



MINUTES OF REGULAR MEETING

APPROVED

URBANA HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION

DATE: Wednesday, December 3, 2025

TIME: 7:00 p.m.

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

MEMBERS ATTENDING: David Hays, Kathryn Holliday, Laura O'Donnell, Dennis Roberts, Trent Shepard, Angela Urban, Andrew Weiss

MEMBERS EXCUSED: None

STAFF PRESENT: Olivia Jovine, Community Development Services Director; Aimirou Sy, Planner II; Teri Anel, Administrative Assistant II

OTHERS PRESENT: Joseph Altshuler, Susan Appel, Richard Dukesson, Felecia Freeman, Prentice Freeman-Choi, Robert Freeman, Yolanda Hollins, Ke Li, Dale Mize, Chu Mizio, Jeniece Nance, Elaine Owens, Miles Owens, Laura Park, Benita Rollins-Gay, Glenn Smith Sr., Lucinda Smith, Robert "Bob" Ward, Sophia Warner, Sage Williams, Marcella Winston

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

There were none.

D. WRITTEN COMMUNICATIONS

- Email from Chris Evans regarding Urbana Street Naming – Dated 11-26-2025
- Email from Kathleen Jones regarding 108 North Webber – Dated 10-07-2025
- Email from Aimee Rickman regarding Street Naming – Dated 11-26-2025
- Booklet from Del Elaine Owens regarding Lawrence "L.C." Owens Street Naming

E. AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION

Bob Ward approached the Historic Preservation Commission to nominate Lawrence C. Owens for a street naming project in Mr. Owen's honor. He handed out a pamphlet containing testimonial letters about the history and character of Mr. Owens. Mr. Ward noted that Mr. Owens was all about the City of Urbana community from playing football to holding holiday soup kitchens where he fed the needy, raising donations to fund projects, and spearheading the Daily Bread project for 25 years.

Ms. Benita Rollins-Gay approached the Historic Preservation Commission to nominate Janice Mitchell for a street naming project in Ms. Mitchell's honor. She mentioned that Ms. Mitchell helped many underprivileged people out of passion. She believes that young kids need to recognize people who have done things for them, and Ms. Mitchell gave over 1,000 computers to children, took them on road trips, and helped guide many of them towards having successful careers. Ms. Mitchell also held parenting classes. She was a veteran and a social worker until she passed away from cancer.

Elaine Owens approached the Historic Preservation Commission to talk about Mr. Owens, also known as "LC Big Daddy". She stated that he was born in Mississippi, but he moved with this family to Urbana at the age of three. She talked about his life and noted his accomplishments serving children, families and the Urbana community by coaching pee-wee football for 20 years, mentoring countless young athletes, serving as a cook for Community Elements Teen Mom program offering meals encouraging to young mothers, opening a daycare, and fostering over 250 children to name a few. His love for people, especially children, was unmatched. He never met a stranger. He encouraged young men to always strive for more knowledge. His impact was so profound that over 700 people attended his homegoing service, which is a true reflection of lives he touched in Urbana. She asked that the Historic Preservation Commission consider naming a street after him and in his honor. Such recognition would not only pay tribute to his memory but also inspire future generations to live the life of service, mentorship and community care.

Jeniece Nance approached the Historic Preservation Commission to speak in honor of her mother, Janice Mitchell. She stated that she grew up watching and having a firsthand seat to the service that her Mom did for so many in the community. She talked about her Mom's accomplishments and dedication to the Urbana community delivering furniture to families and dropping off wedding cakes on weekends, working as a supervisor for Cunningham Children's Home, serving as Captain for Chemical Unit #386 in the military, working for Urbana School District after being a parent volunteer, hosting programs like Brothers and Sisters and Sisters and Me, and founding the UHS Social Justice Club and later the Urbana Neighborhood Connection Center, which hosts five core programs that help feed and transport hundreds of children. This is all done through the vision of her Mom and through the leadership capacity that her Mom had.

Ms. Nance mentioned that folks were told by members of the City Council to bring the Honorary Street Naming project to the Historic Preservation Commission.

Joseph Altshuler approached the Historic Preservation Commission to talk about historic building surveys. He noted that the historic building survey for the City of Urbana is not up to date to the 50-year rule of buildings to be considered. He requests that the Historic Preservation Commission consider updating the survey and look closely at buildings that are from the 1950s, 60s and 70s as

part of the historic significance of Urbana and part of what gives the City its distinctive sense of place. He stated that often buildings that are over the 50-year mark are most at risk of demolition or most at risk of being lost from public memory because they are not quite old enough that we recognize them as historically significant, and yet, they are old enough that they face disrepair or deferred maintenance or other issues that make them undesirable.

