

**MINUTES OF A REGULAR MEETING**

**URBANA HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION**

**DATE:** September 4, 2024

**APPROVED**

**TIME:** 7:00 p.m.

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

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**MEMBERS ATTENDING:** David Hays, Dennis Roberts, Trent Shepard, Angela Urban

**MEMBERS EXCUSED:** Laura O'Donnell, Andrew Weiss

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

**OTHERS PRESENT:** Susan Appel

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**A. CALL TO ORDER and ROLL CALL**

Chair Urban called the meeting to order at 7:00 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**

The minutes of the April 3, 2023 regular meeting of the Historic Preservation Commission were presented for approval.

Ms. Andel noted a change to add Phyllis Williams to the list of **Others Present**.

Mr. Shepard suggested changing BPAC to Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Commission on the top of Page 4.

Mr. Shepard moved to approve the minutes of April 3, 2024, as revised. Mr. Roberts seconded the motion. The motion to approve the revised minutes was approved by unanimous voice vote.

**D. WRITTEN COMMUNICATIONS**

There were none.

**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**

Mr. Ricci stated that staff has not done any monitoring since the previous Historic Preservation Commission meeting. He asked if any of the Commission members had monitored any historic properties.

Chair Urban inquired about the opening date for Hotel Royer. Mr. Ricci replied that an opening date has not been set as of now. The Certificate of Appropriateness is still open for the exterior renovations

**K. STAFF REPORT**

Mr. Ricci reported on the following:

**Items of Interest:**

- **R-7 Adaptive Reuse Inquiries**

Mr. Ricci noted that there has been interest in the R-7 properties, and people seem to be happy that they have additional options for redeveloping the properties, especially into multi-family. They like that there is an allowance that does not require them to add additional parking for approved uses. To date, we have had one adaptive reuse project for 606 West Washington, which was to turn the existing building into apartments.

- **Landmarking Inquiries**

Mr. Ricci stated that City staff has not received any recent landmarking inquiries. Staff has their fingers crossed that First United Methodist Church is still interested in doing a local landmark nomination in addition to being put on the National Register Listing for Historic Places.

- **HPC Bylaws Review**

Mr. Ricci recalled that staff had reviewed the HPC bylaws and proposed updates in the language back in February of 2024. He explained that staff will be taking the draft bylaws to the new City Attorney, Matt Roeschley, to get a legal perspective on the proposed language, and then will present a revised version to the Commission at a future meeting.

- **CLG Grant Opportunity**

Mr. Ricci explained that CLG stands for Certified Local Government. Jurisdictions that meet certain requirements, including having a historic preservation commission, a preservation ordinance, an active monitoring program, and an inventory of historic properties, are eligible for local government certification with the State of Historic Preservation office.

He went on to say that the City of Urbana has been a CLG for several years. A CLG can apply for a grant to help fund projects. The last project the City of Urbana did was in 2015 and was a historic preservation website with an interactive map. Unfortunately, the online platform that the interactive map was based on is no longer functioning so the City of Urbana is without an interactive map.

Mr. Ricci mentioned that he met with the State of Illinois' CLG Coordinator, Jon Pressley, and they talked about the next cycle for grants. Mr. Pressley told him that the State hopes to have another round of grants in September. One can look on the State's website and find the application. While the grant application can be competitive, quite often the State does not award all of their funding.

He talked about the possibility of the Historic Preservation Commission pursuing projects in the future using CLG grant money. Mr. Hays recited the types of projects from the State's website that can be funded with a CLG grant.

Mr. Hays suggested that the Commission seek funding to hire a professional firm to layout a web platform. He did not believe it should cost a lot since the information is already gathered. The web platform could be set up where the City could amend it by adding new content and removing old content, and the City would never have to hire someone again to set it up. He stated that he would be interested in working with colleagues in putting together a CLG application for this project, if it is of interest to other Commission members and staff.

Mr. Ricci stated that he did not believe that there is a cap on the amount one can request in a grant application for a project. He pointed out that an application would require a budget, so someone who wants to work on completing an application to submit would have to bring a skillset for grant writing.

