

MINUTES OF A REGULAR MEETING

URBANA HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION

DATE: November 2, 2022

APPROVED

TIME: 7:00 p.m.

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

MEMBERS ATTENDING: David Hays, Alice Novak, Laura O'Donnell, Dennis Roberts, Angela Urban, Andrew Weiss

MEMBERS EXCUSED Trent Shepard

STAFF PRESENT Marcus Ricci, Planner II; Kat Trotter, Planner II; UPTV Camera Operator

OTHERS PRESENT: There were none.

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

Chair Novak called the meeting to order at 7:01 p.m. Roll call was taken, and a quorum was declared present.

2. CHANGES TO THE AGENDA

There were none.

3. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The minutes of the August 3, 2022, regular meeting of the Historic Preservation Commission was presented for approval. Mr. Weiss moved to approve the August 3, 2022, minutes as presented. Mr. Hays seconded the motion. The motion was approved by unanimous voice vote.

4. WRITTEN COMMUNICATIONS

There were none.

5. AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION

There was none.

6. CONTINUED PUBLIC HEARINGS

There were none.

7. OLD BUSINESS

Bylaws

Chair Novak opened this item on the agenda. Marcus Ricci, Planner II, presented staff's summary for this topic. He stated that the Historic Preservation Commission bylaws are largely similar to the bylaws of the Plan Commission and Zoning Board of Appeals. The only difference appears to be that the Historic Preservation Commission bylaws do not require regular review.

8. NEW PUBLIC HEARINGS

There were none.

9. NEW BUSINESS

There was none.

10. MONITORING OF HISTORIC PROPERTIES

There was none.

11. STAFF REPORT

A. Public Input and Items of Interest

- APA-IL State Conference Panel – Mr. Ricci talked about the presentation made by Kat Trotter, Planner II, and himself at the conference. Ms. Trotter added that their presentation on “Historic Preservation Tools” included a recap of the process for the R-7 Zoning text amendment that City Council approved this past May.
- Downtown Historic District PACA Heritage Award – Mr. Ricci stated that he and Ms. Novak received an award on behalf of the City of Urbana for the Downtown Urbana Historic District National Register listing. Also, the Royer House and Danely Cottage each received awards for their recent restoration of the properties.

B. Historic Property Activities

1. Landmarking

- HP-2022-L-1: 710 West Oregon Street – Van Doren House.
Mr. Ricci stated that the landmark nomination was approved.

2. Certificates of Appropriateness in Progress or Review

Mr. Ricci presented an update on the progress of the following cases:

- HP-2021-COA-04 – 612 West Green Street – Ricker House
- HP-2019-COA-01-B, HP-2019-COA-01-C, and HP-2020-EH-01 – 2 Buena Vista Court
- HP-2020-COA-02 – 4 Buena Vista Court
- HP-2020-COA-06 and HP-2021-COA-01 – 8 Buena Vista Court
- HP-2021-COA-02 and HP-2021-COA-03 – 210 South Race Street – Hotel Royer

Mr. Ricci stated that a Certificate of Appropriateness is issued to the land, not the owner. So, when a property is sold, the new owner will be allowed to continue the work as originally approved.

Although a Certificate of Appropriateness has no expiration, if there is no progress being made on the property, then City staff would contact the current owner to see what the plans are for completing the project.

Mr. Roberts asked whether the City of Urbana had a means of enforcing maintenance on historic deemed properties. Mr. Ricci replied that the City of Urbana cannot force owners to maintain their properties. Maintenance of properties is an issue regardless of whether the property is a historic property or not. The City does have a Property Maintenance Code; however, it applies only to rental properties.

Mr. Roberts stated that he was granted a tour of Hotel Royer, and it looks promising. Mr. Ricci said that he would like to take a tour as well and thought they might be able to have a tour open to the public as an activity for Historic Preservation Month, if the project has been completed and the owner is willing.

3. Certificates of Appropriateness Pending or Inquiries

Mr. Ricci presented an update on the following properties:

- 502 and 504 West Elm Street
- 508 West Elm Street
- 1108 Stoughton Street (Warm Air Research Lab)
- 312 West Green Street (Lindley House)

Mr. Hays asked if the Lindley House had been purchased or was the purchase still pending. Mr. Ricci said that the sale is still pending.

