

MINUTES OF A RESCHEDULED MEETING

URBANA HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION

DATE: January 8, 2025

APPROVED

TIME: 7:00 p.m.

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

MEMBERS ATTENDING: David Hays, Laura O'Donnell, Angela Urban, Andrew Weiss

MEMBERS EXCUSED: Kathryn Holliday, Dennis Roberts, Trent Shepard

STAFF PRESENT: Marcus Ricci, Planner II; Teri Andel, Planning Administrative Assistant II

OTHERS PRESENT: Susan Appel, Phyllis Winters-Williams

A. CALL TO ORDER and ROLL CALL

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

B. CHANGES TO THE AGENDA

There were none.

C. APPROVAL OF PREVIOUS MINUTES

There were none.

D. WRITTEN COMMUNICATIONS

- Urbana Historic Preservation Commission Staff Report – January 8, 2025
- Urbana Historic Preservation Plan Revision – January 8, 2025

E. AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION

There was none.

F. CONTINUED PUBLIC HEARINGS

There were none.

G. OLD BUSINESS

There was none.

H. NEW PUBLIC HEARINGS

There were none.

I. NEW BUSINESS

There was none.

J. MONITORING OF HISTORIC PROPERTIES

Chair Urban opened this item on the agenda. She stated that at the previous meeting in November 2024, Mr. Ricci presented the list of Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) members and the historic properties, which they are responsible for monitoring. She stated that the properties that she monitors did not have any changes. She has not updated the spreadsheet.

Mr. Ricci stated that Ms. O'Donnell took pictures of her assigned properties and entered them into the spreadsheet. This is great because it will establish a photo timeline.

Mr. Weiss stated that he also did not report in the spreadsheet. There were not any changes.

Mr. Hays said that he was happy to experience in person the bike path convergence where the City of Urbana was going to remove brick sidewalk in order to make it safer for bicyclists where West Main Street meets Lincoln Avenue on the north side.

K. STAFF REPORT

Mr. Ricci reported on the following:

Items of Interest

▪ *CLG Grant Update*

Mr. Ricci stated that the City was only allowed to submit two grant applications to the State, which we submitted the application for the Royer Education project and the application for the Historic Preservation Website Update. He is still waiting to hear from Jon Pressley with the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) about the status of the applications. He stated that he is working with the City's Finance Department to set up an account to pay future interns who work on updating the website.

▪ *Historic Preservation Month Activities*

Mr. Ricci said that the month of May will be here sooner than we know, so we can start getting ready to assist Ms. Holliday in advertising or staffing the Mid-Century Modern Housing Tour. Mr. Hays added that the exhibit will open later this month at the Krannert Art Museum. The exhibit will run all spring.

Historic Property Activities

▪ **Landmarking and Districts**

Mr. Ricci stated that there are no recent inquiries for local landmarks and/or districts.

He said that Ms. Holliday and her class are working with Reverend Freeman of the First United Methodist Church to prepare a nomination application for the church as a landmark on the National Register.

▪ **Certificates of Appropriateness in Progress or Review**

Mr. Ricci talked about the following:

- ✓ Buena Vista Court Utility Work – Volo.Net Internet is installing fiber optic internet. Most of the installation is underground. The only above-ground work is attaching little interface boxes on the homes, which the Zoning Administrator determined would be an exempt activity, because the boxes are considered temporary.
- ✓ 8 Buena Vista (HP-2021-COA-01) – He said that he believed the access ramp had been removed already. He needs to work with the new owners to see whether they intend to repair and/or do porch alterations as planned in the Certificate of Appropriateness request by the previous owners.
- ✓ 210 South Race Street (HP-2021-COA-03) – He said that the Urbana City Council approved an open-dated extension for the Hotel Royer. The longer it takes Hotel Royer to open to the public, the less tax reimbursement they will receive from the City. Therefore, there is no hard deadline to be finished by.

L. STUDY SESSION

Historic Preservation Plan

Chair Urban opened this item on the agenda. She mentioned that the Commission should keep in mind that any updates they make to the plan should reflect the *Imagine Urbana* Comprehensive Plan.

Mr. Ricci talked about the following:

1. Review what is in the existing 1998 Historic Preservation Plan and decide what needs to be updated
2. Four Goals of the 1998 Historic Preservation Plan (Implementation Steps)
3. Purposes of Historic Preservation
4. Other City plans that work with the Historic Preservation Plan
5. Historic Resource Surveys
6. Incentives for Historic Preservation
7. Preservation and Education
8. Agenda for Future Action
9. Appendices

The Commission should consider whether the goals correspond to the purposes of historic preservation. We may need to consult with the City Economic Development Division staff to work on the economic development and also with the Building Safety Division on preserving Downtown's buildings and facades. The Building Safety Division can also help us work with the Building Code to figure out ways that people can adaptively reuse structures more easily and more acceptably.

