



February 18, 2026

MINUTES OF SPECIAL MEETING

APPROVED

URBANA HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION

DATE: February 18, 2026

TIME: 7:00 p.m.

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

MEMBERS ATTENDING: David Hays, Kathryn Holliday, Dennis Roberts, Andrew Weiss

MEMBERS EXCUSED: Laura O'Donnell, Trent Shepard, Angela Urban

STAFF PRESENT: Olivia Jovine, Director of Community Development Services Department; Kate Himick, Planner I; Aimirou Sy, Planner II; Teri Anzel, Administrative Assistant

OTHERS PRESENT: Joseph Altschuler, Susan Appel, Chris Evans, Heather Grossman, Ashlee McLaughlin, Karen Medina, Esther Patt, Phyllis Williams, Blair Winter

A. CALL TO ORDER and ROLL CALL

The meeting was called to order at 7:02 p.m. by Mr. Hays, who declared a quorum. In the absence of Chair Urban, Mr. Hays, Vice Chair, stated that he would run the Special Meeting.

B. WRITTEN COMMUNICATIONS

- Email from Dennis Roberts regarding his Facebook post on the Urbana Civic Center (108 East Water Street) Section 106 and comments from the public – Dated 02-18-2026 @ 8:48 am
- Email from Dennis Roberts regarding the News-Gazette article “MTD still looking to build transfer station at former Urbana Civic Center” - Dated 02-18-2026 @ 9:58 am
- Email from Sarah Scott regarding Urbana Civic Center (108 East Water Street)
- City of Urbana Master Facilities Plan Phases 2 and 3 - Final Recommendations July 8, 2020
- Capital Improvement Plan Fiscal Years 2024-2028, Excerpt
- Capital Improvement Plan Fiscal Years 2026-2030, Excerpt
- Updated Overview of the Urbana Civic Center Review Process, Iterative
- Memorandum of Agreement between the Federal Transit Administration and the Illinois State Historic Preservation Officer regarding the Champaign-Urbana Mass Transit District Downtown Urbana Transfer Center Project Champaign County, Illinois (SHPO Log #01053124)

- Handout from Phyllis Williams regarding Section 106 Review of the Champaign-Urbana Mass Transit District's Downtown Urbana Transfer Center Project

C. AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION

Karen Medina addressed the Historic Preservation Commission. She stated that she attended the meeting to express support of Professor Altshuler's work and noted her familiarity with some of his previous projects. Ms. Medina commented that she appreciated the community-focused nature of his approach and expressed hope that the Urbana Civic Center site would be put to productive use after having remained vacant for an extended period. She encouraged commissioners to review Mr. Altshuler's past work.

Phyllis Williams, of the Preservation and Conservation Association (PACA), addressed the Historic Preservation Commission. She provided historical context regarding the original design, construction, and use of the Urbana Civic Center, noting its relationship to broader mid-century modern architectural development in Urbana. Ms. Williams described the building's early popularity, subsequent management challenges, and the impact of later downtown development on its visibility and use. She expressed concern about the prospect of demolition and stated that PACA supports preserving and reusing the Civic Center. She also commented on alternative site considerations, the potential for integrating the Civic Center into broader downtown planning efforts, and the importance of exploring options beyond demolition. She submitted written remarks for inclusion in the record.

D. STAFF REPORT

There was none.

E. STUDY SESSION

Urbana Civic Center (108 East Water Street) Section 106 Review

- *Presentation by Staff*

Olivia Jovine, Director of Community Development Services and Zoning Administrator, presented an overview of the Urbana Civic Center project at 108 East Water Street, summarizing the timeline of City's actions, the Champaign-Urbana Mass Transit District's (MTD) proposed Downtown Multimodal Center, and the Section 106 review. She noted that the handouts provided to Commissioners and the public expanded upon materials previously introduced at the February 4, 2026, meeting. The following materials were introduced to the Historic Preservation Commission:

- City of Urbana, Master Facilities Plan Phases 2 and 3 - Final Recommendations July 8, 2020
- Capital Improvement Plan Fiscal Years 2024-2028, Excerpt
- Capital Improvement Plan Fiscal Years 2026-2030, Excerpt
- Updated Overview of the Urbana Civic Center Review Process, Iterative
- Memorandum of Agreement between the Federal Transit Administration and the Illinois State Historic Preservation Officer regarding the Champaign-Urbana Mass Transit District Downtown Urbana Transfer Center Project Champaign County, Illinois (SHPO Log #01053124)

Ms. Jovine outlined key milestones from an iterative document. She noted that the timeline was compiled from City records, MTD materials, and consultant documentation.

Commissioners asked questions regarding the City's February 2025 correspondence concurring with FTA's initial no-adverse-effect finding and expressed concern that the Historic Preservation Commission had not been consulted prior to issuance of the letter. Commissioners also stated that they did not receive or recall receiving invitations to Section 106 consulting-party meetings. Concerns regarding the email platform and process for communication were also brought forward by Commissioners Hays, Roberts, and Holliday.

Ms. Jovine noted that staff turnover, changes in Commission leadership, email platform transitions, and meeting cancellations contributed to lapses in communication during the Section 106 process. She acknowledged that these factors may have affected the Commission's receipt of notices and materials and requested that the Commission consider a specific study session on the Section 106 process.

Mr. Roberts noted that the mitigation procedures required that a record must be made of the Civic Center and stored in the Champaign County Archives; he stated that the process was beyond changing. Mr. Roberts asked how the Commission might voice their concerns today and what their role going forward could be. Ms. Jovine stated that the current scope of the study session was to provide an overview of the process to date, but that the Commissioners were welcome to make their thoughts known and to continue the topic at a later study session.

Mr. Hays stated that comments in the press about historic preservation were highly negative and that there was a resentment there. He stated that the Commission had an opportunity to discuss how public bodies are involved in public conversations and how historic preservation is seen.

Ms. Jovine stated that there are several powers and actions that the Commission would be able to take, such as presenting to City Council. She stated that in the interest of time, Joseph Altshuler should be allowed to present on his students' work and that discussion could be reopened following the presentation.

- ***Presentation by Joseph Altshuler - UIUC Architecture: Fall 2026 Course. Student Exploration of the Urbana Civic Center and Proposed Transit Center***

Professor Joseph Altshuler, Assistant Professor in the School of Architecture and the Department of Landscape Architecture at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign (UIUC), presented conceptual design work developed by UIUC architecture students exploring potential adaptive reuse and site planning options for the Urbana Civic Center. He described circulation considerations, selective demolition scenarios, and opportunities to integrate civic and transit functions.

Mr. Altshuler stated that it was his mission to create studio experiences for students that engage with civic and community partners. He thanked City and MTD staff for their help in connecting with students on this project. Mr. Altshuler stated that he and MTD staff were very candid with each other at the outset of this project: that he was clear about his interest in adaptive reuse and MTD's position that this was not how they were imagining the project. Mr. Altshuler gave a brief overview of the history of the Urbana Civic Center and noted its use as a community hub

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and platform for city engagement. Mr. Altshuler presented on the students' ideas, work, and visions for the potential future of the Civic Center. Students' work fell into five categories of strategies for adaptive reuse of the building: "addition," "subtraction," "open the walls," "raise the roof," and "activate the public realm."

Ashlee McLaughlin, representative on behalf of MTD, stated that she will answer any questions the Historic Preservation Commission might have for them and to provide additional context regarding MTD's collaboration with the UIUC class. She stated that MTD did not currently own the property.

Mr. Roberts noted that this building could be very important for the community as a civic space, given that Urbana did not have an official community square. He stated that he valued the creativity of the students and that the public should understand a more creative use of this building and its future. He asked if the Commission could see the students' work in greater detail and noted that he felt that there were more opportunities than demolition. Mr. Roberts then stated that he appreciated MTD's interest in this property and in downtown Urbana; he wondered if the grant could support the adaptive reuse of the Civic Center.

