

**MINUTES OF A SPECIAL MEETING**

**URBANA HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION**

**DATE:** October 23, 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, Kathryn Holliday, Dennis Roberts, Trent Shepard, Angela Urban, Andrew Weiss

**MEMBERS EXCUSED:** Laura O'Donnell

**STAFF PRESENT:** Marcus Ricci, Planner II

**OTHERS PRESENT:** Brian Adams, Susan Appel, Stewart Berlocher, Phyllis Winters-Williams

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**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. AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION**

There was none.

**C. WRITTEN COMMUNICATIONS**

- Email from Marcus Ricci to the Historic Preservation Commission Members regarding potential CLG projects
- Certified Local Government Program Matching Grants and Application Guidelines

**D. MEETING TOPIC**

Chair Urban opened this item on the agenda. She stated the list of potential projects on the email that Marcus Ricci, Planner II, had handed out. She mentioned that after discussing and prioritizing each project that the Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) members could vote on what they want to work on. Mr. Hays said it was his understanding that they were to vote in a response email to Mr. Ricci, and Mr. Ricci would share the results at this meeting.

Chair Urban noted that the members could also suggest other projects to work on such as the one Ms. Holliday mentioned at the previous HPC meeting about recruiting a student for over the summer to assist in working on beginning stages of some of the projects on the list.

Mr. Ricci noted which projects each HPC member was interested in working on. He talked about each of the projects. The HPC and City staff talked about signage not being eligible for grant funding.

Mr. Shepard asked what the difference is between the Historic Preservation Plan and the Historic Preservation Ordinance. Mr. Ricci explained that the Plan was written in 1998, and he believes the Ordinance codifies what is in the Plan.

Chair Urban did not like delaying working on updating the Historic Preservation Plan. She felt that there is preliminary work that could potentially happen now by hiring someone part-time to work with the Illinois State Historic Preservation Office.

Mr. Roberts wondered why we would hire a consulting firm to work on updating the Plan when the HPC has the expertise to do it themselves. Mr. Ricci stated that the HPC could review a couple of chapters of the Plan at each future meeting. He stated that he does not have experience in preservation plans so he sees the benefit of hiring a firm whose job is to write preservation plans. Ms. Holliday stated that there could be a preservation plan that reflects the City's interests, and then there is the idea of a preservation plan that has a high degree of community engagement that a consultant could help manage, so we get ideas about historic preservation that are more broadly reflective of who's actually here in a wider range of issues in preservation and community storytelling that they may not know about. A consultant could be really helpful with bringing preservation to a broader community. She believed there would also be value in that a consultant would not be from here, so people in the community might be more open to conversation with them. She liked the idea of prepping for the Plan to be able to tell a consultant what we want in the Plan and what the needs might be.

Ms. Holliday talked about her rating of the potential projects. She rated signs the lowest because the CLG grant will not fund signage. Also, she rated the website higher because many of the things on the existing website are going away when the City migrates to a new one. She feels that taking all of the tour brochures, podcasts, and the 100 greatest buildings and synthesizing them into a separate website that is usable would be beneficial rather than a bunch of separate documents that are posted.

Mr. Hays stated that it seems explicit that the logic behind the funding is scaled to hire professionals to assist with doing projects. He said that while we have access to talented students and faculty who can do all sorts of things; however, the Guidelines state that all grant-funded survey projects must be conducted by a qualified professional architectural historian, historical archaeologist, or architect who meets the professional qualification standards listed in the Guidelines and has completed survey projects that have met the Secretary of Interior standards. He did not see this called out for planning projects or public education projects. It does state in the beginning of the document that there is an emphasis on projects, managers, and consultants meeting National Park Service professional qualification standards, and they have to be approved by the State of Illinois Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) in writing. He said that this makes it a lot easier because we would be applying to get money to hire professionals to work with our knowledge. Mr. Ricci stated that he would talk with Jon Pressley at SHPO about this because he knows that most of the past historical surveys have been done by students of Alice Novak at the University of Illinois. Ms. Holliday

stated that at one time she had done a survey, and she may still qualify to lead a project. She said that almost all of the projects on the list are public education-related, except for the signage. Mr. Ricci said that they could work on updating the Historic Preservation Plan. Grant funds could cover City staff working with the Commission members. He mentioned that the current goals of the City Council do not include historic preservation. Resources are allocated, both time and money, based on those goals. The City would be more likely to allocate staff time to helping with projects if the staff time was getting paid for by a grant. So, an assessment grant to work with the community to find out what they think the importance of historic preservation is, and if a majority of the people believe it is important, then that information can be passed on to City Council and maybe influence how they set next year's goals and objectives.

Chair Urban noted that the public commented at the last HPC meeting about public education of historic preservation. She said that it is important to note that we have public interest and support potentially to assist with this project.

Chair Urban said that her top two picks are public education project and the Historic Preservation Plan project. Mr. Weiss stated that he chose the website and Downtown signage projects.

Mr. Roberts stated that from his experience, several plans have been drafted but no action ever physically takes place that changes the community, which is why he thinks signage identification and local landmarking is so important. He said that we currently do not have any signs telling people when they enter a historic district in Downtown Urbana, and we also do not have any guidelines to guide future development. Actually funding something that physically shows up in our community shows that we actually did something. He believes that City staff should be helping fix the website because it is the City's website. He noted that historic preservation is not even mentioned in the draft Comprehensive Plan. The HPC should make a complaint. Another issue he stated is that the HPC has no money to do any projects. Chair Urban stated that the HPC members have homework before their next meeting to go through the draft Comprehensive Plan and to provide comments, so she encouraged Mr. Roberts to do so. She stated that historic preservation is riddled throughout the plan using different words. It is important for the HPC to provide comments because no one is even recognizing historic preservation as historic preservation. Chair Urban went on to say that development guidelines for the Downtown Historic District could be part of the Historic Preservation Plan.