Mr. Ricci stated that he could start collecting other cities' preservation plans. After three or four months of staff and the Commission reviewing the plans, they could create a bullet point list of things that we would like to consider being adding to the new Preservation Plan. This would give whoever works on creating the new plan, whether it be a consultant, University of Illinois students or in-house, ideas for content in the new plan.

Chair Urban said that a good objective for today is to come up with a draft timeline. This would aid the Commission in applying for a CLG grant in the next cycle.

Mr. Hays said that he reread the 1998 Historic Preservation Plan, and there is a lot of information that is really good; however, he feels that it needs a radical revision. History is not the past, but rather an interpretation of the past. We are always making history in the present, and the past is a given condition. History is not preservation of the past, and the existing Plan actually does not directly preserve the past. It preserves the history, and the history it invites us to preserve is basically Native American people were transient and the prioritizing of settlement as an excuse for claim (real estate and buildings). Then the Native American people were gone and replaced by rich, white men (no mention of women). The existing plan asks us to promote the preservation of our historic resources, which means promoting the preservation of tangible real amenities of rich white men in this community. So, we need a radical rewriting because we do not want to preserve their history. We want to practice history, meaning interpretation of the past, according to our own priorities and values. He understands this to mean the story of people, things, and conditions. They need to redress native histories by acknowledging that women are part of the formula, by acknowledging people of color, and by acknowledging the landscape elements, such as the prairie, trees of Big Grove, and the Boneyard Creek. In the mindset of the people who profit in this place, the men celebrated here, and in the continuing mindset of the community have value in so far as they support economy whether that is industry or leisure (recreation). People do not talk about preserving trees like they talk about preserving buildings, and he thinks that we should. He would like staff and the Commission to look at the plan but imagine what we aim to preserve is much more expansive. If we rewrite the historical summary at the beginning of the plan according to new priorities, we might be asking to support different things than what we are asking for.

Mr. Ricci stated that this is amazing and a radical shift from just preserving buildings to culture. He suggested that the Commission lay out these goals before reviewing the historical summary. He feels that starting off with the history and then going to the goals implies that this history that we just summarized for you is what drove our goals. Whereas, if you lay out the goals at the beginning of the plan and then you talk about your version of the history, what your goals are frames to the reader how you see your history developed. Mr. Hays said that this is a great idea because it acknowledges the subjectivity of different generations of people.

Mr. Hays mentioned that there are three kinds of history: 1) monumental history, which takes a narrow sector and honors it to the exclusion of everything else; 2) antiquarian history, which you do not know the relative value of anything, so everything is important, and 3) critical history, which says that we have the right to look at and judge how people did things in the past and disagree. What Mr. Ricci is proposing would be like history is a living document that each year people look through it and say do we need to change something. They rewrite history and reinterpret the past as they do the work to guide them on what they could focus on.

Ms. Urban agreed that we need to make the Plan more expansive and redefine what the Plan could mean for historic preservation. She said that when she read through the existing Plan, it read like it was from 1998. It was the beginning of having a Historic Preservation Commission for the City of Urbana. She said that they have gone way beyond the existing Plan, but they have not had a chance to update it. Looking at the objectives in the existing Plan helps them get started in updating the Plan. She anticipates that the updated plan will be vastly different.

Mr. Weiss stated that the framework that Professor Hays described is invaluable. Balancing the content will be refreshing.

Chair Urban talked about the timeline. Since the CLG grant application will be due in November, she believes that they should have a semblance of what they want to do by September. They should send out a Request for Proposal (RFP) to get an estimate to have a consultant rewrite the Plan. They could also figure out an estimate of how much it would cost to have University of Illinois students rewrite the plan. Mr. Ricci stated that he was unfamiliar with the RFP process and would need to look into it.

Mr. Ricci suggested that they also start asking members of the listserv of the National Association of Preservation Councils (NAPC) how much time and money they spent on updating their Historic Preservation Plan. He said that he could reach out to some consultants without doing a RFP, and the consultants would tell them how much it would cost as well. He could work on this while the Commission holds discussions to set goals and talk about how they want to approach preservation in the new plan.

Mr. Hays inquired about the scope of work that the Commission would be doing on the new plan. He pointed out that the Historic Preservation Commission did not write the 1998 Historic Preservation Plan, because the Commission did not exist yet. The Historic Preservation Plan was written by the Plan Commission and approved by City Council. He asked Mr. Ricci to check to see if they are able to rewrite their own plan. Mr. Ricci said that he would ask about the process and who can rewrite the plan.

