#### MINUTES OF A JOINT MEETING

# URBANA HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION & URBANA CITY COUNCIL APPROVED

DATE: February 7, 2007

TIME: 7:00 p.m.

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

MEMBERS PRESENT:	Mayor Laurel Lunt Prussing; Brandon Bowersox, Alderman, Ward 4; Rich Cahill, Historic Preservation Commission; Danielle Chynoweth, Alderwoman, Ward 2; Phyllis Clark, City Clerk; Scott Dossett, Historic Preservation Commission; Robert Lewis, Alderman, Ward 3; Katherine Lipes, Historic Preservation Commission; Alice Novak, Historic Preservation Commission Chair; Dennis Roberts, Alderman, Ward 5; Charlie Smyth, Alderman, Ward 1; Mary Stuart, Historic Preservation Commission; Art Zangerl, Historic Preservation Commission
MEMBERS EXCUSED:	Trent Shepard, Historic Preservation Commission
MEMBERS ABSENT:	Lynne Barnes, Alderwoman, Ward 7; Heather Stevenson, Alderwoman, Ward 6
STAFF PRESENT:	Elizabeth Tyler, Community Development Director; Robert Myers, Planning Division Manager; Tony Weck, Recording Secretary
OTHERS PRESENT:	G.D. Brighton; Linda Lorenz; Chris Stohr

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

The meeting was chaired by Mayor Prussing. As a quorum of City Council members was not yet present at the time of the start of the meeting, Mayor Prussing transferred control of the meeting to Alice Novak, Historic Preservation Commission Chair. Ms. Novak called the meeting to order at 7:03 p.m. Roll was taken and a quorum of members of the Historic Preservation Commission was declared. Upon the arrival of other City Council members, control of the meeting was transferred to Mayor Prussing. Roll was taken by the City Clerk and a quorum was declared.

#### 2. CHANGES TO THE AGENDA

There were none.

## 3. APPROVAL OF HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION MINUTES

Changes were proposed to the minutes of the November 1, 2006 meeting. Mr. Dossett made a motion to approve the November 1, 2006 meeting minutes as amended. Mr. Zangerl seconded the motion. Upon a vote the Commission unanimously approved the minutes as amended.

#### 4. WRITTEN COMMUNICATIONS

A printed e-mail message from Councilmember Dennis Roberts to the Recording Secretary was distributed to all members present. Mr. Roberts had sent his comments to the Recording Secretary in case he was unable to be present at this meeting. The message was sent prior to the meeting, on the same date.

Also distributed to all members present was a list of modifications to the City's demolition noticing procedures.

## 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

There was none.

#### **10. MONITORING OF HISTORIC PROPERTIES**

There was nothing to report.

#### **11. STAFF REPORT**

Neighborhood Conservation District Update.

Mr. Myers presented an update regarding Neighborhood Conservation measures asked to be pursued at the October 23, 2006 Committee of the Whole meeting. Mr. Myers reviewed six strategies to be pursued and their progress.

## 12. STUDY SESSION

#### Encouraging Historic Nominations -- Setting Priorities and Working with Partners. Simplifying Historic Protection for Urbana citizens -- Outreach and Education, and Next Steps.

Mr. Myers provided a framework for discussion during this meeting by providing background information answering the following questions:

- Which properties are currently protected as local landmarks or historic districts?
- How can the City encourage more nominations for local landmarks and historic districts?
- What does the 1998 Historic Preservation Plan provide in terms of priorities?
- What guidance does the 2005 Comprehensive Plan provide for carrying out historic preservation activities?
- What existing work can be used as a basis to identify properties?
- What design standards are used to review exterior changes to local landmarks once they are designated?
- What steps should be taken next?

City staff recommended that the following steps be taken as part of the historic preservation work plan for 2007:

- With the help of City staff, have the Historic Preservation Commission identify priorities. City staff can rely on previously compiled surveys and priority lists.
- Request the University of Illinois historic preservation class to work on nominations rather than surveys, in cooperation with property owners.
- Work cooperatively with property owners, especially preservationists, to nominate their properties.
- Better distribute information on incentives such as the State Property Tax Assessment Freeze Program.
- Increase awareness by distributing historical property research work already undertaken by digitizing and making it available online, and continuing to hold workshops and forums.