He talked about the Urbana Civic Center noting that it was built in the late 1960s and was dedicated on May 3, 1970. It is likely that this building will be demolished and is eyed as a site of a future bus station for Mass Transit District (MTD). He stated that he strongly supports there being a new central bus station on or near this site. He thinks it is a good thing for everyone. So, he asked his students to consider different scenarios of adaptive reuse for the Civic Center as part of a future that thinks of this site as a site for a dedicated bus station for MTD, but a development that would also incorporate some amount of adaptive reuse of the existing historically significant building. He said it was energizing to see the conversations between staff at MTD, City staff, and architects.

Mr. Altshuler asked the Historic Preservation Commission to consider this important missing piece of our broader collective stock taking and records. As a local educator, resident, and neighbor interested in these issues, he offered his capacity to help the City to partner with historic preservation.

Sage Williams approached the Historic Preservation Commission to support the Honorary Street Naming project for Janice Mitchell. She mentioned that she was one of the hundreds of thousands of kids that Ms. Mitchell helped throughout her lifetime. She said that Ms. Mitchell's capacity as a social worker inspired her to want to help people.

Ms. Williams stated that she started out in an after-school program and transitioned to a college and career readiness program where they help you step by step fill out your FAFSA and gain the skills you need to go to college. Then, she graduated from Illinois State University with her Bachelor of Social Work and was pushed by Ms. Mitchell to get her master's in social work. She is now back at the center and works as a primary um throughout the school year and during the summer. So, she wanted to give a short testimonial of the lives that are touched because it is being talked about in the abstract of these hundreds of thousands of kids that Ms. Mitchell helped mentor and worked with. She said that the least we can do is name a street after someone who was so impactful.

Taylor Rosco approached the Historic Preservation Commission to support the Honorary Street Naming project for Janice Mitchell. He mentioned that he is a brother to Ms. Williams. He stated that he started working at Urbana Neighborhood Connection right when COVID started. One of the problems with COVID was that children who were struggling with reading, writing, and math before COVID, no longer received one-on-one help to help them progress in their development after COVID hit, so it stunted growth. The countless surveys and papers that have been pushed out since then show students who are below grade level. He said that Ms. Mitchell was sick, but she kept the center open and found ways to make sure that it met all the guidelines regarding protective barriers such as using sanitizer, wearing masks, etc. so these children would not fall further, so they would have help, and so they were able to keep up with their grades.

Chair Urban said that while Historic Preservation Commission members are unable to reply, comment or ask questions during "Audience Participation", testimony from the community is

valued. The Historic Preservation Commission will work with staff to incorporate their testimony into the agenda.

F. CONTINUED PUBLIC HEARINGS

There were none.

G. OLD BUSINESS

There were none.

H. NEW PUBLIC HEARINGS

Case No. HP-2025-L-01 - A request by Reverend Robert K. Freeman, Pastor, on behalf of the First United Methodist Church of Urbana, to designate “First United Methodist Church” at 304 South Race Street a local historic landmark.

Chair Urban opened the public hearing for Case No. HP-2025-L-01.

Olivia Jovine, Director of Community Development Services, presented the staff report to the Historic Preservation Commission (HPC). She introduced the case and gave a brief background. She reviewed the criteria from Section XII-5 of the Urbana Zoning Ordinance as it pertains to the proposed landmark nomination. She mentioned that the proposed nomination meets criteria A, C, E, F, and G. The application was deemed complete on October 30, 2025.

Mr. Roberts asked Chair Urban to speak about when an Urbana Street Naming Program would be on the agenda for the HPC to discuss and potential vote on. Chair Urban noted that the HPC would not be discussing the Street Naming Program because it is not on the agenda for this meeting. However, it could potentially be added to the February 2026 regular meeting agenda. Ms. Jovine added that the remainder of this meeting will be dedicated to the current case, HP-2025-L-01.

Ms. Jovine continued her staff presentation. She reviewed the options of the HPC and presented staff’s recommendation for approval. She mentioned that the applicants were in the audience and available to answer questions.

