

CITY OF MUSKEGON
HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION
MINUTES

December 5, 2023

S. Radtke called the meeting to order at 4:01 p.m. and roll was taken.

MEMBERS PRESENT: J. Huss, T. Emory, K. George, G. Borgman, S. Radtke

MEMBERS ABSENT: D. Gregersen, excused

STAFF PRESENT: J. Pesch

OTHERS PRESENT: B. Mahaffey (1337 Peck)

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

J. Pesch explained that he updated the draft minutes to reflect errors in the applicant names for both cases, and that the changes were reflected in the most recent version of the meeting minutes. A motion to approve the regular meeting minutes of November 14, 2023 was made by T. Emory, supported by G. Borgman and approved with J. Huss, T. Emory and K. George, G. Borgman, and S. Radtke voting aye.

OLD BUSINESS

None.

S. Radtke asked about Case 2023-23 that was tabled at the November meeting. J. Pesch explained that he contacted the applicant, but had not received a response. Once the applicant submitted more information, the case would be heard at a future meeting.

NEW BUSINESS

Case 2023-24 – 1337 Peck St. – Windows

Applicant: Brett Mahaffey (Renewal by Andersen) - District: McLaughlin - Current Function: Residential

The applicant was seeking approval to remove 32 existing wood windows and replace them with matching composite windows; one casement window in the kitchen and double hung windows on the front and back of the attic are also proposed to be replaced with composite windows but without grilles to match the existing windows. J. Pesch mentioned that he shared the additional photos and information he received with the board members prior to the meeting.

G. Borgman stated that this was a house he had been concerned about for a while. B. Mahaffey explained that he was not the owner of the house – he was the contractor – and that the owner was looking to rehabilitate the house in phases.

The board and applicant reviewed the windows proposed to be replaced, noting that the owner was not looking to replace anything that contained leaded glass, nor the windows on the enclosed front porch. B. Mahaffey added that the splits in the existing windows were very close to the proposed replacements and that he was trying to have them match within an inch or so of the original dimensions. Any windows that did not match were likely not original, including one casement window in the kitchen and the double hung windows on the front and back of the attic which all contained grilles. These windows were proposed to be replaced with windows without grilles, matching the typical splits found throughout the house.

B. Mahaffey stated that he was concerned about the second floor windows on the front of the house which abutted the porch roof. He explained that those windows barely had sills, and if new sills were to be added, they would need to be treated wood where they met the roof. The replacement windows would be installed from the interior so as to be minimally disruptive to the existing siding and trim, but those windows would require more attention – possibly aluminum wrap on replacement sills – to prevent future water damage. The board discussed how the connection between these window sills and the porch roof were currently addressed, then considered acceptable treatments going forward. S. Radtke explained that should the property owner want to replace rotted wooden window sills with replacement treated wood sills, the HDC would not need to formally approve that work, but he advised against wrapping treated wood with aluminum. The board chose to include language in the motion specific to wrapping and/or flashing these two window sills.

A motion that the HDC approve the request to remove 32 existing wood windows and replace them with matching composite windows with the exception of one casement window in the kitchen and double hung windows on the front and back of the attic which will be replaced with composite windows but without grilles to match the existing windows, and to wrap the bottom sashes of the two second-floor windows on the front (east) elevation with aluminum with the condition that the proper flashing is used, as long as the work meets all zoning requirements and the necessary permits are obtained was made by J. Huss, supported by K. George, and approved with S. Radtke, G. Borgman, T. Emory K. George, and J. Huss voting aye.

OTHER BUSINESS

Commercial Storefront Design Standards – Board members discussed potentially adopting design standards for commercial storefronts as the local standards did not address such situations. J. Pesch explained that the HDC’s local standards were focused primarily on residential buildings rather than commercial buildings. He shared examples of storefront design standards from other cities and noted that there were limited areas where these could be utilized in Muskegon’s historic districts – mainly on Western Avenue in the Clay-Western Historic District, a few other buildings scattered throughout the districts, and houses on Peck Street that were converted into commercial spaces.

The board discussed the standards that would be referenced in the case of new commercial buildings proposed in the historic districts. J. Pesch stated that the local standards’ Guidelines for New Construction provided a good base for the design of new buildings, but did not offer much guidance when it came to the level of detail contained in the design of a storefront. He added that the Form Based Code zoning regulations applied to most commercial areas in the historic districts, providing additional regulations for storefront design that the HDC could also rely on.

J. Pesch proposed that the board take some time to review the design standards used in other cities while considering how they could be applied to commercial storefronts in existing historic districts or areas that could potentially be included in a historic district in the future. The board planned to reconvene for a workshop in early 2024 where storefront design standards could be crafted to address the local context.

HDC Public Outreach/Realtors – J. Pesch shared the new, interactive historic district map on the City’s website. He noted that he worked on this with T. VanBruggen from Muskegon County GIS to replace the static map that had been used previously. This map allowed users to search by address or navigate the map to click on individual parcels. An additional layer of information tied to the former historic home plaque program was hidden by default to avoid creating possible confusion, but offered opportunities for further development with a revived plaque program.

G. Borgman explained that the Muskegon Chronicle created the former plaque program and that it was ultimately taken over by the Muskegon Heritage Association, which no longer existed; the program awarded “historic home” plaques as well as “historic building” plaques. J. Huss added that the museum still had the content from the program for reference, and it could be updated. The board discussed the possibility of reestablishing the plaque program and how it could contribute to the board’s public outreach efforts.

J. Pesch stated that discussion of hosting an informational meeting for area realtors would be delayed until D. Gregersen was in attendance, but noted that nine realtors were contacted in 2023 in response to sale listings that did not reference a house's location in a historic district. S. Radtke proposed that a welcome packet for new homeowners in the district be created to introduce people to the HDC and the relevant regulations. J. Pesch said that something similar was done when the City built and sold the Midtown Square houses on Houston and Monroe, but that it could be difficult to get the packets into the hands of all area realtors without distributing them via a centralized source for all area realtors.

K. George mentioned that street sign toppers were another way that the board had discussed making the historic district locations more visible. G. Borgman asked if there were any grants that could assist with paying for such signs. J. Pesch explained that he had started looking into the locations of existing street signs where it would make sense to add a topper, but that he needed to finalize those locations; he added that it may be possible that a CLG grant could help pay for the signs if they could not be budgeted by the City. The board considered different options for historic district signs, discussing the positives and negatives of various sign types.

Denial Motions – To aid in enforcement (when necessary) of the HDC's rulings, J. Pesch requested that the board issue a denial motion prior to an approval motion for any case in which the approval differs from an applicant's original request. He stated that this was typically the approach used in the past, but the board had gotten away from the practice more recently.

2023 CLG Annual Report – J. Pesch explained that the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) requires all Certified Local Government (CLG) communities submit an annual report to be in good standing and remain eligible for grant funding and technical assistance activities. The board reviewed the previous year's report and provided input on some of the open-ended responses that J. Pesch could incorporate into the 2023 report.

ADJOURN

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 5:18 p.m.