

MINUTES  
OF  
MOUNT VERNON HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION  
May 2, 2026

The Historic Preservation Commission met at Mount Vernon City Hall on Saturday, May 2, 2026 at 8:30 a.m. Commissioners present at City Hall were Grace Chamberlain, Sue Astley, Randy Brown, Mike Guerber, Kim Benesh, Guy Booth and Edith Dawson. Visitors present were Megan Dietsch, Cari Morgan and Nathan Countryman.

The Minutes of the meeting of April 15, 2026 were approved.

The first item of business regards the design review for property at 101 1<sup>st</sup> St NW, Mount Vernon, IA. This building is in the downtown commercial district. A request is made to replace the HVAC equipment that has been in place at the rear of the building. There will be no change in location or in size, but only replacement with a new unit. The building is owned by Casey and Bridget O'Connor. Upon motion made by Mike Guerber, seconded by Guy Booth, the Commission approved the application as having no material effect.

Under new business, Cari Morgan from Cornell College presented information on several projects on the Cornell campus. The first item was informing the Commission that the artificial turf for the athletic complex at Ash Park is being replaced. It is 13 years old, and needs to be replaced. A city building permit is not required, so the Commission does not need to approve the application before the work can be done. There would be no changes in its location or its appearance.

Cari then showed to the Commission two retaining walls on the campus that need to be repaired. One of the walls is located at the Thomas Commons building loading dock, and the other is the retaining wall by the heating plant. Both walls have had some deterioration and the large blocks that make up the retaining wall need to be replaced and/or reset. There will be little change in its appearance or structure. The college has not requested a building permit as yet, so the Commission will proceed when the application is formally presented. The Commission informally indicated that the project appears to meet all standards in historic preservation for the retaining wall.

Megan Dietsch was present to determine what steps she should be taking in her business as a window artist. Megan works with commercial buildings to place decorative paintings on windows, as well as dealing with signage. Megan wanted to make sure that she understood what guidelines Historic Preservation had for the downtown commercial district so when a building owner hires her to do artwork on the windows, that it meets the guidelines of the Commission. It was pointed out that there are two steps she will need to follow. First, she will need to consult with the city zoning office to determine if her proposed designs meet with the city sign ordinance. Once it has been approved by the city, then it comes to Historic Preservation for review. We also discussed the difference between permanent and temporary artwork, as well as if there is a definition of what amount of window space can be covered. This issue may come up when there is a formal presentation for approval of the artwork that Megan will be applying to the commercial windows.

Randy Brown had contacted Cornell for an update on the renovation and repair at King Chapel, as well as the work that may be needed for the Platner House. The college indicates that

they are still waiting for information from FEMA and IDHSEM to determine the funding that will be available. Cornell has worked with the architects and consultants regarding how to best preserve the historic integrity of King Chapel. Finally, Cornell is working with an architectural firm in Cedar Rapids to evaluate design and determine the scope of work needed for remodeling of Platner House. It is hoped that there will be more information available on these projects by our June meeting.

The final item under new business was a discussion of outreach projects for the Commission. Grace and Kim are both working on ideas to have historic preservation be highlighted to the community. They have a number of ideas that could be pursued and need to prioritize what can be done and what amount of work and how many people will need to be involved on various projects.

Under old business, Grace gave a report on the archive-accessible database. She feels it would be important to hire someone as an intern for the summer to assist in getting the database completed. She has been contacted by a person with superb qualifications for working on this archive project. The Commission agrees that this person should be hired, so there will be an attempt to define the scope of work and the compensation so the project can be started this summer. The Commission will need to determine if funding should come from the remainder of this year's budget or should be taken from the budget for the next fiscal year.

Kim gave a report on the cemetery commission activities. The cemetery commission has received a \$900 grant from the state association for preserving Iowa Cemeteries and a \$1,000 gift from Ava Stamp. These contributions will be used in the renovation of gravesites in the cemetery.

Mike Guerber reported that there were no home sales in any of the historic districts since the last meeting. Sue Astley briefly discussed the First Street Community Center nomination proposal. The First Street Community Center nonprofit corporation will need to meet so there can be an agreement that the building will be subject to the design review guidelines of the Commission. Sue Astley gave the Commission a copy of the proposed historic district newsletter that is well-designed and discusses the new design guidelines that have been adopted. The Commission approved the ordering of 200 copies of the newsletter. This will be sent to all property owners in the historic districts. Upon motion by Guy Booth, seconded by Mike Guerber, Sue is authorized to proceed with the publication and to expend up to \$500 in the printing and postage of the newsletter.

Finally, it was reported that Sue will be visiting with the company that is going to be making the historic downtown tour plaques. We are waiting to have the QR code insignia prepared for the individual plaques.

Randy gave a brief report on the meetings he has attended regarding historic preservation, and also discussed the upcoming Preserve Iowa Summit that will be held June 2 and 3.

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned.

Respectfully Submitted,

Guy Booth, Secretary