Mr. Roberts stated that the character of criterion F is misinterpreted by the recommendation. He believes the classification intended by the landmarking ordinance is trying to include commercial storefronts and buildings that would be like an automobile dealership or something of a historic nature than a community. He would not call a major spiritual church or center merely utilitarian. Instead, he said that he would call it a religious use. Religious and utilitarian are not the same definition. So, while he plans to support the nomination, he does not feel that this particular feature is contributing to the landmark nomination.

Ms. Urban pointed out that when HPC gets to the voting portion of the hearing, they do not need to say that all of the criteria have been met. Mr. Roberts stated that the landmark nomination only needs to meet one of the criteria, but he did not want to add any misleading criteria. Ms. Holliday stated that she worked with one of her students, Sophia Warren, and with Reverend Freeman and members/staff of the church to draft the landmark nomination application. Criterion F is not one of the criteria that they included, so she would support dropping criterion F, especially since it is not

necessary. Ms. Jovine stated that when one of the HPC members makes a motion, they can refine their recommendation to include or exclude certain criteria. Also, their Findings of Fact will reflect that.

Ms. Holliday noted that it would be good under criterion A to include the significance of the church as part of the social, political, and religious heritage of the local community, not just its significance for architecture. She believes the nomination supports this. Ms. Urban suggested that the HPC keep the motion general and add their caveats to what they talk about with the recommendation.

Chair Urban opened the hearing for public input. She invited the applicant to speak.

Reverend Robert Freeman, Directing Pastor of Urbana First United Methodist Church, approached the HPC to speak. He stated that he became the Pastor in 2017 of this church in 2017 and was tasked with saving the church. He talked about the history of the church. He noted that out of this church came Clark Lindsey Village, the Cunningham Children's Home, and Bethel African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church. The church had four different phases/buildings: 1) log cabin, 2) building they outgrew with Judge Cunningham, 3) brick building built with bricks provided by the Sheldon Corporation brick company, and 4) existing church built and dedicated in 1927. Many theater groups used the stage in the church, such as the 50 Plus Club and the Century Club. He mentioned that Jesse Owens was a member of the church until he left in 1948, and his paintings are still at the church. He said that Lincoln Square Mall would not be able to exist if it was not for the First United Methodist Church giving up its parking spaces and its parsonage. He thanked HPC for listening to the church, for working with the church, and for standing with the church. He, especially, thanked Ms. Holliday and the University of Illinois Architecture Department for helping research the property and for drafting the landmark nomination. He, also, thanked Maynard Britchford for archiving the church's history which ties the legacy between the social work that the church has done with the work it has done to be a pillar of light to the City of Urbana. He mentioned that they still have members from 1927. They now call the facility the Urbana First Community Center.

Mr. Roberts commented that the Sheldon family, who were huge donors to build the church, was the owner of the brick factory in Urbana. Having done history of Urbana, he said that the Sheldon brick work was an important commerce factory in town. He made the connection when reviewing the landmark nomination.

Ms. Holliday stated that it was great to work with Reverend Freeman, Sophia Warner, Dale Mize, and Ke Li. It was a great project for students to learn more about the City of Urbana.

Sophia Warner, student of Ms. Holliday at the University of Illinois, approached the HPC to speak. She said that it is amazing how this church has been influential in the broader Urbana community, such as the women's organization that was incredibly active and the creation of the Cunningham Children's Home. She said it was a real treat to learn more about the history of this community and how integral the church had been over time.

Mr. Hays stated that he appreciates being able to consider this landmark nomination and vote on it. He has been dismayed, horrified by the demolition of the University Place Church in the City

of Champaign where there was an attempt to get it designated that failed. To see the rubble on the site is horrifying. Chair Urban agreed.

Mr. Roberts asked if the proposed property is within the City's Downtown Historic District. Someone replied yes. Mr. Roberts stated that this is another advantageous aspect of this nomination.

Susan Appel approached the Historic Preservation Commission to speak. She mentioned that she represents the advocacy committee of the Preservation and Conservation Association (PACA) of Champaign County. She has no complaints about the proposed landmark nomination. She said it is a clear logical nomination, and she is happy that the HPC can support it with great enthusiasm. She thinks that Mr. Hays' comments about the University Place helped to make clear why these major buildings deserve to be acknowledged before difficulties hit that force their congregations into very difficult decisions.

With there being no additional input from the audience, Chair Urban closed the public input portion, and she opened the hearing for discussion and/or motion(s) by the Historic Preservation Commission.

There was some discussion about making a motion. Ms. Jovine stated that Chair Urban should not make the motion.