Mayor Prussing agreed with Mr. Myers City staff's recommendation that information on the historical and architectural significance of properties be distributed to property owners. She suggested that property owners may not be aware of it. Mr. Myers responded that sharing information with property owners is helpful in and of itself. Mayor Prussing then asked if neighborhood groups such as the Historic East Urbana Neighborhood Association (HEUNA) could do this. Mr. Dossett answered that HEUNA does not. Mr. Myers suggested that holding public meetings, distributing information to neighborhood groups, posting information on websites and in the Urbana Free Library are ways of getting information out to interested parties. He also stated that one neighborhood group of which he was aware placed small wooden markers in the front yards of homes which shared basic property histories and which made residents self aware about their neighborhood. Ms. Tyler added that the West Urbana Neighborhood Association (WUNA) had recently sponsored an historic house walk, which was very well-attended and which was a fundraiser for PACA and WUNA.

It was Mr. Bowersox's impression that the Historic Preservation Commission wanted to see more historic nominations from the community but that the Commission has been somewhat stifled by the possible conflict of interest created by commissioners suggesting to property owners that they should apply for historic status. He further expressed his perception that the Commission is somewhat frustrated due to the lack of activity in regards to historic nominations of late and asked if these statements were correct. Ms. Novak agreed, stating that one of the problems with the current historic preservation ordinance is that anyone can nominate an Urbana property for historic designation except for a member of the Historic Preservation Commission. She noted that in the City of Rock Island, some of the most active nominators of historic properties have been members of their historic preservation commission. While those members have to abstain from voting on any official action they initiated, Ms. Novak wanted to be able to network with members of the community and initiate nominations. She felt, however, that this would be overstepping the bounds of the current historic preservation ordinance in Urbana and that she would like some clarification on the issue. Mayor Prussing asked if most cities were restricted in the same way as Urbana or if they followed the model of the City of Rock Island. Mr. Myers responded that in some cities, city staff will initiate applications in cooperation with property owners, while in other cities an historic preservation commissioner may nominate but must abstain from voting on any official action in regards to the property in question. Mayor Prussing asked Ms. Novak if the Urbana Historic Preservation Commission were to vote in favor of a nomination, does the Commission have the final word on a subject property becoming an historic landmark or is the nomination then forwarded to City Council? Ms. Novak responded that the commission has the final word on local landmark nominations supported by the property owner. Historic district nominations, however, are forwarded to City Council for final approval. Mayor Prussing suggested changing the ordinance to allow nominations by Historic Preservation Commissioners if they abstain.

Ms. Chynoweth asked if there were communities in which the historic preservation commission looks at surveys that have been made of area houses and votes to pursue designation of particular properties in such a way that the commission acts as an advisory body to city staff, who eventually advises their city council in these matters. Her main idea was that an historic preservation commission can vote to say that certain properties are found to be historically significant and as experts in the field, commissioners can prompt city staff to begin the process of historic nomination. Ms. Tyler answered that it was her thought that it is a role of the Historic Preservation Commission to provide policy guidance to City Council and City staff and that there are valid reasons for restrictions being placed on members of advisory boards being able to nominate, sign petitions and so forth, one of these being to avoid a conflict of interest. As a follow-up question, Ms. Chynoweth asked if there was a precedent or if it was possible under current ordinance for the Historic Preservation Commission to request a particular property to be nominated for historic status and City staff would in turn initiate the nomination process. Ms. Tyler answered that if City staff is given general guidance from the Commission it is helpful but that it should be generalized so as not be prejudicial in the case of a contested nomination. Ms. Chynoweth then asked if City staff can nominate a property for historic designation, to which Ms. Tyler answered that staff had in the past prepared nominations at the request of property owners and that nothing to her knowledge would prevent staff from nominating properties in the future.

Mr. Myers added that in some communities historic preservation commissions set priorities for categories of properties, such as "pre-Civil War" or "railroad" properties. This was a common way to deal with this issue as opposed to, for instance, a commission approving a "top ten" list of individual properties to be considered for historic nomination.

