

Historic Resources Commission Minutes May 3, 2021

The monthly meeting was called to order by Chairman Noreen Keating at 6:00.

Commissioners presents also included: Kay Forster, Mary Hebert, Sherie Gekiere, Wendy Fleming, Sherry Nelson and R.J. Archambo via zoom. Tom Eustice was also present representing the city, as City Council liaison Diane Raab was unavailable.

Noreen Keating moved to approve the minutes from the April 5 meeting. Seconded by Mary Hebert. Motion passed.

There was discussion regarding inviting guests to meetings. As all meetings are public, all may attend. It was decided to hold off on inviting specific guests until the commissioners had some clear direction of purpose, or projects to consider.

Commissioners asked if there was a data base of HRC history. Tom Eustice said that everything available is stored in a closet in the City Council Chamber. There is also a possibility that materials are also in boxes in the basement. Sherrie Gekiere suggested that all materials be digitized and available for review. Mary Hebert said that it may be possible to get funding to for the project and will discuss it with Gekiere. All agreed that digitizing all records should be pursued. Once a data base is generated, it can be a component of the City of Cheboygan website.

Tom Eustice brought up that in mid 2020 the state instituted a tax credit to commercial businesses toward restoration. The 10-year tax credit may be used toward any renovation. He will email the bill to commission members so we can learn the details of the bill, and promote it to local businesses. Wendy Fleming's friend Jessica Flores, an architectural historian and founder of Preservation Forward, may be able to explain the process to us—Wendy will contact her for that possibility.

Mary Hebert brought up that some funding is contingent on having the city complete the Certified Local Government (CLG) process and the Redevelopment Ready Communities (RRC) paperwork. Tom Eustice said that both were in progress and nearing completion. Noreen Keating asked if they could be completed expeditiously.

Eustice replied yes.

Jim Conboy joined the group via zoom to give an overview on how the Historic Resources Commission got started. In the late 1990's, a group of citizens were concerned with historical aspects of the city. They considered forming an historic district, but were met with opposition as it restricted what building owners could do to the appearance of their properties. The mayor suggested they draft an ordinance outlining how historical properties could be preserved and what constitutes properties worthy of historical designations. The ordinance took about 3 or 4 years to draft and to identify "historic resources." Some of the ordinance drafted was taken from the state historical statute.

The ordinance also set up a commission with a procedure to designate qualifying properties as historic resources. In so doing, owners of historic properties could voluntarily have their properties recognized as a historic resource. Following submission of a request and detailed file, 9 (actually 13) plaques were awarded to properties for designation. Some were residences and some were commercial properties.

Some examples of plaques awarded include: Bronson/Rittenhouse residence at 521 Cuyler St., St. Paul United Methodist Church/Huron Street Tabernacle at 102 S. Huron St., Steffins Block/Purple Tree building at 334 N. Main St. In addition, the commission developed files on each of the designated properties, recounting the history, previous owners, and significance of each.

In discussing successful restoration, Jim put forward his belief that repurposing historic buildings so they have a modern economically viable use is a successful way to go. As an example he mentioned the Bodman Building/Cheboygan County Courthouse at 229 Court St. Jim Conboy worked personally on the project to obtain historic tax credits. The building is now used as a law office. Following the plaque project, drafting and passing the ordinance, the commission sputtered according to Conboy.

RJ Archambo suggested that the HRC develop a survey to determine what the community interest is regarding Cheboygan's historic resources. He outlined 3 groups that must be involved for successful historic preservation. 1—Property owners 2—Community members 3—City officials and political influencers. The HRC must project to all groups the value in

historic preservation, and how supporting the resources in general is relevant. For current property owners, we need to ask how the HRC can assist them. For the public, the HRC must evaluate what is understood about preservation, and tell the public how it can be supported.

Mary Hebert noted that there is a survey available, already produced by the Michigan Historic Preservation Network. She will get a copy of it and forward it to commission members. The survey can be discussed, vetted and added to at the next meeting on June 7. At that time we will also determine to whom the survey should go and how the survey can be accomplished.

Once survey results are in, the HRC can evaluate how to move forward, develop a strategy, establish goals, and raise funds to accomplish goals.

Mary Hebert brought up one tool that is available to secure funding through SHIPO (State historic Preservation Office) and National Park Service. It is apparently triggered by a letter from the mayor to SHIPO. Mary will send copies of the proposed letter to commission members for evaluation.

Kay Forster brought up that the current HRC ordinance says that commissioners must live within the city. Some of the commissioners do not. Tom Eustice said that City Council has already held a public hearing and voted to change the ordinance, which does not include that requirement. Cheboygan City Clerk Bridget Brown will have the HRC ordinance amended to reflect the change, and forward it to the webmaster Matt Ginop to change on the city website.

To avoid preparation of competing agendas, Noreen Keating will submit a proposed agenda to Clerk Brown, who will then forward them to commission members.

Upcoming meetings for the rest of the year are tentatively scheduled for: June 7, July 12, August 2, September 13, October 4, November 1 and December 6. They will be discussed at the next meeting and put on the city calendar. All are Mondays at 6:00.

Meeting adjourned at 7:22.

Sherry Nelson
HRC Secretary