the City will be requesting modifications to what is being done in Platteville, WI, but overall, this appears to be a very worthwhile project that will be completed at very little expense to the city. Perhaps the major question relates to the digital screens that would provide information for City events. There was concern expressed that these digital screens could also be used for advertising, and the question arose as to who would be authorized to prepare and approve the display of advertising other than city-sponsored events. The City's intention is that this not become a commercial advertising device, but it may be prudent to have some language in a city resolution that directs future discussion of advertising being limited to the intentions of the City at the initiation of this project. Sue Astley volunteered to work on a draft of language that may be helpful to both the Historic Preservation Commission and to the City.

Chris indicated that much of the planning for this project comes from Alliant Energy, but the City does have the ability to direct the project so it fits within the historic nature of the

downtown historic district. Both HPC and the City will continue to work on the details of this project.

Donnie Moore and Mary Evans jointly discussed event planning for the Commission. Mary had been working on a historic hayrack ride that would take people to various historic sites in Mount Vernon where a presentation would be made about the history of each site. Donnie Moore had indicated that he would like to plan a social event for the Commission, and had thought that there could be a combination with the hayrack ride. However, Mary Evans indicated that the hayrack ride details caused her to be concerned about the safety of the hayrack ride and has now indicated that she has cancelled plans for the ride. She will continue to explore to see what may be a safer transportation method for people who would like to have an historic-related tour of Mount Vernon. Likewise, Donnie will continue to visit with Mary to see if this tour of the City could be a way to combine the social event for the Commission. Because there is going to have to be additional planning and investigation, a sub-committee consisting of Donnie, Mary, and Sherry Brayton was appointed to work ahead on these plans.

It was also suggested that HPC look ahead to next May during National Historic Preservation Month to identify projects that have been completed that should have recognition for their significance in the historic districts.

Sue gave a report on the Visitor's Center restoration. There is still work remaining to see if more of the dark stain on the building can be reduced. The contractor has been using D-2, a stain-reducing chemical. There have been 3 or 4 applications, and it has some positive effect, but there will be additional applications of the product to see if more of the stain can be eliminated. Sue indicates that the grant for this project has been completed. The landscaping has not been completed. A retaining wall that has been constructed will need some additional work, as it is bulging in one section. The retaining wall will be a substantial help in eliminating the washing away of mulch along the side of the building. Sue also reported that the grant that has been completed will provide approximately \$11,000. HPC will contribute about \$1,000 to the Visitors Center project.

Both Sue and Mary commented on the preservation of photos that have come to the Commission. These photos came from the Horton family and from the Mount Vernon-Lisbon Sun. Marcia Driscoll and her sister, as well as Mary Evans, have reviewed the photographs and have been able to identify many people who are in the photographs.

There have also been 127 glass negatives that have been cleaned and will be part of our archives. There are still others that need to be cleaned. Christine Flavin, a resident of Mount Vernon, who is a photography professor at Kirkwood, has been very helpful in helping our volunteers in learning how to safely clean the negatives.

Sue and Nathan Countryman also reported that the missing editions of the Sun newspaper from 2012 to 2014 have been located and will be added to the entire history of the newspaper.

Sue Astley wanted to have the Commission recognize the outstanding leadership and work that Ed Sauter has provided to the Commission. Ed was one of the founders of the Commission and has been instrumental in helping with the organizational proceedings of the Commission. Ed prepared the guideline book for the Commission. This was perhaps the first such guideline book for any Commission in the State of Iowa. Ed prepared the drawings for the book and the original drawings are still part of our archives. Sue has asked the company that

will be preparing the guideline book to incorporate Ed's drawings whenever it is possible. This will be not only a tribute to Ed, but should give our guidelines a unique perspective on how this captures the history of Mount Vernon. Sue will also send a note of appreciation to Ed. Ed is homebound and is having serious health problems at this time.

Related to the discussion of the guideline book, Sue attended a recent City Council meeting to explain the project and to detail why it is needed. The Council seemed very supportive of the project. There still are some details to work out on the total cost of the project. The City Council has approved a substantial portion of the cost, and HPC will be paying for a portion of it through its regular budget.

On motion by Duane Eash, seconded by Guy Booth, the Historic Preservation Commission formally approves the hiring of JMT as the company to prepare the new Historic Preservation Guideline book. The City Council will approve and sign the contract that is submitted by JMT.

The meeting adjourned at 9:45 a.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Guy Booth, Secretary