



DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT SERVICES

Planning Division

m e m o r a n d u m

TO: Laurel Lunt Prussing, Mayor

FROM: Elizabeth H. Tyler, FAICP, Director

DATE: May 21, 2009

SUBJECT: T-Mobile USA, Inc. Donation to City of Urbana for Historic Preservation Activity

Introduction

On March 19, 2009, the City of Urbana received a letter (attached) from the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency (IHPA) with a donation for \$5,000 for Historic Preservation activities in Urbana. The donation, from T-Mobile, is intended to mitigate an adverse effect from a new radio tower on a property listed on the National Register of Historic Places. IHPA has reserved the right to approve how the money is spent.

The Historic Preservation Commission discussed this donation at their April 1, 2009 and May 6, 2009 meetings (minutes attached). The Commission voted unanimously to recommend to the City Council that the donation be spent to pursue a National Register of Historic Places historic district to include the West Urbana Neighborhood and possibly the Downtown.

Background

In 2007, the University of Illinois built a radio tower for WILL Radio at 1106/1110 W. Main Street to replace an existing radio tower whose signal was going to be blocked by a new apartment building. (The University did not apply for or receive zoning approval from the City of Urbana to erect the new tower.) Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 requires the University to take into account the effect of Federally-funded or -permitted undertakings on historic properties via a public process. The Warm Air Research House is located one block from the new radio tower at 1108 W. Stoughton Street and is listed on the National Register. As such, constructing the new radio tower should have triggered the Section 106 review process.

T-Mobile requested a Special Use Permit from the City in early 2008 to allow them to locate nine antennae on the new WILL radio tower. The issue of Federal or State review for effects on

historic resources was not raised at that time. Shortly thereafter, the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency became apprised of the situation. According to IHPA, the donation from T-Mobile constitutes adequate mitigation for the previously non-compliant radio tower adjacent to the Warm Air Research House.

Discussion

The donation is to be spent on preservation activities in Urbana. According to the letter from Anne Haaker that accompanied the donation, the “donation is provided to the Urbana Historic Preservation Commission for the sole purpose of carrying out a distinct preservation action in Urbana such as a survey or National Register nomination.”

Preservation Directives from the 2005 Comprehensive Plan

Goal 12.0 Preserve the characteristics that make Urbana unique.

Objectives

- 12.1 Identify and protect neighborhoods and areas that contain significant historical and cultural resources.*
- 12.2 Pursue the establishment of historic landmark and/or historic district status for sites that have contributed to the history of Urbana.*
- 12.3 Encourage public/private partnerships to preserve and restore historic structures/sites.*
- 12.4 Promote and educate the public about the benefits of historic preservation.*
- 12.5 Preserve and maintain brick sidewalks and streets which are unique to Urbana’s older neighborhoods consistent with the city’s Brick Sidewalk Plan.*

Implementation Strategies

- *Update historic surveys of older neighborhoods in order to develop an inventory of historic resources.*
- *Study the feasibility of initiating a low-interest loan or grant/match program for exterior renovation projects on structures that have been designated as “historic” under the Urbana Historic Preservation Ordinance.*
- *Designate downtown Urbana and portions of West Main Street (where appropriate) for historic district status.*
- *Designate civic buildings that contribute to Urbana’s history for landmark status.*

Possible Preservation Projects/Programs

Below is a list of historic preservation needs identified by staff and presented to the Historic Preservation Commission as possible projects/programs to pursue with this donation:

