

MINUTES
OF
MOUNT VERNON HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION
June 6, 2026

The Historic Preservation Commission met at Mount Vernon City Hall on Saturday, June 6, 2026 at 8:30 a.m. Commissioners present at City Hall were Sue Astley, Mary Evans Mike Guerber, Duane Eash, Sherry Brayton, Randy Brown, Guy Booth and Edith Dawson. Guests present were Nathan Countryman from the Mount Vernon Lisbon Sun and Kari Morgan and Beth Orth from Cornell College.

The Minutes of the May 20, 2026 meeting were approved, subject to the correct spelling of the name of Danielle Kumley.

There are three design review requests. The first is for window signage at the breakfast restaurant at 100 1st St SE. The restaurant has opened and is requesting signs that identify the business as 1st Street Breakfast Company. All three signs are a copy of the logo of the restaurant and will be placed on three separate windows of the restaurant. The size of the logo fits within the zoning ordinance and the signs are appropriate for the downtown business district. Upon motion by Guy Booth, seconded by Sue Astley, a motion for a certificate of appropriateness was approved.

The second design review is for property owned by Christine Flavin at 609 6th St NW, Mount Vernon. This property is located in the Ash Park Historic District. Christine is requesting approval of the replacement of step flashing and to replace shingles along the replaced flashing as needed. The shingles will match the existing shingles on the house. The repair work is needed to prevent any leaking of the area between the siding of the house and the roof. Upon motion made by Duane Eash, seconded by Guy Booth, the Commission approved the work and the issuance of a certificate of no material effect.

The third design review request is from Cornell College. Two retaining walls on the campus have deteriorated and have been damaged to the extent they need to be replaced. Over the course of the years, the retaining walls received some damage from delivery trucks, and also, the retaining walls have started to deteriorate and slide from the previous base. The retaining walls are near the heating plant and the area behind the commons. The college plans to use an interlocking concrete block that will provide a strengthened retaining wall for the two areas. Both of the repairs are needed. A motion to issue a certificate of appropriateness was made by Sue Astley, seconded by Mary Evans, and was approved by the Commission.

Kari Morgan and Beth Orth were present to discuss updates on the repair to King Chapel and also to the Platner House. Beth stated that there are still complications in dealing with FEMA to receive approval of the design for repair and to have the FEMA proceeds approved for the project. It is a complicated process, as both the State Historic Preservation office, as well as FEMA need to approve design plans. The design plans have changed based upon the discovery of the condition of the building. Also, the efficiency of FEMA has been slowed by the current political process at FEMA. It is hoped that these issues will resolve in the near future. The main concern is the design of the support at the southwest corner of the building and the addition that will be used for access to the Chapel. Beth indicated that the interior design for the building has not been completed. This could interfere with or delay the approval of the plans by FEMA and

the State Historic Preservation office. Our approval will be requested when the application for a building permit is submitted.

Beth also reported that the Platner House renovation is being reviewed by an architectural firm from Cedar Rapids. The college needs to determine the future use of the building and the feasibility of costs of repair. It has to be determined if an elevator will need to be added to the house. There was a general discussion about grant money that could be available on some projects. Sue has experience with the HRDP grants from the state. Because there is some concern as to the legality of grants that are coming from public funds, there may be some delay in determining eligibility. Guy Booth is going to ask Joe Jennison if he is available through the City to assist in writing grant proposals.

Sue Astley gave an updated report on the Commission's budget for the fiscal year ending June 30. There are funds in the account that need to be disbursed during this fiscal year. The Commission intends to use existing funds for work on the archives. Grace Chamberlain has previously identified a person who will be able to complete some of the archival work. Mary Evans indicates that Edith Dawson has been involved in the archival work and could complete her project before the end of June. Upon motion made by Sue Astley, seconded by Mike Guerber, the Commission will set aside the sum of \$218 for Edith to finish her project. The Commission will then determine if the additional interim work identified by Grace can be paid from funds in the next fiscal year.

Sue also discussed the cost of funding for the history tour project. This will include paying for the website, producing and placing the plaques that will have QR Codes, and for other expenses of the project. Upon motion by Mary Evans, seconded by Duane Eash, the history tour expense in the amount of \$1,635.80 was approved.

Kim Benesh reported on Heritage Days activities. A photo board is going to be painted, which will have four holes for people to place their faces in. The board will depict clothing and style from approximately 1850. Kim indicates there will also be a history guessing game and there will be numerous giveaway items. The photo boards and a table will be located at 224 1st St SW.

Mary Evans reported that the GIS mapping of the cemetery has been completed. There are approximately 3,600 graves. Over the course of the next few years, all gravesites will be identified and placed on a map so people are able to easily locate the gravesite of persons. Mary also indicated that 40 gravestones will be restored during the summer. Further, there will be professional instruction provided so that cemetery commission members and volunteers will have a better understanding of the process of site renovation.

Sue Astley also gave a status report on the project of having the First Street Community Center Building be added to the national historic register. The Commission has agreed to contribute \$3,600 toward the project, and is hoping to receive a matching grant to pay for the remaining cost of preparation of the application. A question has arisen as to whether a grant to a non-profit corporation can be approved. The state auditor wants to determine whether a non-profit corporation is qualified to receive the state funds if the corporation is owned by private individuals. It may take some time to sort out the legality of a grant to the First Street building.

Mike Guerber reported that a house in the Ash Park District at 419 3rd St NW has been sold. We will forward information about historic preservation to the new owners.

Sue and Randy both discussed their attendance at the Preserve Iowa Summit conference. Both had attended good sessions that are related to issues that concern our Commission. In addition, Randy did give a presentation regarding our recent experience in developing new guidelines. Other communities who are in attendance contacted Randy and would like more information.

Randy gave a quick summary of additional educational opportunities regarding historic preservation.

The meeting adjourned at 10:00 a.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Guy Booth, Secretary