Mr. Roberts asked since Kate worked on preparing the nomination, will she have to recuse herself? Ms. Holliday said yes, she will recuse herself on the vote after there is a motion and the HPC has discussion on the motion. She has some recommendations about modifications to the motion. Mr. Roberts stated that for the Canann Baptist Church, he was not allowed to speak on behalf of the landmark nomination because he had helped with the nomination. Ms. Jovine thanked Mr. Roberts for clarifying this. She recommended that Ms. Holliday provide feedback before the motion is on the floor. We can consider that part of the public hearing process. I believe that would be most appropriate.

Ms. Holliday said that under criterion A, she would not list only the architecture but also list the civic and religious significance of the institution. She would keep the other criteria except for criterion F and criterion G, which she would eliminate because they do not apply in this case. Ms. Holliday, then, recused herself from the case.

Mr. Shepard moved that the Historic Preservation Commission forward Case No. HP-2026-L-01 to the Urbana City Council with a recommendation for approval of the landmark nomination of the First United Methodist Church because it meets the following: 1) criterion A – significant part of the architectural, civic, cultural, ethnic, political, and social heritage of the community, 2) criterion C – architectural type and integrity, and 3) criterion E – it is identifiable as the church at Lincoln Square. Ms. O'Donnell seconded the motion.

Mr. Roberts commented that it is a strong application. He thinks it is important to recognize buildings of faith that have been important in our community culturally, religiously, and socially. This building has a long history and has been through many permutations. Its beautiful Gothic Revival style makes it even more attractive. He said that today in modern architectural design, so

many churches that are removed end up being modernist expressions of our current era and so little is being recreated architecturally in the cityscape in these more traditional styles. Its position in the community has been very important historically, and many members of the congregation became extremely important socially and commercially in the City of Urbana.

Mr. Shepard stated that the proposed landmark nomination is one of the most obvious yes votes we have on landmark nominations. It is a prominent Urbana landmark, and he would be proud to vote in favor of it. With regards to criterion G, he was glad it is not included in the motion because he is confused about how the good things that have happened in the church were molded into the nomination. Mr. Weiss commented that the narrative portion of criterion G could apply to criterion A and be folded in. Chair Urban agreed.

Mr. Roberts said that is a good suggestion. It fulfills and elaborates why we find criterion A is supported more specifically. He said it is interesting that the criteria A, C, and E spells “ACE”.

Mr. Hays stated that he appreciates the addition in part because there are many types of churches, and the scope of what churches do is always larger than what most people think of as for a church. In this case particularly, the scope of impact has always exceeded the congregation. So, it is helpful to recognize those multiple scales for something like this, because when we say, “for the community”, a person can have benefited significantly from this institution and their activities without being a member of the congregation.

Roll call on the motion was as follows:

Ms. O'Donnell	-	Yes	Mr. Roberts	-	Yes
Mr. Shepard	-	Yes	Ms. Urban	-	Yes
Mr. Weiss	-	Yes	Mr. Hayes	-	Yes

Chair Urban said that the motion passed by unanimous vote

I. NEW BUSINESS

There was none.

J. MONITORING OF HISTORIC PROPERTIES

Chair Urban opened this item on the agenda.

Mr. Shepard gave these updates:

- Lincoln House on Illinois Street looks like they have finished painting.
- House at 305 West. High Street looks good.
- Royer House on Busey Avenue and Oregon Street was listed for sale about a month ago. He hopes the next owner will be a great preservationist like the current owner.

Mr. Roberts commented that there was an Open House at the Royer home. He expressed concern that it is being pitched as a multi-student occupied home rather than a residence. He wondered what reconfiguration inside the building might occur to accommodate the general desire of most

landlords. He noted that the basement was in bad condition. He stated that the City does not have regulations to help guide the use or the preservation of the interior features. Mr. Shepard stated that he cannot remember the last time the house was used as an owner-occupied home. He stated that he gave the owner of 108 Webber Street a recommendation of a contractor to do some work on the house.

Chair Urban noted that the Urbana Free Library and the Champaign County Archives provide tours that are relevant to the Historic Preservation Commission. She stated that both are interested in partnering with HPC to provide tours in the future.

K. STAFF REPORT

Update on CLG Grant for Website and Mapping

Ms. Jovine announced that the CLG grant was not finalized until after Adeline Evans, intern hired to work on the CLG grant project. She said that Ms. Evans worked on the project from June through August of 2025. However, after some forensic accounting at the department side, our grant was not actually executed until September 15, 2025. This means that the work that Ms. Evans produced is no longer eligible for the grant. She stated that there is additional information that she can provide after the meeting. City staff are working internally to find a resolution.