1. *Historic Resource Surveys.* When the Urbana City Council adopted a demolition delay ordinance in November 2007, the list of properties subject to the 45-day delay in the issuance of a demolition permit was comprised of properties for which the City had a historic resource survey, as well as properties in selected blocks of East Urbana identified by Councilmember Roberts as having historic potential but without historic resource surveys. The donation could be used to do a partial reconnaissance survey of this area in East Urbana, generally bounded by Urbana Street on the west, the railroad tracks on the north, Lynn Street on the east, and Illinois Street on the south, and then to prepare more intensive surveys of properties of greater historic significance. The 2005 Urbana Comprehensive Plan also identifies updating historic resource surveys as a strategy to “Preserve the characteristics that make Urbana unique,” (Comp Plan, p 91).
2. *Historic Recognition Grant Program.* In February 2007, the Urbana City Council and the Urbana Historic Preservation Commission held a joint meeting to discuss historic preservation in Urbana. The City Council then directed staff to work on a recognition grant program and/or a revolving loan program. Both the grant and the loan programs are listed in the Comprehensive Plan as strategies to “Preserve and enhance the character of Urbana’s established residential neighborhoods” and to “Preserve the characteristics that make Urbana unique.” The grant program would provide matching grants for the rehabilitation of locally-designated historic landmarks and properties in historic districts. The T-Mobile donation could be used to set up and provide seed money for such a program.
3. *Revolving Loan Program for Historic Properties.* A revolving loan program would provide low interest-loans for the exterior rehabilitation of landmarks and properties in historic districts. This program has a policy basis in both the Comprehensive Plan and by City Council direction. A revolving loan program could require a significant amount of staff time and seed money to create, but the money is then eventually paid back into the program. An additional issue with this program is that \$5,000 would not provide sufficient capital to start the program and periodic funding would be needed to build the program to reach sustainability.
4. *Downtown Historic District.* The Comprehensive Plan identifies pursuing a historic district for the historic part of downtown Urbana as being an implementation strategy to further the goal of ‘Preserve the characteristics that make Urbana unique,’ (Comp Plan, p 92). The donation could be used to pursue a historic district designation for the downtown area. If there were sufficient property owner support, the district could be locally-designated. If there were not sufficient support, the district could be National Register-designated (see below for explanation of National Register), which would qualify property owners for a federal income-tax credit of 20 percent of rehabilitation costs for income-producing properties.

5. *Designate Civic Buildings as Landmarks.* Pursuing landmark status for civic buildings that contribute to Urbana’s history is an implementation strategy in the Comprehensive Plan which states: “Preserve the characteristics that make Urbana unique,” (Comp Plan, p 92). The T-Mobile donation could fund a study of civic buildings such as the courthouse, the library, schools, etc. and pursue landmark designation or National Register listing where appropriate.

6. *Research and recognition of Urbana’s Nobel, Pulitzer, and other award winners who have made substantial contributions in their fields.* The City of Urbana has been home to many Nobel and Pulitzer Prize winners and others who have made significant national and international contributions to their fields. This program would recognize those individuals. The program could install sidewalk plaques similar to the plaque recently installed in front of Roger Ebert’s childhood home on E. Washington Street.

7. *National Register District for West Urbana Neighborhood.* The National Register of Historic Places is the official list of the Nation’s historic places worthy of preservation. It was established through the 1966 National Historic Preservation Act and is maintained by the National Park Service, which is part of the U.S. Department of the Interior. Listing in the National Register provides formal recognition of a district’s historical or architectural significance based on national standards used by every state in the country.

According to the National Park Service, benefits of being on the National Register include:

- The Federal Historic Preservation Tax Credit Programs provides federal income-tax incentives for the rehabilitation of historic income-producing properties. Specifically, a 20% tax credit is available for the substantial rehabilitation of commercial or rental residential buildings.
- Providing opportunities for specific preservation incentives, such as:
 - Federal preservation grants for planning and rehabilitation
 - Preservation easements to nonprofit organizations
 - International Building Code fire and life safety code alternatives
- Becoming part of the National Register Archives, a public, searchable database that provides a wealth of research information.
- Encouraging preservation of historic resources by documenting a property’s historic significance.
- Involvement from the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation when a Federal agency project may affect historic property.

- Access to information on the care and maintenance of a historic property through various National Park Service Preservation Briefs and Tech Notes.
- Network with other historic property owners, tour historic areas, or chat with preservationists through Conferences, Workshops, and Preservation Organizations.
- Celebrate the listing by ordering a bronze plaque that distinguishes the property as listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

Additionally, a further benefit is the Illinois State Property Tax Assessment Freeze, which provides tax incentives to owner-occupants who rehabilitate their homes. With this program, the assessed valuation of the historic property is frozen for eight years at the level which existed the year the rehabilitation began. The valuation is then brought back to market level over a period of four years.

Unlike with properties in a local historic district, National Register listing places no obligations on private property owners except when using Federal money or a Federal permit. There are no restrictions on the use, treatment, transfer, or disposition of private property. National Register listing does not lead to public acquisition or require public access. Additionally, the district will only be listed if a majority of property owners do not object.