12. STUDY SESSION

Downtown Urbana Historic District Incentives & Protections

Dennis Roberts gave a presentation on a potential design overlay district for the Downtown Urbana Historic Downtown District:

- The Importance of Urbana's Historic Downtown
 - Heart of community; first impression of Urbana, sense of place
 - A community with an indifferent downtown is a community in decline
- Early Proposal to Create Protection for Our Historic Downtown
 - Introduced as a topic to the Historic Preservation Commission in March of 2016
 - City has no Design Review Board overseeing development of the downtown area
 - Request the City Council to expedite the protection of and creation of a Design Review Board for this area
- 2012 Downtown Urbana Plan
 - Promote context-appropriate urban-style infill development to extend downtown's core character
 - Protect and enhance the character of downtown
 - Downtown Plan calls for adoption of urban design standards
 - Character and Historic Architecture

- Traditional design character is one of the favorite aspects for area residents
- Historic architecture, pedestrian scale of buildings, and walkable nature of the downtown core
- Several properties are designated as local historic landmarks, which offers protection
- Creation of the Downtown Urbana Historic District
 - In August 2019, the Urbana Downtown area was listed in the National Register of Historic Places
 - Protection and oversight is left to the City to establish
 - What the National Register does and does not do
- Principles Addressed by Design Guidelines
 - Massing and Scale and Relationship to Adjacent Structures
 - Building Height
 - Building Façade
- Summary
 - Buildings and monuments reflect its historic importance and role in Urbana's early growth
- Goals
 - Establish a set of Design Guidelines
 - Establish a buffer zone with design guidelines
- Map of Urbana Downtown Historic District Boundaries
- Map of Proposed Buffer Zone to the Design Guideline Overlay Area
- List of Communities Which Have Historic District Design Guidelines
- The Michigan Historical Center, Department of History, Arts, and Libraries

Ms. Novak asked staff why we would consider this option as opposed to a local historic district for the downtown area. Mr. Ricci replied that it might be difficult to get the required amount of owner consent for a local district, especially if we did not have other things backing it like a façade grant program or other financial incentives. Local historic district designation may make it more difficult to do standard building maintenance, i.e. window replacement. Design guidelines are a similar function; the reviewing body would have some control over balancing historic preservation/design elements and financial impacts/costs. Either option will require a lot of education of the public.

Mr. Ricci went on to say that regulation is seen as hoops to jump through and obstacles to deal with. A local historic district would require review and enforcement, and that would fall under the purview of the Historic Preservation Commission; whereas, a downtown design overlay district could fall under the purview of the Design Review Board or the Historic Preservation Commission.

Mr. Ricci shared staff comments and concerns about requiring an additional layer of regulation for property owners to go through. Some staff felt that the idea had merit. Many staff thought that design review could act as an obstacle, especially when in the context of existing old, historic buildings. The main question is how do we use design review to promote revitalization, economic development and adaptive re-use of the downtown area as opposed to it becoming something that inhibits development downtown? Would the City need to develop a façade grant program or waive building permit fees for historic properties? Some staff thought we should wait to see the results of the Downtown Public Realm Study, which is currently underway. Other staff believe that a design

district could be handled internally by staff, similar to following building codes and the Zoning Ordinance, especially since the downtown area is primarily business uses and not residential uses.

Mr. Ricci mentioned that Kevin Garcia, Principal Planner, would be including this design district idea on a slate of other planning ideas that he will be bringing to City Council to get guidance on moving forward with planning activities.

Ms. Urban stated that she felt this was worthwhile to consider. If the City created design guidelines for downtown, it does not mean that the City would not be able to designate downtown as a historic district as well. Ms. Novak clarified that it would be possible to have different boundaries for each district if this happened.

Ms. Urban noted that she has seen at least two buildings demolished that were in the proposed buffer zone.

