

MINUTES OF A REGULAR MEETING

URBANA PLAN COMMISSION

APPROVED

DATE: June 24, 2010

TIME: 7:30 P.M.

PLACE: Urbana City Building – City Council Chambers
400 South Vine Street
Urbana, IL 61801

MEMBERS PRESENT: Jane Burris, Andrew Fell, Tyler Fitch, Lew Hopkins, Bernadine Stake, Marilyn Upah-Bant

MEMBERS EXCUSED: Ben Grosser, Dannie Otto, Michael Pollock

STAFF PRESENT: Robert Myers, Planning Manager; Rebecca Bird, Planner I

OTHERS PRESENT: Susan Taylor

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

In the absence of Chair Pollock, Mr. Fell nominated Tyler Fitch to serve as Acting Chair. There was no objection from the Plan Commission members.

Acting Chair Fitch called the meeting to order at 7:35 p.m., roll call was taken, and a quorum was declared present.

2. CHANGES TO THE AGENDA

There were none.

3. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Ms. Upah-Bant moved to approve the minutes from the May 6, 2010 and the May 20, 2010 regular meetings of the Urbana Plan Commission. Ms. Stake seconded the motion. Both sets of minutes were approved by unanimous voice vote.

4. COMMUNICATIONS

 “Join the movement in making Urbana a sustainable community” brochure

5. CONTINUED PUBLIC HEARINGS

There were none.

6. OLD BUSINESS

There was none.

7. NEW PUBLIC HEARINGS

Plan Case No. 2125-T-10: A request by the Zoning Administrator to amend Article XII (Historic Preservation) of the Urbana Zoning Ordinance, including procedures for designating local landmarks and historic districts, reviewing applications for Certificates of Appropriateness, and reviewing Certificates of Economic Hardship.

Rebecca Bird, Planner I, presented this case to the Urbana Plan Commission. The purposes of the proposed text amendment are to clarify the intent, to better guide the Historic Preservation Commission in making decisions, to help applicants better understand the application processes, and to be easier for City staff to administer. She provided an overview of the major changes being proposed. City staff recommends that the Urbana Plan Commission recommend that the Urbana City Council approve the Zoning Ordinance text amendment as outlined in the staff memorandum.

Ms. Upah-Bant asked Ms. Bird to talk about recording of landmark ordinances. Ms. Bird stated that under the current Ordinance, the designation in most cases is in no way tied to the deed of the property. City staff felt that once a property is designated the designating ordinance should be recorded with the Champaign County Recorder of Deeds and tied to the Parcel Index Number and legal description. Then when a prospective buyer of a property gets a title search done, they would find whether that property has been designated as a landmark.

City staff has recently recorded all of the current landmarks and properties in local historic districts. The proposed change makes this a required step for future designations.

Ms. Upah-Bant asked Ms. Bird to name some of the landmarks and districts that have plaques. Ms. Bird said that the building that Crane Alley is located in and the Cinema Gallery building both have small brass landmark plaques. For the West Main Street Historic District the City installed signs at both ends of the district.

Acting Chair Fitch asked what would happen if a building permit is in motion when a landmark application is submitted. Ms. Bird explained that if a building permit application was submitted before the landmark application, the building permit would take precedence.

Acting Chair Fitch noticed that in the section on demolition the word “non-significant” is used, and he did not see a definition for “non-significant.” He recommended that City staff add a definition. Ms. Bird replied that this is a good point and agreed to add a definition.

Acting Chair Fitch asked if “temporary” and “permanent” signage is defined anywhere in the Sign Ordinance. Ms. Bird said yes, in the Sign Ordinance.

Acting Chair Fitch wondered why accessory buildings less than 100 square feet would be exempt from any review, but accessory buildings over 100 square feet would jump up and require review by the Historic Preservation Commission. Ms. Bird explained that accessory buildings less than 100 square feet do not require a building permit, so City staff would not necessarily even know when one is being constructed. They are considered to be a more temporary structure because they do not have permanent footings.

Acting Chair Fitch asked if any consideration had been given to who can serve on the Historic Preservation Commission. For example each member of the MOR Development Review Board must meet a specific requirement (eg. architect, developer, and resident of the district). Section XII-3.A mentions the criteria to be a HPC commissioner. The criterion is just general expertise and interest in historic preservation. What is the distinction between the criteria to serve on the Historic Preservation Commission and to serve on the MOR Development Review Board?

