

MINUTES
OF
MOUNT VERNON HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION
November 13, 2024

The Historic Preservation Commission met at Mount Vernon City Hall on Wednesday, November 13, 2024. Commissioners present at City Hall were Duane Eash, Mary Evans, Mike Guerber, Sherry Brayton, Sue Astley, Wade Squiers, Edith Dawson and Guy Booth. A guest at the meeting was Crystal Wherry.

At the beginning of the meeting, Sue discussed the possibility of property owners in the historic preservation district being eligible for a Community Development Block Grant. This is a grant that has funds available for restoration of buildings in the historic district. There could be a substantial amount of money in the grant that would be divided between building owners that want to join in the grant. It is a complex process that could take a year to determine if the grant will be awarded, and if it is, the work would be done over a three-year period. An architect would be hired to verify what work would be done on a building that is part of the grant request. Joe Jennison is the person in charge of the grant writing proposal and has information to share with building owners. The next meeting on this project is scheduled for November 18 at 10:00 a.m. at Mount Vernon City Hall. Joe feels it would take at least 8 property owners to commit to the grant for us to be successful in receiving it.

Crystal Wherry, a realtor asked to do a pre-review for a potential rebuilding of a garage on a house located at 609 5th Ave. NW. This is in the Ash Park Historic District. The property is for sale, and a potential buyer needs to understand what the procedure is if the single-stall garage, which is at the back of the property along the alley, were to be expanded or demolished and replaced with a larger garage. The Commission indicated that the garage was not of historical significance, and because of its location, a new structure would probably be approved so long as it met other historic preservation guidelines. Ms. Wherry thanked the Commission for taking the time to explain this process.

The next item of business related to the digital banners that are part of a proposal for the Intellistreets Poles proposed by Alliant Energy. The proposal for the lighting fixtures is of benefit to the City, as Alliant Energy is providing the costs of the new lighting system. The one item that may be controversial is the use of digital banners to replace our traditional cloth banners that promotes different festivals sponsored by the City or by CDG. The Commission is supportive of the contribution that Alliant Energy is making, and the selection of appropriate poles and lighting. There is some question about the appropriateness of digital banners. The digital screens could be used for other purposes. Also, the screens that would be used would not add to the historical look for the downtown historic district. While the Commission may not have authority to rule on the inclusion of these digital screens, the Commission does have the obligation to advise on how appropriate the screens would be in the historic district. Guy Booth indicated that he has had feedback from at least 6 business owners that have expressed concern about the inclusion of these digital banners. Guy indicated that if the community does have opinions, either pro or con, that this information should be collected and presented to the City Council, as they are making the decision of including these digital banners as part of the lighting project that is being undertaken. Guy indicated he would check with other property owners so he could give the City feedback from the public, and not just from the Historic Preservation Commission. Guy will assemble this information during the next week.

The final item of business was a discussion of the contract for preparation of a new design guideline book JMT, the company that the Commission desires to have prepare the new guideline booklet, has sent a proposed contract to the City. The City has responded asking for four changes, which the Commission feels are appropriate requests. We are at the point where the City is ready to sign the contract if the changes are made. Assuming the contract will be signed in the very near future, the Commission then needs to organize the initial meeting with personnel from JMT. This would be an opportunity for the company to become familiar with Mount Vernon and its historic districts and to get feedback as to what specifically is needed in the revision and updating of the design guideline book. Sue will continue to monitor the timing of scheduling the first meeting. Tentatively, it could be set for December 7, but this will depend on the date of the signing of the contract and the availability of JMT to come to Mount Vernon for their initial meeting. Sue will keep everyone informed as to the meeting. December 7 would ordinarily be our first Saturday of the month meeting.

Finally, Sue reported that Christine Flavin has been busy with her teaching duties, but she will be available in December to help the Commission work on the preservation of the glass negatives that were given to the Commission earlier this year. Once we know dates that Christine is available, Commissioners would be notified in case they have time to learn the cleaning techniques and help make sure the negatives are well-protected.

Mike Guerber indicated there have been no change of owners of structures in historic districts that have been sold.

The meeting adjourned at 7:50 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Guy Booth, Secretary