

MINUTES OF A REGULAR MEETING

URBANA HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION

APPROVED

DATE: November 1, 2006

TIME: 7:00 p.m.

PLACE: City Council Chamber, 400 South Vine Street, Urbana, Illinois

MEMBERS PRESENT: Rich Cahill, Katherine Couch, Scott Dossett, Trent Shepard, Mary Stuart, Art Zangerl

MEMBERS EXCUSED: Alice Novak

MEMBERS ABSENT: None

STAFF PRESENT: Robert Myers, Planning Division Manager; Rebecca Bicksler, Community Development Associate; Tony Weck, Recording Secretary

OTHERS PRESENT: G.D. Brighton, Chris Stohr

1. CALL TO ORDER, ROLL CALL AND DECLARATION OF QUORUM

In Ms. Novak's absence, Mr. Zangerl acted as Chair for this meeting. Mr. Zangerl called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. The roll call was taken and a quorum was declared.

2. CHANGES TO THE AGENDA

There were none.

3. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Changes were proposed to the minutes of the October 4, 2006 meeting. Mr. Dossett made a motion to approve the October 4, 2006 meeting minutes as amended. Ms. Stuart seconded the motion. Upon a vote the Commission unanimously approved the minutes as amended.

4. WRITTEN COMMUNICATIONS

There were none.

5. AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION

There was none.

6. CONTINUED PUBLIC HEARINGS

There were none.

7. OLD BUSINESS

There was none.

8. NEW PUBLIC HEARINGS

There were none.

9. NEW BUSINESS

- Neighborhood Conservation District Report Update & City Council Comments:

Mr. Myers presented this portion of the meeting. He gave an introduction and background information on the matter and proceeded to address issues raised by City Council and Plan Commission. First, a better define of neighborhood conservation districts was asked for and provided in the staff memo. The City Council also asked staff to follow up on three Neighborhood Conservation District issues: information on demolition review; making presentations to neighborhoods on the subject of Neighborhood Conservation Districts and; considering forming a special taskforce to identify potential historic landmarks and districts.

Mr. Myers noted that the process had already begun on making neighborhood presentations, citing presentations already made to the Historic East Urbana Neighborhood Association (HEUNA) and the West Urbana coffee group which were well received and produced some good feedback.

As for considering the formation of a special taskforce to identify potential historic landmarks and districts, Mr. Myers stated that it could be helpful to involve groups. Two examples were the Preservation and Conservation Association of Champaign County (PACA) and the University of Illinois' historic preservation class.

On the subject of demolition review, Mr. Myers stated that the City Council had asked specifically if there were any cities that review demolitions outside of historic districts. City staff surveyed more than 30 communities which were thought to be good candidates for having such review and it was found that only three of the surveyed communities did so. In all three cases there were unique circumstances for demolition review in these communities. The City of Chicago, he noted, reviews demolition permit applications to see if the property is eligible for local landmark designation; if so there is a delay in issuance of permits to provide time for the historic preservation community to meet with the property owner and come up with possible alternatives. The City of Highland Park, Illinois carries out demolition review as they receive applications to demolish over 100 homes per year and are a built out community which cannot grow. Loss of affordable housing is the issue

there. Demolition review there is a stopgap measure and which is historic preservation-based. If the property is found to be eligible for local landmark status, the permit application is denied, but 90% or more of the homes have not been eligible for local landmark designation. In the City of St. Charles, Missouri, an extended historic preservation district was adopted as a transition zone to buffer historic districts. Mr. Myers observed that in St. Charles, this was a response to control blight and declining property values which had already hurt communities in neighboring St. Louis County. Mr. Myers noted that demolition review in these communities are the results of unique circumstances and also that all these cities were part of large metropolitan economic areas with different commuting patterns and income inequalities. He also noted that based on staff research demolition review without a historic preservation basis would likely be legally indefensible.

Mr. Myers also reported the results of research for demolitions in Urbana, 2000-2006, for the West Urbana and Historic East Urbana Neighborhoods. It was found that two-thirds of demolitions in West Urbana were due to institutional expansion, not poor landlord upkeep. Furthermore, Urbana is not experiencing the “tear down” phenomenon as found in Chicago and elsewhere. No demolition projects resulted in large, expensive homes being built; nor were demolitions in West Urbana due to business encroachment. For Historic East Urbana, the situation is somewhat different. The level of demolition in Historic East Urbana was significantly lower than in West Urbana, and replacement structures were more varied.