A potential drawback to a National Register district would be when Federal money or a Federal permit is involved. Current City grant programs that could be affected by a large National Register historic district include the Emergency Grant Program, the Access Grant Program, Senior Repair Service, and the Get the Lead Out Program. Other programs that could be affected include the County's Weatherization Program and other upcoming energy efficiency grants. If a property owner in a National Register historic district applied for one of these Federally-funded programs, the project would require review by the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency for possible negative impacts on the historical significance of the property. This could result in delays, and potentially, a property owner not being able to take advantage of the grant program. Another possible consequence would be additional regulations when the City uses Federal money to fund road and other capital improvement projects within the District. Similar restrictions would apply to the Park District and School District for any improvements to parks and schools in the district.

While National Register designation for West Urbana would be responsive to Comprehensive Plan strategies for preservation of this residential area, National Register designation is not identified as an objective for the City.

Staff does not yet have a detailed estimate of the cost of preparing a designation nomination for this area, but it is preliminarily estimated that it could range from \$10,000 to \$25,000. Further analysis is necessary to determine impacts of this proposal upon staff

time and resources and implications for property owners. Because this proposal could potentially affect a large number of property owners, it is recommended that a public forum be held as an initial step to gauge possible public interest in the designation, prior to expending significant efforts.

Recommendations

On May 6, 2009, the Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) unanimously passed the following motion:

“It is the desire of the Urbana Historic Preservation Commission to pursue a National Register of Historic Places historic district, to include the West Urbana Neighborhood and possibly the Downtown, in a comprehensive approach to designation which would, at minimum, bring recognition and honor to a large number of historic resources, in addition to promoting the use of related financial incentives. It is our desire to have a project come to fruition and to promote an appreciation for historic resources.”

During their discussion, the HPC expressed reservations about using the donation for surveys as a historic preservation class at the University of Illinois adds over 100 properties to the City’s list of properties with historic resource surveys annually at no charge to the City. Additionally, the HPC agreed that they wanted to use the donation for a *tangible* project and felt that surveys would not meet this criterion. Similarly, the Commission did not feel that \$5,000 was enough money to successfully start the grant and loan programs. Some of the Commissioners liked the idea of pursuing designation for civic buildings, but all preferred a National Register historic district.

As discussed above, there are a number of possibilities for this donation. The historic recognition grant and revolving loan programs are both Mayor and City Council goals for historic preservation which are currently unfunded.

Staff recommends that Council review the previously described program uses for the donation and provide a motion directing staff to pursue one or more of these programs, subject to IHPA approval.

Should the City Council concur with the Historic Preservation Commission recommendation to pursue National Register designation for West Urbana, staff recommends that the following steps be taken prior to any formal action:

- (1) Holding one or more public forums, inviting affected residents and property owners, to gauge public interest and support for a possible district.
- (2) Further evaluating the fiscal impact and staff resources necessary to pursue National Register designation for West Urbana; and
- (3) Further evaluating the implications for property owners due to National Register listing, including concerns about housing and energy efficiency grants and the

ability to apply Federal funds to public infrastructure and institutions such as parks and schools.

Prepared by:

Rebecca Bird, Planner

Attachment: Letter from IHPA
Minutes from April and May HPC Meetings



**Illinois Historic
Preservation Agency**

1 Old State Capitol Plaza • Springfield, Illinois 62701-1512 • www.illinois-history.gov

March 18, 2009

Alice Novak, Chair
Urbana Historic Preservation Commission
601 W. Delaware
Urbana, IL 61801

Dear Ms. Novak:

Please find enclosed a check to the City of Urbana, Historic Preservation Commission from T-Mobile in the amount of \$5,000.

This check is provided to mitigate the adverse effect of construction of a radio tower behind the Warm Air Research House by the University of Illinois. The tower was constructed without the requisite approval required by Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended. This action was discovered when T-Mobile sought to co-locate cellular phone antennas on the tower. As such, they found it in their best interest to provide mitigative relief on behalf of the University.

This money is provided to the Urbana Historic Preservation Commission for the sole purpose of carrying out a distinct preservation action in Urbana such as a survey or National Register nomination. We reserve the right to approve the action or product to ensure the money is spent for historic preservation purposes. Please inform us as soon as the Commission decides how the money will be spent.

If you have any questions, please call me at 217/785-5027.