Mr. Lewis asked about the Commission making recommendations to staff on what properties within the City are eligible and well-suited to nomination, and prompting staff to initiate nominations. He stated that the members of the Commission, with their knowledge of historic properties and the nomination process, would be the best group to do this. Ms. Tyler answered that City staff would be unconstrained in making recommendations but limited by its knowledge. She suggested that staff could provide recommendations for historic nomination since it would not be voting on any official action regarding a nominated property. Mr. Lewis furthered that it was his view that the current historic preservation ordinance is prohibitive and wondered if it could be crafted such that the Commission would have more latitude in making recommendations. Ms. Novak answered that the problem was not so much in the way the ordinance is worded but in the legal interpretation she has received of it. She stated her feeling that in placing the restrictions that it does on the Commission members, it puts the Commission in a reactionary position.

Mayor Prussing suggested that the City obtain a copy of the City of Rock Island's historic preservation ordinance to be reviewed. Mr. Lewis suggested having the City's legal staff review Rock Island's ordinance.

Mr. Smyth suggested coming up with the most aggressive historic preservation ordinance possible, which would remove some if not all of the existing constraints on Commissioners. He would like to look into allowing Commissioners to nominate properties and then abstain from voting on any official action. Additionally, he also suggested coming up with a frequently-asked-questions listing to help answer the interested public's questions about historic district designations.

Mr. Roberts stated that he would like to see the Historic Preservation Commission be proactive in obtaining nominations, however he said that he could see how a conflict of interest could be created if a member of the Commission were to make a nomination and then have to make a decision on it in the future. Ms. Novak reminded Mr. Roberts that the nominating Commissioner could abstain from voting. Mr. Roberts furthered that it would be important for the Commission to help identify properties within the City that would be eligible for local landmark status and once identified, other members of the community of City staff could make the actual nomination. He acknowledged that the members of the Historic Preservation Commission are the experts in the field and that if it was necessary to rewrite the current ordinance, this is a feasible solution.

Ms. Chynoweth stated that she knew of a number of historic preservationists in the community that are not involved with the Historic Preservation Commission and asked why the City has not seen nominations from these people. Ms. Novak answered that it was her thinking that there is a perception that historic nomination takes a substantial amount of documentation to prepare the application for historic status and that it also takes a great deal of time. She offered that she would be willing to do it but was concerned that she might be overstepping her bounds as an Historic Preservation Commissioner if she approached a neighbor, for example, and asked them to consider nominating their property for local landmark status. She stated that she would like to have the freedom to do so and to assist someone with their nomination process.

Ms. Chynoweth agreed with Mr. Smyth's idea of pursuing a more aggressive historic preservation ordinance and stated that one item for discussion would be the issue of working cooperatively with property owners. She said that she felt that addressing this issue should be concurrent with considering a more aggressive ordinance. She mentioned a recent historic nomination notification

letter which she felt was somewhat intimidating and too bureaucratic. She suggested that perhaps the best people to handle working cooperatively would be members of the Historic Preservation Commission. The problem, she stated, is that Commissioners apparently feel as if they cannot because they might be exceeding their limitations. In closing, Ms. Chynoweth submitted that it should be the advocates of historic preservation – namely the Commissioners – that should be the first contact with the public on these issues, not the notice that the City is required by law to send out.

Mayor Prussing asked if there were Federal rules regarding changing an historically-designated building to make it more energy efficient, citing that this problem was encountered when renovating the Urbana Free Library. She stated that this is an issue that should be addressed on the Federal level, especially in light of the concerns over global warming and rising energy costs. She further stated that it would be impossible to preserve historic buildings if they prove too difficult to heat and cool.

Mr. Myers responded that concerning energy-use in historic buildings, studies have shown that the primary area of heat loss with windows is air infiltration around the glass rather than through glass. Reglazing the window glass, installing brass weather stripping, and installing a storm window normally vastly improve their energy efficiency. For residential buildings, the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation state that it is preferable to repair rather than replace historic windows, but that when replacement is necessary, that replacement windows be and materials as the originals.

Ms. Tyler noted in response to Ms. Chynoweth's comments on the matter of friendliness her belief that City staff is very friendly to those involved with historic nominations and owners of designated properties. City policy is not to charge for any historic property applications or reviews, she said. She added that staff works very hard to review and approve applications for changes to historic properties such as fence or roof replacements quickly. The objective behind this is to encourage historic nominations. Concerning public outreach, Ms. Tyler noted that every year, staff and the commission have applied for and used Certified Local Government (CLG) grants for educational and outreach events.