Mr. Hays stated that he did not think of Downtown Urbana as the heart of the community or as the first impression of the City. Downtown areas in many cities have struggled while those cities thrived in many other ways. People have been trained to think of the downtown area as the first impression but that is because people do not know how to read a community otherwise. The fact of being historic does not mean the ossification or preserving of anything. It means assessing your resources, knowing what you have to work with and how that can be parlayed for some new agenda. Having a more coherent downtown is a great way to stimulate economic development so that more people are coming and shopping, then that would be something really important to foreground.

Mr. Hays noted that some of the communities listed in the presentation are prosperous and cultivated as tourist towns. Giving an example of Colonial Williamsburg, he talked about images having value. While the City of Urbana does not want to do what Williamsburg has done, he was thinking about places with infill of something that creates a sense of cohesion beyond what is the most appropriate new thing to put next to something old. He gave examples of specific buildings that accomplish this. He believed it would be helpful to have discussions with other communities to get a sense of their basis for prosperity.

Mr. Roberts stated that he likes the idea of new infill buildings that would not be historic. We are not trying to preserve history so much as appreciating the buildings that are interesting in our community. It is a visual thing and new buildings should fit into the rhythm of the street whether it be by having cohesive size and shape and mass or the number and orientation of the windows.

Mr. Roberts went on to say that there is some history that is unique to the City of Urbana. Abraham Lincoln practiced law here for one. Second, our community area has more Royer buildings. Joseph Royer was a significant architect. Third, picking a certain style/look or theme for the downtown area could bring more business. Urbana is also a wonderful, musical art center.

Mr. Roberts stated that the City of Urbana is located next to the City of Champaign, which is a prosperous city, and next to the University of Illinois; both of which draw a lot of attention. So, what is it about the City of Urbana that we like that is unique? He mentioned that we have the Boneyard Creek. Every other community in this region that the Boneyard Creek runs through has

completed beautification improvements to connect the creek to their community. The City of Urbana is the only town that has not done so yet.

Mr. Hays stated that the City of Urbana has done significant work on the Boneyard Creek. He felt that there is potential for people to want to live next to the improved section. Mr. Hays stated that he believed the question is how to preserve and protect historically significant architecture by connecting them to a larger vision that incentivizes this kind of coherence.

Chair Novak asked for a show of hands of the Commission members who generally supported the idea of a downtown historic district being on the table and for support of the larger scheme of things that the City is considering. All of the members present raised their hand.

Mr. Roberts talked about the “next step” which is creating a guide identifying the kinds of buildings we have, specifically what style each building is. It would also give examples how other communities have created similar cohesion through massing and style and proportion. He would like to bring this to the Historic Preservation Commission at the next meeting. Mr. Ricci responded that as long as the City Council approves staff spending time helping prepare this, he welcomed the thought of bringing the next step to the Commission. He reiterated that Mr. Garcia would be bringing a list of Planning’s projects to City Council for direction in the near future, and then staff could provide an update to the Historic Preservation Commission going forward on this.

Mr. Roberts felt it was important for the Historic Preservation Commission to have its own vision about its community and not depend upon staff for guidance. We should be guiding the community because we are the people who care. The Commission members are smart, and some have the knowledge in designing and of communities of history that have succeeded in this. He believed this to be an opportunity to bring a vision of more creativity to the downtown area using this as a tool to stimulate tourism and new development and to expand the harmony of the downtown area.

Mr. Hays commented on “style”. The University of Illinois has a requirement that all new buildings must follow a certain style, but fortunately they realized how limiting this had been. He mentioned that the style of the Siebel Center for Design is unlike anything near it. It is one of a kind, but is still complementary to the surrounding area.

Ms. Urban stated that there is a good example already in Downtown Urbana, the Sipyard. There is no longer a building; however, the street front harmonizes with the rest of the downtown.

Mr. Ricci stated that staff has some direction and some ideas and will see what City Council directs staff to do. The Historic Preservation Commission can reflect and see what they would like to do as a working group.

13. ANNOUNCEMENTS

There were none.

14. ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Hays moved to adjourn the meeting at 8:21 p.m. The meeting was adjourned.

November 2, 2022

Submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Marcus Ricci". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent initial "M".

Marcus Ricci, AICP
Historic Preservation Commission Recording Secretary