Ms. Holliday thanked Mr. Altshuler for presenting the students' work. She noted that there are other strategies to use the building and the space that should be taken seriously. Ms. Holliday stated that the greenest building is the one that already exists and noted the climate impacts of demolition and construction.

Mr. Weiss concurred with his fellow Commissioners' comments. Mr. Hays referred to Imagine Urbana and its calls for different forms of identity and place. He stated that in his time in the Midwest, he had encountered the idea of destruction as a form of progress. Mr. Hays referenced the Burnham Mansion in Champaign as a case study and stated that he saw the Urbana Civic Center as an opportunity to have conversations about changing the narrative around demolition and costs. Mr. Hays noted that in his experience, having proactive conversations can impact outcomes and transform processes.

Ms. McLaughlin requested to provide additional context regarding timeline; she stated that they do not yet have a set plan for this site. Ms. McLaughlin stated that MTD had been working with the City for over ten years to find a site for a more official bus transfer center in downtown Urbana. She stated that MTD had landed on this site with the previous City administration and that they would not have embarked on the NEPA process without having conversed with administration. She stated that as a transit agency, they were required to proceed with the NEPA process for all projects, which represented a risk to them in developments. Ms. McLaughlin noted that they did not think that the building as it currently stands could be used for mass transit purposes and that there needed to be room for 40- and 60-foot buses to circulate. Ms. McLaughlin stated that the larger vision was to have a multi-agency use to maximize the property and that adaptive reuse had not been part of the vision, given that the site had already been vacant for many years. Her view was that the Commission had been given ample opportunity to participate and that MTD and their consultant had no evidence that this building would be considered significant.

Ms. Holliday noted that if a relevant body like the Commission was not responding to requests to participate, especially after an eligibility decision for the National Register, it should be clear that

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something was wrong with the chain of communication. Mr. Hays noted that it felt like there was a lapse somewhere and that he did not see it as an issue with any individual. Mr. Hays further explained that the language used to describe historic preservation in the News-Gazette article felt negative. He asked if there could be a situation or solution in which MTD could see historic preservation as an opportunity rather than a roadblock. Ms. McLaughlin noted that they were not yet committed or locked into any plans and referenced the issue with circulation, stating that there were portions of the site that presented significant turning challenges. Mr. Altshuler stated that his view of MTD's timeline and the City's timeline for closure of the site made sense for how the process has resulted. Mr. Altshuler saw this time as an opportunity for more creative options.

Mr. Roberts noted that there were parts of the building that the Commission would be open to removing. Mr. Hays referenced the wealth of goodwill in the room and trusted that people were making decisions in good faith and to the best of their ability; he wondered that, given where the situation is, how they could make this into something terrific. Ms. Jovine stated that some possible next steps were to host additional study sessions, educate and inform the citizens of Urbana, and to testify before City Council and all other boards and commissions. She noted that Commissioners are also able to act as citizens and send letters and have conversations with officials. Ms. Holliday stated that other options were to file a landmark application at the local level or apply for National Register status, since the building had already been deemed eligible. Mr. Roberts concurred that local landmarking would be appropriate and that there could be flexibility if such a landmark were created.

Ms. Holliday referred to Mr. Hays' comments on how historic preservation had been negatively portrayed in the media. She stated that historic preservation is truly creative, open-ended, and inclusive and that it is an economic development tool that should be in every city's toolkit. The Civic Center represented an inspirational story of architecture, design, and community for her. Ms. Holliday stated that historic preservation was maintenance, care, and repair. Mr. Hays added that people thought preservation meant ossification. He explained that there was a great opportunity before them to work creatively and collaboratively and brought the Commission's attention to next steps.

Ms. Jovine noted that staff would include a continuation of this study session on the March 4th agenda and that a separate study session could be scheduled to address improvements to internal procedures for future Section 106 reviews. Ms. Jovine noted that the next regular Historic Preservation Commission meeting is scheduled for March 4, 2026.

F. ADJOURNMENT

Vice-Chair Hays adjourned the meeting at 9:02 p.m.