Mr. Zangerl stated that he would be happy to review the application forms to see if they could be made less intimidating to readers. Ms. Novak added that there is certain information that must be included in legal notices regarding historic nominations, to which Ms. Chynoweth said that she did not mean that City staff has been unfriendly toward historic nominations, just that a legal notice should not be the first contact a citizen receives about a historic nomination. She suggested more education and outreach such as celebrating our history, such as with historic house walks on Main Street, to educate people on historic properties. She also suggested getting articles published in the *News-Gazette* and the *Daily Illini* about the history of historic properties so that more people would understand the meaning behind historic landmarks and nominations. Ms. Chynoweth concluded with the question of how City Council could help facilitate this.

Mayor Prussing suggested a cover letter be added to any legal notices regarding an historic nomination. Mr. Myers responded that if there was any way that City staff could improve the noticing process, it could be done.

Mr. Dossett seconded the spirit of Ms. Chynoweth's comments. He felt that some people consider historic designation as potentially a government "taking" of property without compensation. He acknowledged that historic designation often reduces a property owner's flexibility for exterior maintenance, citing the recent severe modification by the commission of an application for window replacement for a locally designated property. He suggested that the Commission do more in terms of working with City staff to build in a greater level of friendliness to all concerned with historic nomination. He suggested that City Council consider whether Historic Preservation Commissioners would be able to nominate properties. He believes the public likely considers the Commission to be quasi-City staff or at least involved to some degree with City governance, and the public needs to confident that the Commission is an objective body. He suggested that perhaps the reasoning behind Commissioners not being able to nominate is to protect this objectiveness. As such, he was unsure as to whether or not he would be in favor of rewriting the ordinance to allow Commissioners to nominate properties for historic status.

Mr. Bowersox said that the Rock Island model for changing Urbana's historic preservation ordinance sounded like the most promising to him. He added that some of City staff's recommendations as presented in the staff memo also sounded very good. Specifically, he cited the recommendation that students in the University of Illinois' historic preservation class could work on nominations, not only on surveys, and the recommendation that City staff could work cooperatively with property owners and preservationists to nominate properties. He reiterated Ms. Chynoweth's idea of celebrating historic properties is very important. He suggested that one thing Urbana could do to educate the public about our history is for the City to help tell the stories through a historical marker program. Each year, the City could help to erect new markers at places such as the Champaign County Courthouse or A Woman's Place, the first domestic violence shelter in the United States.

Mayor Prussing suggested that the way to get more historic nominations is to provide incentives. She gave as an example that perhaps the City could help with making historic properties more energy efficient. Overall, people should be made aware that historic designation comes not just with restrictions but also with benefits such as Illinois' property tax assessment freeze program.

Mr. Zangerl stated that energy efficiency in historic properties has recently become more of a concern. This is not just a windows issue, and that this is primarily a public education problem. The notion that windows have to be replaced in order to increase energy efficiency is a common misconception, and more should be done to educate the public on this matter. He also suggested that neighborhood groups concerned about the deterioration of their neighborhood should consider the benefits of historic district designations as they could be a great form of protection against future degradation. One thing that neighborhood groups can do better than an individual is to go out in to the neighborhood and encourage and educate people about the benefits of historic districts. He noted that only 25% support from property owners in a neighborhood is required for a district nomination to go forward and for an uncontested nomination, 40% of property owners would have to approve a district nomination by a two-thirds vote in order for it to pass.

Mr. Roberts mentioned the Centennial Farms Program for rural areas. He suggested that the City of Urbana could follow a similar program in which properties of a certain age be given some sort of certificate or plaque which lists it as a centennial house. He noted that it could be an inexpensive form of recognition for historic homes in the community. It would not take into consideration the

quality of construction of a building or whether a building has undergone alteration at some point in its life. He suggested that if several hundred homes in the City were found to be "centennial homes", there could suddenly be several hundred property owners with a new found sense of pride because of this recognition. Ms. Novak clarified that centennial farm designation pertained to the land on which the farm is located being owned by the same family for at least 100 years. She furthered that such designation has nothing to do with the style or age of the house that is on the property. Mr. Roberts responded that the centennial home recognition would use different criteria than for centennial farms. Also, he suggested that recognition as a centennial home might affect any decision on demolition. He said that such a program would be relatively easy to establish and if other participants in this meeting felt that the idea had merit, it is something that should be investigated.