Chair Urban commented that writing the grant application is one part of a project. The other part is the actual execution of a project. She understands that City staff does not have the ability to write a grant application. Would City staff be able to help with the execution of a

project? Mr. Ricci replied that it all depends on the project. If a grant is approved to hire a firm to design and install signage on historic properties, then this is not staff intensive. And amending content on an interactive map that has already been set up by a firm would take minimal staff time and could be something that staff could do.

Mr. Hays noted that the State website says that the grant cannot cover more than 70% of the project budget. Mr. Ricci said that Mr. Pressley had told him that the 30% which the City would be responsible for could include staff or volunteer time. The City Council does not have a priority for historic preservation, so we have to do future projects at basically zero dollar out of the City's pocket.

Mr. Roberts talked about a project that he would like to work on, which is signage for properties in the Royer District in downtown Urbana. He handed out information regarding the Royer District that was established in 2007 by City Council. He stated that tourists walking in Downtown Urbana could learn the history of unique buildings by reading signage that would be placed on specific buildings. He talked about the design of signs, which was created over 15 years ago, having a historic look to match the historic look of a building. He reviewed the list of signs that have been created already, and who paid for each sign. He also talked about the buildings that still need signage.

He went on to talk about free-standing signs versus wall-mounted signs and the cost for each. He would like to see the City share the cost of installing the signs on the buildings, especially like Canaan Baptist Church who cannot afford to pay for the sign and its installation.

Mr. Roberts talked about the Royer District brochure for properties in Downtown Urbana and about possibly updating it as a future project. He mentioned that the Royer District in Downtown Urbana was never adopted by the Historic Preservation Commission because there is already a historic district called the Royer District on Oregon and Busey, which was Joseph Royer's home.

Mr. Ricci stated that any of the Commission members could work on writing a grant application individually or as a group. He said that a letter in support from the Historic Preservation Commission, City Council and or the Mayor of Urbana would be great to include in the grant application when it is submitted to the State.

Chair Urban inquired about the cost for signage. Mr. Roberts replied that five years ago, wall signs cost \$600 each and freestanding signs cost \$900 each. However, the cost has increased since then and wall plaques now cost about \$925 each and freestanding signs cost about \$1,300 each. A sign takes about 2-1/2 to 3 months to produce and is created by Ing Graphics, which is an extremely well-known sign company out of St. Louis. He mentioned that the signs are durable too.

Mr. Ricci stated that as technology and connectivity with people continues to evolve, he sees a lot of educational sign programs going towards smaller signs, larger print, more pictures, and less text. Some even use QR codes on signs to direct people to a website if they want a

full description. Putting a lot of the text online would allow the text on the sign to be larger and easier to read from a distance, and it would end up being less expensive.

Mr. Roberts mentioned an idea for another project would be to create guidelines for new development or redevelopment in a historic district. Design guidelines would not have to be mandatory but more suggestive. However, if a property owner wanted to be a good partner to the community and have their building design be in rhythmic harmony with the other buildings on the block, then the design guidelines could show them how to accomplish this. Mr. Ricci pointed out that Planning staff did ask the Executive staff in April of 2024 and was informed that the City Council and the City's Executive Department would not support or direct resources to historic district design guidelines. Mr. Roberts replied that if it is because they cannot spend staff time working on this, he would not mind creating a set of guidelines. It would not be hard to find guidelines that exist in other communities or even in our own community that could be used as a template.

Mr. Hays stated that one example for a project mentioned on the State's website for being eligible for a CLG grant includes revising planning documents. If the Commission is interested, one of the members could contact the State's Historic Preservation Office to see if creating design guidelines for the Main Street Historic District would qualify for a CLG grant to be certain. Mr. Ricci suggested that the Commission think about updating the Historic Preservation Plan at some point. It was created in 1998. It could be revamped to lay out priorities that the Historic Preservation Commission wants to take on, possibly new goals and objectives, and implementation and action steps.

Mr. Ricci stated that this may be a way to get the interest of our citizens and our leaders. Mr. Roberts said if the City does not support historic preservation or if the City Council is not interested in the Commission and our work, then what are we doing? We need to be engaging the City Council and the community more. Mr. Ricci agreed they need to take steps such as the Royer District signage and working on the interactive map to educate people on what we have here in the City of Urbana. Then, we can start taking bigger steps to educate. Mr. Hays felt that if we follow the trend in the community and link historic preservation to adaptive reuse, then people will get excited as they do with other things.

