

CITY OF MUSKEGON
HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION
SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES

February 27, 2025

S. Radtke called the meeting to order at 4:00 p.m. and roll was taken.

MEMBERS PRESENT: S. Radtke, G. Borgman, J. Huss, C. Davis, K. Kochin, D. Gregersen

MEMBERS ABSENT: None

STAFF PRESENT: J. Pesch

OTHERS PRESENT: None

This meeting was called to review the HDC's preservation goals as they related to the responses in the 2024 CLG Annual Report.

OTHER BUSINESS

2025 Historic Preservation Goals – J. Pesch explained that the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) requires that 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. He shared the summarized responses to the questions from the annual report that he had already received from some board members to serve as a starting point for further conversation.

What are Muskegon's top historic preservation goals for 2025?

- 1) Increase awareness of Muskegon's local historic districts within the community through direct mailings to property owners within the districts and city-wide newsletters containing info on historic districts and HDC procedures. Present to Neighborhood Associations on the same.

The HDC agreed that this was a critical first step to gauge the public's reaction to the historic districts and the HDC, and one that should be undertaken prior to any updates to the districts. J. Pesch explained that the mailings would be sent out in phases over the coming months. The HDC members discussed the ongoing need to educate property owners within the districts and how such efforts were critical to building support before considering the creation of any new districts. If there was sufficient interest following the mailings, the HDC could host an open house meeting to share information and meet with the general public.

- 2) Apply to the SHPO Community Partnership Program to complete a survey of historic resources for one (or more) of Muskegon's existing historic districts.

J. Pesch reviewed the process of creating new local historic districts, changing the boundaries of the existing districts, or eliminating existing historic districts. He noted that a historic preservation consultant would likely be hired to complete a historic resource survey due to staff time limitations. The HDC asked about a variety of different areas in the city that could be candidates for local historic districts, and J. Pesch mentioned that they had previously shown interest in the properties between the existing Clinton-Peck and Jefferson Historic

Districts. He also noted that Muskegon's historic district boundaries were last substantially changed in the 1980s, and that a reevaluation of the current boundaries was overdue.

J. Pesch shared an example from the recently completed Architectural Survey of African American Civil Rights Resources in Muskegon County. The Report called for a potential National Register Historic District in a portion of the Jackson Hill Neighborhood. Such a district would not require the same level of design review as the city's existing local historic districts, but would serve primarily as an honorary designation, honoring the area's historic significance without placing additional regulations on properties within it. Eligibility for federal funding would be another benefit that would come with listing in the National Register; the former Froebel School in Jackson Hill was used as an example of a project that could benefit from federal funding for historic preservation.

- 3) Remain a resource for others to understand the history of our city and maintain relationships with other local organizations that share similar purposes.

J. Pesch stated that this topic previously centered on a social media presence with the creation of a Facebook page, but acknowledged that little attention had been paid to it since it was created. The HDC noted that there were a few history-focused private Facebook pages where posts could also be shared. J. Pesch highlighted the existing relationships with, among others, the Hackley Public Library, Lakeshore Museum Center, and Muskegon County Genealogical Society noting that continuing to strengthen those was important.

Further discussion included providing resources to property owners seeking to complete improvements to their homes. J. Pesch explained the resources that he usually shared as well as the financial incentives that were typically available to property owners looking to complete work.

The HDC also showed interest in serving as a resource for owners of historic homes that were not currently located in local historic districts. They discussed possibly presenting to the Neighborhood Associations of Muskegon (NAM) at one of their monthly meetings along with the two Neighborhood Associations that contained local historic districts. J. Pesch added that he was working with the City's Community Engagement staff to include a short write-up on the historic districts and HDC in the Connect Muskegon spring newsletter that would be mailed to all city residents.

What is one thing you would like the new CLG coordinator to understand about your community and local preservation activities/needs?

The HDC focused on the range of abilities and financial resources of property owners in the historic districts and the difficulties that can come along with upholding their local standards. There was an interest in how other communities deal with similar struggles, and it was suggested that some type of roundtable meetings could be held to allow Commissioners from HDCs across the state to interact, share experiences, and exchange ideas. J. Pesch noted that he would share this with the SHPO.

What accomplishment/achievement/event from 2024 is your HDC most proud of? Or is there a preservation success story from your community that you would like to highlight?

The Nelson House was highlighted as a success story from the past year, and J. Pesch stated that he would share photos of the move with the SHPO. The HDC also discussed the ongoing rehabilitation of the former Hackley School, but determined that this could be a project to highlight once it was complete. Also reserved for the 2025 report was the ongoing restoration of the former First Church of Christ Scientist at 280 W. Muskegon Avenue.

Describe any problems, issues, or challenges (e.g., economic, political, operational) encountered in the local preservation program in 2024.

Having already identified broader challenges that may be shared by other HDCs, discussion focused on the more specific issue of the recent lack of available, non-vinyl, alternate siding materials. It was hoped that other HDCs could share products/suppliers that they knew of.

What are the most critical preservation issues/needs facing your community?

The HDC discussed difficulties faced in dealing with a growing number of resources within historic districts owned by outside investors. It was agreed that conveying the importance of historic preservation to individuals that tend to view properties as investments challenged the task of conveying the relevance of historic preservation to local residents.

ADJOURN

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 5:10 p.m.