Mr. Lewis asked about the length of time between the initial nomination of a property for historic status and when the property is officially recognized as a local landmark. Mr. Myers answered that the nomination process for a local landmark takes approximately two months. In turn, Mr. Lewis made mention of the home of composer Scott Joplin in Missouri and the fact that it took 50 years for the house to be recognized as historic and another eight years for restoration work to begin. Mr. Myers answered that in terms of how long it takes for a property to be restored once it is designated, that varies from property to property.

Mr. Cahill mentioned that the Ricker House in west Urbana, once acquired by PACA, took about five years for restoration to be completed and local landmark status to be granted. As far as concerns that landmark designation will lower property values and impedes the sale of a property so designated, the value of the Ricker House actually rose and it had no problem selling. He also cited the Royer District as another success story of historic designation, as well as the Webber House, in terms of increased property values. He stated that this message did not seem to be getting out to the public. Mayor Prussing suggested the production of a brochure depicting given properties both before and after historic designation and including information on any property value increases. She stated her feeling that that this would be information that the public would like to have. Mr. Cahill answered that this would be very easy to do for the Ricker House and that PACA has already published information on this property. He suggested that information would also be available on the Lindley House local landmark.

Mr. Smyth noted that an internet search for historic preservation frequently asked questions, a great deal of information is available on the web. Further, he asked Mr. Myers about "green" roofs, and roofs featuring solar collectors and their impact on historically designated buildings. There was some interest in installing a "green roof" at the public library. Mr. Myers answered that if the building roof was not visible to the public, such as on buildings with flat roofs, that would be appropriate under Urbana's current historic preservation ordinance. Mr. Smyth further noted that the windows in the Urbana Free Library had never been renovated and he also made mention of issues with the windows in the downtown Urbana Post Office/Independent Media Center. He suggested that these buildings might be good models for the idea that energy efficiency can be built into historic buildings without compromising their historic character.

Mr. Lewis stated that there seemed to be a lot of positive aspects that would set the stage for an excellent marketing program for historic designation in the community. He felt that such a program would help to dispel a lot of the myths held by the general public about designation.

Ms. Novak feels that the preservation movement is failing in providing public information historic windows. The value of original building materials should also be looked at when addressing energy efficiency. Construction-grade plywood is no longer even available and multi-oriented strand board replacing it doesn't have the longevity of the former. Also, she concurred with Mr. Myers' earlier comments about the lack of public information on the subject of historic windows. Second, the City of Rock Island uses street markers to indicate historic areas of the community, much as Urbana has done in the west Urbana neighborhood with its "Historic Urbana" street signs. From this, Rock Island applied for and obtained National Register of Historic Places designation. She suggested that this series of steps is something that Urbana could consider.

Ms. Chynoweth suggested that the new Public Arts Commission could tie into historic preservation by displaying art at historic places which would tell the story of a property or a neighborhood not just in words but in an artistic way. The City might also look at historic preservation versus conservation. She noted that there are a number of demolitions in Urbana, some of which do not concern historically-designated properties but some of which are still historic and suggested that perhaps conservation district status should be considered. Lastly, we may be missing the fact that a lack of public education is probably not the only barrier for getting more nominations. Even historic preservationists are not nominating their own properties. She suggested that there might be some other missing policy piece that needs to be examined.

Mr. Roberts noted the article just published in the *Daily Illini* regarding recent demolitions having taken place in Urbana. A number of these demolitions have happened in the East Urbana Neighborhood, where zoning allows single-family homes to be demolished and larger multi-family structures to be built. Offering that the Historic Preservation Commission has paid much attention to the grander homes in Urbana, he asked the Commission to address conservation districts. He understood them as not having all the restrictions associated with Federal historic home renovation guidelines, and asked if it would be in the Commission's purview to support conservation more generally, and if the Commission would be interested in helping suggest guidelines for such a program in Urbana.