Mr. Hays talked about the education project. He said the guidelines describe outreach programs or activities that promote historic preservation in the community including production and distribution of information in various media, development of audiovisual presentations or websites, and temporary or permanent exhibits. So, maybe one way to be synthetic is to draw on all the material that we have to make a comprehensive website, but part of it is event or exhibit based. We could have three constituencies: 1) general public, 2) owners of historic properties, and 3) City Council. If we do not have their support, then much is not going to happen.

Ms. Holliday stated that the ideal of designing a redesign of a website is not that you have a website but that you have something that allows you to use it as a tool to launch a conversation. If she designed a website, afterwards she would have an event that launches the website and describes the narrative that it is constructing to those audiences and is also a part of a longer continuum of how you begin to do education.

Mr. Ricci stated that he could see where they could roll the Royer brochure, the website, and education elements into one education project. However, it would be more difficult to put together a cohesive three-pronged grant than to break them down into individual projects. He said that it would be easier if the State does not like one project, then they would still be willing to fund the other two projects. Mr. Hays responded that one way to make any of the individual projects convincing would be to locate it within a bigger picture. This may draw more support for the other two projects.

Mr. Shepard asked what amount of grant funds do we hope to get. Mr. Ricci stated that he does not know how much the City received in the past for CLG projects. The 2022 guidelines say that there were \$140,000 total funds for that previous grant cycle, and the maximum amount that could be requested was \$140,000. Chair Urban added that they would have up to two years to spend the grant money. *[Editor's note: the FY25 grant cycle will have approximately \$150,000 available.]*

Mr. Roberts stated that he liked the idea of combining several goals into a master plan. He wondered what the representative from SHPO would say about this.

Mr. Ricci summarized the projects to be the Royer brochure, the website, and education materials. Two commission members could work on each project along with outside resources. He said that his job would then be to facilitate and collate them together in an application form and make sure it looks good. They can hold off for now on the Downtown signage since the CLG grant will not cover production and installation of signs.

Ms. Holliday asked if there is another mechanism for funding the Downtown signage. Mr. Ricci suggested that the HPC make their presence known at City Council. HPC can make resolutions and bring them to City Council.

Chair Urban asked if the 30% matching funds could be considered the HPC time spent working on the projects. Mr. Ricci said yes, but he would confirm this with Mr. Pressley.

Mr. Roberts asked for the HPC members who do not have a degree in the right areas, how can they participate? Mr. Ricci replied that Mr. Roberts could state his publications on the Royer District as his credentials. He should also state that he created the Royer brochure originally and now wants to update it.

Mr. Ricci talked about teams working on the projects. He stated that the HPC members could work on the projects they want as long as there are no more than two members working together. He mentioned that they could invite other non-members to work on the projects with them. The teams were broken into the following:

- Royer District and Signage: Dennis Roberts and David Hays with Brian Adams
- Education Program: Angela Urban and Kate Holliday
- Historic Preservation Plan: Angela Urban and Trent Shepard
- Website and Map: Andrew Weiss and Kate Holliday

Mr. Ricci talked about the application. The teams should decide what they want to do, how they want to get there, any sub-projects, any activities, timeline and budget. He will provide an example of a previous CLG project application. Ms. Holliday asked Mr. Ricci to ask Mr. Pressley for a more recent example of a completed CLG application and to find out how much a typical summer intern gets paid. Mr. Ricci said that he would ask Mr. Pressley for three different examples similar to the projects that the HPC has chosen to work on.

Susan Appel, representative of Preservation and Conservation Association (PACA), approached the Historic Preservation Commission to speak. She mentioned that some people that are pulled in to help with the projects may have the professional backgrounds required for the projects. She said that they were interested in helping, so she encouraged the members to invite them to work on projects.

Brian Adams approached the Historic Preservation Commission to speak. He stated that he is interested in helping with the Royer brochure. He mentioned that he published his Royer biography in 2011 and has continued to research Joseph Royer since. He is working on getting his Royer biography republished and believes that a lot of information in the biography could be included in the brochure.

Mr. Adams stated that he spoke with the person in charge of marketing and sales at the new Royer Hotel. She had expressed interest in putting together a coffee table-style book about Royer and his projects to help market the hotel.

Phyllis Winters-Williams, representative of the Preservation and Conservation Association (PACA) and as a homeowner in the Main Street Historic District, approached the Historic Preservation Commission to speak. She stated that they have been wanting to work on the owner education brochure for a long time. She said that she believes the reason historic preservation is not mentioned in the draft *Imagine Urbana* Comprehensive Plan is because realtors for some reason shut down when they hear "historic preservation". This is why it is important to educate people. She wanted to know if providing a QR code on buildings would be considered a permanent exhibition.

Chair Urban thanked the speakers for attending the meeting, and she said that the HPC members would be in touch with respect to how they can work together on the specific projects.

Chair Urban reminded the HPC members to review the draft *Imagine Urbana* Comprehensive Plan and provide comments. She noted the link to the website, which is [www.imagineurbana.com](http://www.imagineurbana.com).

## **E. ADJOURNMENT**

Chair Urbana adjourned the meeting at 8:25 p.m.

Submitted,



Marcus Ricci, AICP

Historic Preservation Commission Secretary