Mr. Hays suggested that the Historic Preservation Commission go through the existing plan page by page and decide what needs to be removed, what needs to be updated and whether they need a consultant or a student to do each task that needs to be done.

Chair Urban talked about the different phases of the process. She said the first step would be an internal dive into the 1998 Historic Preservation Plan. She likes the idea of the Commission members coming to a study session with comments prepared. This may include the Historic Preservation Ordinance. The second step would be external plan review, which she imagined having two parts: one is getting examples of other city's historic preservation plans and ordinances, and the second part of step two would be what other City plans would the Commission want to tie the Historic Preservation Plan to. The third step would be getting estimates from consultants and talking with the NAPC to get a better sense of what other cities have received for different plan updates and do we need to get a RFP. The fourth step would be to figure out what we want in our plan.

Mr. Hays stated that he figured what they want should come before getting estimates, because the estimates will be based on what we want. He felt the point that is incredibly powerful is thinking about how this plan connects to other commissions and other aspects of the Plan Commission's work. He said that in a sense we are inviting the possibility of what we do being integral to the big picture so that it does not come across as it has in the past as a kind of decorative supplement or an option that is nice that the City does. The Historic Preservation Commission does not get asked to do a lot of things that they should or to weigh in on things that they should. However, if the HPC was accountable to others and others were accountable to the HPC through a set of priorities the HPC articulates in the way we interpret the past, then the work of the HPC or whatever we would be called would have more teeth to it. He stated that he frets that the work of the HPC is not central to the process of managing the City broadly speaking.

Mr. Ricci stated that there are other places in the Zoning Ordinance where Historic Preservation Commission is mentioned. For example, if there is a variance request for a property next to or adjacent to a designated landmark or district, the HPC is supposed to be asked for comments prior to the variance going to a public hearing. We may need to develop a different mechanism to aid City staff when they are processing permits.

Chair Urban suggested giving each step two months to be worked on. Mr. Ricci reminded the HPC that the Open Meetings Act says that no more than two members can work on something together without being considered a meeting of the Commission. So, two members could meet at a time and discuss what they want to keep and what they want to remove or add to the updated plan. The members could rotate and discuss the same with a different member. They could then submit their changes to him. This is something that the HPC members could do between meetings and be a way to keep the momentum and dialogue going, because it is hard to justify holding a HPC meeting without there being cases. Chair Urban agreed. She recognized that the HPC would not be able to hold a meeting every month. She suggested that they task out the different steps to different members. We know that by August, we need to start looking into costs, because we want to start writing the application for the next Certified Local Government grant cycle.

Mr. Ricci stated that he would put a word version of the 1998 Historic Preservation Plan on the Google Drive as well as a blank version of the CLG Grant application. Chair Urban asked Mr. Ricci to share the link again to the Google Drive with the Commission members.

Mr. Weiss supported the overall effort to update the Historic Preservation Plan. He said that he did not agree that historic preservation is the gatekeeper of what is right and what is wrong. He stated that revising the Plan in a sensitive way will help define or undefine that perception. Mr. Ricci stated that he hopes the planning process for updating the Plan becomes a community discussion and a collaborative discussion. There are experts at the Urbana Free Library, the University of Illinois, and in the school district that can help.

Phyllis Williams-Winters asked how the public and other organizations can submit comments. Mr. Ricci replied saying that the Plan is available for anyone to review, and they can submit comments to staff. The public and other organizations can even email City staff and Commission members.

M. ANNOUNCEMENTS

Mr. Hays announced that the “Marking Place for the Arts at Home Performance and Mid-Century Architecture” exhibition will open at the Krannert Art Museum on January 29, 2025 at 5:15 pm for members and on January 30, 2025 from 5:00 pm to 7:00 pm for the general public. He explained that the exhibition focuses on four houses designed by three architects: two by Jack Backer (the Erlanger House in Urbana and Baker’s Loft Apartments on Chester Street in Champaign), Dick Williams’ home on West University Avenue in Champaign, and John Replinger’s second home in Yankee Ridge in Urbana. The properties were designed as places where performances might take place or where new artwork would be generated. The exhibition asks what the value of these places is now? How do we make use of our understanding of them? How do we interpret them for our own purposes? People will be invited to add content or comments to the exhibition. He presented additional details and noted his role in providing information and activities for the exhibition. He noted that the exhibition would run through July 2025.

Chair Urban noted that the Urbana Free Library has brochures advertising virtual walking tours of the City of Urbana. It includes several significant buildings.

N. ADJOURNMENT

Chair Urban adjourned the meeting at 8:31 p.m.

Submitted,



Marcus Ricci, AICP
Historic Preservation Commission Secretary