Ms. Novak answered that she felt that neighborhood conservation districts are a good idea. She questioned why there are none in Illinois despite the fact that a number of communities in the state have the legislative ability to create them. She stated that a neighborhood conservation district would be a perfect solution for the east side of Urbana, where integrity issues outweigh significance that would be applicable under historic district designation. Under historic district designations, there is the ability to designate vernacular properties, for instance hall-and-parlor houses, which are prevalent in East Urbana. The problem with neighborhood conservation districts, she said, is that many people use them as an alternative to historic districts because they see in them all of the benefits but none of the perceived pain.

Mr. Roberts felt this was not a strong endorsement of neighborhood conservation districts and asked if the Historic Preservation Commission had discussed whether or not it would support them at all. Mr. Dossett answered that he had in a previous meeting asked that the Commission cease discussion of neighborhood conservation districts because he felt that there is no reason why neighborhood conservation districts and historic districts must be considered as mutually exclusive. For some neighborhoods, the more important aspect in retaining historic character might be the speed with which one can work. The longer the Historic Preservation Commission debates neighborhood conservation districts and all their connotations, the more the process will be bogged down. Ms. Stuart stated that neighborhood conservation districts could be a good part of the larger effort to raise consciousness about historic preservation and build community pride. They could be a perfect solution for HEUNA involvement. She also stated that she would like to see a particular focus on East Urbana if City staff is going to assist homeowners in making nominations for historic status because of her feeling that there is a critical mass in that neighborhood of potentially historic homes.

Ms. Tyler addressed demolitions in Urbana. In response to the idea that demolitions are increasing in the community, that is not the case. Over the course of five years, it was found that there is an average of 28 demolitions per year in Urbana, with an average of 15 of these being single-family homes. Of those 15, approximately one third are due to egregious code violations or fire damage. The demolitions taking place in the community are by and large due either to fire damage or institutional expansion. Only a small subset are due to an older house being demolished in favor of a new house being built in its place.

Mr. Roberts stated that some demolitions are appropriate because of structural weakness or fire damage, and that it is understandable that as the City grows, some change is inevitable. He expressed, however, that there are some very well cared for and structurally sound buildings that are being demolished for expansion purposes. It is hard to appreciate a city block being taken out for the expansion of a school yard or parking lot. He felt that the concern in the East Urbana Neighborhood is not so much that demolitions are approved and performed but rather in how a demolished building is replaced and whether the replacement structures conforms to its neighbors. This, he submitted, can have an effect on neighborhood home sales.

Mr. Cahill mentioned that the Historic Preservation Commission is planning a windows workshop in the spring of 2007. Mr. Myers confirmed that a grant from the State had been applied for in order to hold this workshop but the State has not yet announced the grant recipients. Mr. Cahill cited that in June 2005 an expert from Detroit, Jim Turner, came to Urbana to give a presentation on historic steel windows and that he understood Mr. Turner was willing to return to give another presentation. He also stated that "rental" does not equal "run-down", citing some of the work done by Kevin Hunsinger on West Green Street. He also mentioned the area near the Champaign Country Club where older homes are being demolished in favor of large, new "McMansions". While this has not yet happened in Urbana, he warned that it could easily happen in some areas of West Urbana and he suggested that stipulations be written into any neighborhood conservation district ordinance that if something is demolished, it should be replaced in kind so as not to destroy the fabric of a given neighborhood.

Ms. Lipes mentioned that there is a historic house research workshop to be held at the Urbana Free Library and suggested on that the Commission could use this venue to distribute information about preservation so that perhaps it would not seem so "scary" to the general public.

Mayor Prussing stated that a lot of good ideas had come of this meeting and that the process perhaps starts with celebrating historic properties currently existing in the community and creating more public interest. Once public interest in historic preservation is generated, she said that the opportunity presents itself to relay information to people on the practical benefits thereof. In closing, she thanked the Historic Preservation Commission for the work it does.

## 13. ANNOUNCEMENTS

There were none.

# 14. ADJOURNMENT

Mayor Prussing adjourned the meeting at 8:45 p.m.

Submitted,

Robert Myers, Planning Division Manager