Sincerely,

Anne E. Haaker
Deputy State Historic
Preservation Officer



Illinois Historic
Preservation Agency

FAX (217) 782-8161

1 Old State Capitol Plaza • Springfield, Illinois 62701-1512 • www.illinois-history.gov

Champaign County
Urbana

Telecommunications Antennae, Radio Tower Installation
1110 West Main St.
TRILEAF-200153
IHPA Log #011011608

March 18, 2009

Mary Crowl
T-Mobile USA, Inc.
8550 W. Bryn Mawr Ave., #100
Chicago, IL 60631-3201

Dear Ms. Crowl:

Thank you for the donation to the Urbana Historic Preservation Commission. This will constitute adequate mitigation for the previously non-compliant radio tower immediately adjacent to the Warm Air Research House. This property, at 1108 Stoughton, is individually listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

In our opinion, the act of T Mobile co-locating on this tower will now constitute a no adverse effect on this National Register property.

Sincerely,

Anne E. Haaker
Anne E. Haaker
Deputy State Historic
Preservation Officer

c: Don Johnson, FCC
Melvyn Skvarla, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
Alice Novak, Urbana Historic Preservation Commission

MINUTES OF A REGULAR MEETING**URBANA HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION****APPROVED****DATE:** April 1, 2009**TIME:** 7:00 p.m.**PLACE:** City Council Chamber, 400 South Vine Street, Urbana, Illinois**MEMBERS PRESENT:** Katherine Lipes, Alice Novak, Trent Shepard, Joan Stolz, Mary Stuart, Art Zangerl**MEMBERS EXCUSED:** Scott Dossett**MEMBERS ABSENT:** none**STAFF PRESENT:** Rebecca Bird, Planner; Tony Weck, Recording Secretary**OTHERS PRESENT:** Glenn Berman, Riley Glerum, Marie Bohl, Corrie Proksa**9. NEW BUSINESS****T-Mobile donation for historic preservation activity**

Ms. Bird reported to the Commission that the City of Urbana had received from T-Mobile a donation of \$5,000 for historic preservation activities in the city. She reported that the donation was intended to mitigate the adverse effect from the construction of a radio tower on a property listed on the National Register of Historic Places (1106/1110 W. Main Street). She noted that the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency had reserved the right to approve how the money is spent.

Noting the preservation directive set forth in the 2005 Urbana Comprehensive Plan, Ms. Bird suggested that the donation money could be used for the following historic preservation activities:

- historic preservation surveys
- a historic recognition grant program
- a revolving loan program for historic properties
- a downtown historic district
- the designation of civic buildings as landmarks

Other preservation projects suggested were as follows:

MINUTES OF A REGULAR MEETING**URBANA HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION****DRAFT****DATE:** May 6, 2009**TIME:** 7:00 p.m.**PLACE:** City Council Chamber, 400 South Vine Street, Urbana, Illinois**MEMBERS PRESENT:** Scott Dossett, Katherine Lipes, Alice Novak, Trent Shepard, Joan Stolz, Mary Stuart, Art Zangerl**MEMBERS EXCUSED:** none**MEMBERS ABSENT:** none**STAFF PRESENT:** Rebecca Bird, Planner; Tony Weck, Recording Secretary**OTHERS PRESENT:** Nancy Wehling, Marie Bohl, Ed Tiedemann, Corrie Proksa, Rebecca Rury Burlingame**11. OLD BUSINESS****T-Mobile donation for historic preservation activity**

T-Mobile has donated \$5,000 to the City of Urbana for historic preservation purposes. Use of the funds will require approval from the City Council. The Commission discussed the issue, during which the consensus was that it would be desirable to pursue a National Register of Historic Places historic district which would include the West Urbana neighborhood and the Downtown.

Following discussion, Ms. Novak made a motion as follows: “It is the desire of the Urbana Historic Preservation Commission to pursue a National Register of Historic Places historic district, to include the West Urbana Neighborhood and possibly the Downtown, in a comprehensive approach to designation which would, at minimum, bring recognition and honor to a large number of historic resources, in addition to promoting the use of related financial incentives. It is our desire to have a project come to fruition and to promote an appreciation for historic resources.”

Mr. Zangerl seconded the motion.

With no further discussion a voice vote was taken. The motion passed unanimously. Ms. Bird asked the Commission if they would like to discuss and/or vote on a second choice for the use of the