Ms. Jovine talked about quarterly reporting on a new project. She noted that the first deadline would be January 15, 2026, so we have some time theoretically to pivot and take advantage of the CLG grant that was awarded to the City.

Honorary Street Naming Project

Ms. Jovine stated that there have been no directives by staff, City Council, or City Administration for the Historic Preservation Commission to develop a plan for street naming. The Commissioners' interest and insights are certainly valued as with the public input. She would love to work with the Commissioners to find a way to incorporate a discussion on the topic in an agenda moving forward for discussion, perhaps as a Study Session item.

Chair Urban commented that it was empowering to have so many community members come to the HPC meeting and state their rationale for why significant individuals should have or be part of an honorary street naming. She stated that the Historic Preservation Plan is severely outdated. She said that HPC envisions historic preservation to expand into a concept of community of adaptive reuse and of helping to create an urban fabric. These community members bringing up honorary street naming are coming ahead of updating their plan. Perhaps HPC will expand their mission in the future. She added that she does not want to discount what the public said. She would love to hear how staff feels it would work and to hear from others as well.

Mr. Roberts agreed with Chair Urban. The Historic Preservation Commission needs to realize that we have a certain function to meet criteria for landmarking and such. However, it does not limit them from having a voice and being interested in softer ways of historic preservation or softer ways of creating community historic appreciation.

He stated that the HPC does not have any criteria for a street naming program. It has not been adopted as a program for the community, like in the City of Champaign. He felt it would need to be

structured through the City's Public Works Department, and City Council would need to approve it. Purchasing street signs would not cost much. Public Works staff could produce them. Doing outreach that is more community centered is so important because it helps to build historic appreciation as part of the culture of Urbana.

Mr. Shepard stated that he thinks it should be something that starts with City Council to develop a program for honorary street naming. When it deals with the history of the town, then HPC would be part of that decision making or have some input on it. He said with the framework that HPC has now, we cannot just launch something like this with no legal basis to it.

Ms. Holliday said that she thinks it would be an excellent topic for a study session. She understands that there is some understaffing in the Planning Division currently, but there is need for some research from City staff about what options already exist for commemoration of important citizens in public space, whether it is a historic marker, whether it is placed by the City of Urbana, whether it is a historic marker placed by a nonprofit, whether it is a street name topper, whether it is a renamed street, or whether it is a renamed public space. There needs to be research on what commissions and staff are responsible for making decisions about these as well. Having this kind of information in hand would be helpful to share with citizens who want public commemoration, but it seems to be unclear who is responsible for making these decisions and what Urbana already has in place as an existing program and what would need to be invented.

Ms. Jovine stated that she believes that there has been some discussion on this at City Council public hearings as well. There was a desire for members of the community to continue input, so they were directed to HPC by Council members. It is an evolving conversation across many public bodies and groups, but there is certainly a need for some staff research to help guide those conversations.

Chair Urban asked where do we go from here? HPC can have a study session, but we need to be able to convey information to the City Council on what role HPC sees themselves playing. Ms. Jovine said that staff can convey that to the City Administrator of course to the Council members. She believes the City Council would have to formally direct this body to take action.

Ms. Holliday stated that there is a body besides HPC that is responsible for street names. Ms. Jovine agreed that staff would absolutely have to be involved. She likes the idea of a menu of options because Urbana is also a tree city. Perhaps there is an opportunity for commemorating folks with a living memorial as well in the form of a tree. There are so many ways this conversation could move forward, and she expressed her appreciation that HPC members are open and willing to have these conversations.

Mr. Weiss asked if the residents have gone to any other committees or commissions to speak about nominating an important citizen for street naming. Or are they planning on going to other boards/commissions? Ms. Jovine replied that to date it has been public input for City Council, and then folks were directed to the HPC meeting on November 5, 2025, but that meeting was cancelled. So, Community Development staff directed them to tonight's HPC meeting. She mentioned that in our research, staff can certainly see which other bodies have been presented to, if any.

L. STUDY SESSION

There was none

M. ANNOUNCEMENTS

Ms. Jovine introduced Aimirou Sy, the new Planner II, and gave background information. Mr. Sy talked about his previous work experience in the Planning field. He mentioned that he is new to the area.

N. ADJOURNMENT

Chair Urban adjourned the meeting at 8:45 p.m.

Submitted,

Olivia Jovine

Olivia Jovine

Historic Preservation Commission Secretary