Mr. Ricci stated that the Commission members and staff can coordinate on who wants to work on what CLG grant applications. He will then let Mr. Pressley at the State know that the City's Historic Preservation Commission is interested in grant funding for specific projects, and he can keep City staff updated when the grant cycle will begin and the deadline for applying. He reviewed other possible ideas for CLG application projects listed on the staff report.

- **Preservation Month Activities**

Mr. Ricci stated that we had a great tour last May that was planned by Pastor Bob Freeman and Dr. Kathryn Holliday. There were about 30 people who participated.

He talked about the possibility of having a Mid-Century Modern Housing Tour in May of 2025. Dr. Holliday and some of her graduate students are planning the tour.

Mr. Hays mentioned that he and Professor Holliday are part of a group of people who are curating an exhibition that will be at the Krannert Art Museum from January 2025 to July 2025. It is called “Making Place for the Arts at Home” and will be looking at three houses primarily by three architects (Jack Baker, John Replinger, and Dick Williams). The idea of the exhibit is not to focus on the houses but rather to think about the ways in which houses were built by these architects as homes to domesticate the arts, places where performances would take place. He noted that there will be walking tours of places along the way. There are photographs of each house in great detail that are foregrounding both their strengths and their problems. Part of the purpose is to draw attention to the fact that houses need care, even Mid-Century Modern houses. It is showing that these are places where a lot of things happened and they are worthy of continuing attention because of their continuing potential.

On a separate topic, Mr. Shepard asked if there are any vacancies on the Historic Preservation Commission. Mr. Ricci said yes, there is one vacancy. He stated that if any of the members know of someone that would be qualified to serve on the Historic Preservation Commission to please encourage the person to apply.

Mr. Shepard asked if there was a plaque for the Van Doren House. Mr. Ricci said yes. He has it and three other plaques that need to be installed. He will reach out to David Seyler to assist in getting the plaques installed. He mentioned that he would love to work with UPTV (Urbana Public Television) staff to record the installation of the signs, including and interviewing the homeowners explaining why they felt it was important to landmark their home, and using this as an educational opportunity.

- **CLG Administration**

Mr. Ricci stated that he submitted the 2023-2024 CLG Annual Report to the State. He noted that the Historic Preservation Commission must hold four meetings per year. He also mentioned that members are strongly encouraged to participate in at least one continuing education professional development training/conference/course each year.

Chair Urban stated that it is hard for the members to know when there will be a meeting or when it will be cancelled. It seems like many of the meetings have been cancelled in the last year. Mr. Ricci stated that Historic Preservation Commission meetings are scheduled for the first Wednesday of every month. In the past, Planning staff was directed to cancel a meeting if we did not have a case. He believes that thinking has now changed. In the future, if a member wants to add a topic to be discussed on a meeting agenda, the member should email the topic idea and some details to the Chair and to him, as the Secretary to the HPC. He will work with the Chair to figure out if the topic is valid or whether they have enough to talk about to hold a meeting when there are no cases. Chair Urban said that this will help keep momentum going, especially for planning activities for Historic Preservation Month.

### **Historic Property Activities:**

- **Landmarking and Districts**

Mr. Ricci reiterated that the Canaan Missionary Baptist Church was approved as a local landmark in June 2023.

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

Mr. Ricci talked about the status of the Certificate of Appropriateness for 8 Buena Vista Court and two Certificates of Appropriateness for 210 South Race Street.

- **Certificates of Appropriateness: Information Provided at June 7, 2023 meeting**

Mr. Ricci confirmed that a Certificate of Appropriateness does not expire and is transferrable to a new owner of a property.

**L. STUDY SESSION**

There was none.

**M. ANNOUNCEMENTS**

There was none.

**N. ADJOURNMENT**

Chair Urbana adjourned the meeting at 8:05 p.m.

Submitted,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Marcus Ricci".

Marcus Ricci, AICP  
Historic Preservation Commission Secretary