Ms. Bird stated that the required criterion is pretty standard in most historic preservation ordinances. Robert Myers, Planning Manager, added that the criterion is based on model language used for preservation ordinances generally. The City of Urbana is a Certified Local Government which means that the Historic Preservation Ordinance meets certain minimum standards. He read Section XII-3.A, “...*Members shall be appointed on the basis of expertise, experience or interest in the areas of architecture, architectural history, building construction or engineering, finance, historic preservation, geography, landscape architecture, law, neighborhood organizing, planning, real estate or another related field.*” That is standard language from the model ordinance.

Ms. Bird commented that the more criteria that is required, the harder it is also to get people to serve on the boards and commissions. Mr. Myers mentioned that the City’s Zoning Board of Appeals currently has three vacancies and that anyone wishing to serve on this Board can contact the Mayor’s office.

Ms. Upah-Bant recalled that when the City had the Historic Preservation Ordinance before the Plan Commission for review, the Plan Commission recommended that the criteria for membership on the Historic Preservation Commission be more specific. Ms. Bird offered to review the record on this.

With no further questions from the Plan Commission for the City staff, Acting Chair Fitch opened the meeting for public input. There was none. Acting Chair Fitch then closed the public input portion of the hearing. He then asked for Plan Commission discussion and/or motion(s).

Mr. Fell commented that although he agrees with the proposed amendments, he believes that two things should be added to the Historic Preservation Ordinance. The first is that language should be added that property owner objection would mean denial of the application. The second addition has to do with the Historic Preservation Commission itself. In the past, his experience has been that the Commission acts in a reactive instead of proactive manner. People should not be able to nominate a building simply on the basis because the property owner wants to make

changes to it. In other words, don't use landmark applications to block redevelopment. This needs to be fixed somehow. Just because an owner wants to demolish a building on his/her property does not mean that property instantly becomes historic.

Ms. Burris stated that it sounds like the City needs an ordinance to address conflicts of interest.

Mr. Myers replied that he feels the ordinance has to be followed up with assessments about what historic resources are important to the community and which ones deserve and should be protected. Ideally an effort to identify and prioritize potential landmarks would be carried out on an ongoing basis.

Ms. Burris feels that the whole Historic Preservation Ordinance is written to be reactive. When the Ordinance was originally written she thought there would be more historic landmarks and districts nominated. However, there are no goals mentioned to assess properties in a systematic way.

Mr. Fell stated that on the whole, he feels properties are nominated in the proper manner. However, the issue of using historic preservation as a way to block redevelopment needs to be addressed.

Acting Chair Fitch likes the concept of registered preferences. He wondered if there is a way to salvage it while eliminating the confusion.

Ms. Bird explained that City staff would still speak with the property owners of a nominated landmark or district to determine their preferences. It would just not be called a "registered preference" and it would not be on a particular type of form. Mr. Fitch stated that he feels there is something about the forms that encourages property owners to return them. They can fill out the form and return it to City staff. They can then choose whether or not to attend the meeting or talk to City staff. Mr. Myers pointed out that the property owners still have the protest procedure. In the past, property owners have gotten confused between the protest procedure and the registered preference form.

Ms. Stake moved that the Plan Commission forward Plan Case No. 2125-T-10 to the Urbana City Council with a recommendation for approval. Ms. Upah-Bant seconded the motion. Roll call on the motion was as follows:

Ms. Burris	-	Yes	Mr. Fell	-	Yes
Mr. Fitch	-	Yes	Mr. Hopkins	-	Yes
Ms. Stake	-	Yes	Ms. Upah-Bant	-	Yes

The motion was approved by unanimous vote. Ms. Bird noted that this case will go before the City Council on July 19, 2010.

8. NEW BUSINESS

There was none.

9. AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION

There was none.

10. STAFF REPORT

Mr. Myers reported on the following:

- ✚ East Urbana Design Review Overlay District was approved by the City Council as recommended by the Plan Commission. There will be a future amendment to add the two properties to the District as requested by the Plan Commission.

Ms. Stake commented that in the future Sustainability Plan the City should be preserving the rich farmland. Another topic that should be addressed in the Plan is to encourage the use of light rail and high speed rail instead of automobiles.

Mr. Myers commented that the City’s Sustainability Advisory Commission (SAC) is working on creating a “Climate Action Plan” for the City of Urbana. After the Climate Action Plan is finished he understands that the Commission plans to work on other sustainability issues. The Mayor’s asked the SAC is to first address energy, greenhouse gas emissions, and water. They will also be working on other sustainability issues in the future.

11. STUDY SESSION

There was none.

12. ADJOURNMENT OF MEETING

The meeting was adjourned at 8:27 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Robert Myers, AICP, Secretary
Urbana Plan Commission