Mrs. Bicksler stated that staff had recommended that seven different strategies be pursued to help implement neighborhood conservation:

- 1) Consider extending design review requirements to the Lincoln-Busey corridor.
- 2) Rezone selected blocks in the Historic East Urbana Neighborhood where zoning is inconsistent with land uses.
- 3) Make neighborhoods aware of how private, not-for-profit community development corporations can be formed to achieve neighborhood housing goals.
- 4) Adopt a neighborhood conservation district ordinance that would enable neighborhoods to apply for design review and other Neighborhood Conservation District protections using a process similar to that for establishing an historic district.
- 5) Identify priorities for protection as local landmarks or historic districts; request assistance from groups such as PACA and the University of Illinois’ historic preservation class, making use of existing resources.
- 6) Meet with neighborhoods to discuss neighborhood conservation problems and possible solutions.
- 7) For reasons discussed in the staff report to the Council, staff strongly advises against reviewing demolitions other than those for designated local landmarks and historic districts.

Mr. Myers stated that upon a presentation of these items to the Committee of the Whole, Council member Charlie Smyth made a motion to pursue the first six strategies with more details needed on neighborhood conservation districts before deciding on its support. Councilmember Chynoweth seconded Mr. Smyth’s motion and upon a vote the motion passed. Further, Councilmember Chynoweth made a motion at the same meeting requesting city staff to look at the historic landmark ordinance process and identify possible changes, including developing different levels of historic preservation designation. Councilmember Chynoweth also asked that the Historic Preservation Commission be invited to hold a joint work session with the City Council to discuss how to encourage more local landmarks and historic districts to be designated.

Mr. Zangerl noted that the whole context of the demolition review discussion has been for neighborhoods rather than individual landmarks, and as such he could not see what historic district designation did to solve the perceived problems. Conversely, he believed that historic district designation would have a considerable impact on conversion of owner-occupied homes to rental properties because he believed design review for historic landmarks would require a higher level of investment than for non designated properties. He also noted that in Table 1 of the staff report, mention is made of the lack of curbs and gutters in some areas of the city being a problem to be solved. He felt this was actually part of the character of those neighborhoods which should be considered for preservation. It should be a priority to identify potential historic districts, he further stated, but that identifying individual landmarks should be a lower priority. On the subject of lower levels of historic designation, Mr. Zangerl stated that most property owners in such a district would not qualify for the benefits of bona fide historic designation. He cited existing minimum standards for property owners to qualify for state and federal benefits. In conclusion, he stated that the difficulty with demolition review is that it might be feasible in the context of individual landmarks but he did not see how it could be done in the context of districts and therefore wouldn't be an effective tool for neighborhood preservation.

Mr. Dossett commented that in terms of neighborhood conservation districts, the Historic Preservation Commission should cease consideration of them. He also expressed his full support for the first motion made by Councilmember Smyth due to his feeling that neighborhoods should be given the option of participating in things such as conservation districts.

Mr. Cahill stated on the matter of demolition review his feeling that if a single-family home is demolished, then a similar structure should replace it. He suggested that this could be part of the zoning regulations in a given neighborhood.

Ms. Stuart asked if it was known when the demolition review methods in the cities mentioned by Mr. Myers in the staff report were implemented and how successful they have been. Mr. Myers responded that City staff could further inquire with those cities. She also brought up the issue of scanning the historic property surveys completed so far and making them available to the public via the City web site. She stated that part of the resistance shown by some members of the public to historic designation is lack of understanding, making these surveys publicly available might be a way of raising consciousness. Mr. Myers concurred.

Ms. Couch expressed her support for having a joint meeting with City Council, saying that it would be helpful for education, discussing concerns, and initiating a dialogue with the City Council. Mr. Dossett agreed and made a motion that the Historic Preservation Commission plan a joint work session with City Council as soon as possible. Ms. Couch seconded the motion. A vote was taken and the Commission voted unanimously to proceed with planning a joint study session with City Council.

- C.L.G. Grant Opportunity:

Ms. Bicksler stated that staff is currently preparing a grant application to hold a workshop on repairing historic wood windows. A date for the workshop had not yet been set.

10. MONITORING OF HISTORIC PROPERTIES

Regarding the application to replace the windows at the Royer house, Mr. Myers stated that the homeowner has decided not to replace the windows for the time being. She indicated she might return to the Commission with another application to replace the windows in the house only with wood replacement windows.

11. STAFF REPORT

Mrs. Bicksler stated that she has been working on the high school art contest that had been discussed two meetings prior to the present one and that the arts intern on staff with Community Development had been assisting. The guidelines have been revised per the Commission's suggestions, and the revised guidelines could be e-mailed to Commission members at some point in the future. She also stated that having spoken with a number of area art teachers, the idea of the contest has been very well-received and staff planned on going forward with it, with advertising beginning in the schools in January 2007.

12. STUDY SESSION

There was none.

13. ANNOUNCEMENTS

Trent Shepard mentioned that during his tenure on the Urbana Plan Commission there was a joint meeting with the Champaign Plan Commission to discuss current issues. On this note, he wondered if a joint meeting with the Champaign Historic Preservation Commission might be useful.

14. ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Shepard moved to adjourn the meeting. Mr. Dossett seconded the motion. The meeting was adjourned by Mr. Zangerl at 8:16 p.m.

Submitted,

Robert Myers, Planning Division Manager