

**MINUTES**  
**December 9, 2002**  
**Historic Preservation Commission**  
**City of Batavia**

**1. CALL TO ORDER**

Chairman Vasilion called the meeting to order at 5:40 p.m. at the Depot Museum.

**2. ROLL CALL**

**Members present:** Vasilion, Hoefler, Bell, Fessler, and LaLonde

**Members absent:** None

**Also present:** Kai Tarum, Community Development Director; Mary Ann Monzani, Administrative Aide; Kathy Montanari, Recording Secretary (left at 6:50 p.m.); Carla Hill, Depot Museum Director; Chris Winter, Depot Museum Coordinator (Hill and Winter left after Item 5)

**3. ITEMS REMOVED/ADDED/CHANGED**

None.

**4. APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

**MOTION:** To approve the November 25, 2002 Historic Preservation Commission Minutes

**MAKER:** Hoefler

**SECOND:** LaLonde

**VOTE:** 5/AYES 0/NAYS, MOTION CARRIED

**5. PRESENTATION AND WORK SESSION WITH HISTORICAL SOCIETY**

Tarum noted that Hill was instrumental to the passage of the Historic Preservation Ordinance.

Vasilion explained the Historic Preservation Committee (HPC) sees its role not only to enforce the ordinance, but also to educate the public and build relationships with other organizations with more experience. He hopes to find out what the HPC members can do to support the Historical Society's efforts, and the Historical Society's interest in assisting the HPC. Tonight's meeting is the first of many that will be scheduled with various organizations.

Hill stated that she is the director of the Depot Museum, and Winter coordinates the Museum's programs and exhibits. They work hand-in-hand with the Batavia Historical Society. The museum is owned and operated by the Batavia Park District, but is a cooperative effort between that entity and the Historical Society. Hill works for both boards at providing direction, as well as assisting with fundraising for the Historical Society. The Society owns the artifacts at the Museum, provides volunteers for the museum and research center, and also provides preservation materials. The Society has the ability to receive certain grants, whereas the Park District, in many cases, cannot. Conversely, the Park

District has the ability to apply for certain grants from the federal and state government. The museum has been open for almost 27 years.

Hill said she and Winter would like to provide the HPC with any information it needs as it begins its work. There is a great deal of information available from the research center, and the volunteers are well versed in the history of Batavia. The museum has a full photographic collection of many residences and buildings.

Hill explained that she worked with Lane Allen on the survey and most of the photographs in the survey were from the museum's collection. She is willing to provide any kind of assistance the HPC needs.

Vasilion asked how complete the downtown photographic records are, and Winter said they include most of Wilson Street and parts of Batavia Avenue. Many of the photographs go back to the 1860s.

Hill noted that the museum continually finds new sources for photographs it doesn't already have in its collection and often receives gifts of photographs from estates and family collections. The research center itself is about two years old and was built with a combination of grants.

Hoefler explained the subgroups the HPC has formed to begin accomplishing its work. Hill commented that she believed the educational component will be very important since people are wary of how the ordinance will impact their property.

Hill said the Historical Society has a plaquing program, but it doesn't have any "teeth." The only requirement for receiving a plaque is proof the building is over one hundred years old. Winter said the museum's listing contains about 35-40 properties, but records are not complete. The Society also has a slide presentation of plaqued homes.

In response to a question from Vasilion, Hill explained that the residential photography records in the collection are not as extensive. There are many more photographic records of the downtown area. Local historian Marilyn Robinson Research has done comprehensive research into a number of homes, and has published several books about historic Batavia.

As the HPC establishes how it wants to proceed, the Depot Museum will be able to determine how it can assist.

The research center has written histories for certain buildings, and the Historical Society's newsletters also contain a great deal of information. Hill said Marilyn Robinson was able to save original probate records before the County destroyed them. These old records are frequently used for research.

Vasilion noted that he had earlier been asked by Tarum to review the Blaine Street School since it is facing zoning and adaptive reuse issues. She would like an analysis and recommendation from the HPC for that property.

Hill said that materials could be copied for the HPC. She is at the depot museum every weekday from 8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. and can also be available at other times. Hill will arrange to have the HPC meet with Marilyn Robinson or Gary King, if desired.

Tarum noted a public misconception that there are restrictions associated with having a plaqued home.

Tarum believed the Historical Society may be able to suggest which residential areas should be reviewed first, outside of the downtown. LaLonde added that the HPC is also interested in structures with a history of being associated with important people or events.

Hill confirmed that she would be interested in giving input and providing resources when the HPC begins to define downtown and residential districts.

Winter explained that the museum has 95 volunteers, and Society membership is over 500. Average age of the volunteers is 80-85, so they are often able to identify buildings and people in old pictures. Hill said the Society has been preparing oral histories with many of Batavia's older residents.

Tarum explained that once districts and landmarks are in place, there will be applications for rezoning or conditional uses for which the Plan Commission must hold Public Hearings. The Plan Commission will rely on the HPC to prepare a recommendation for landmarked buildings or those within a historic district. Regarding the Blaine Street School, she is not requesting it be landmarked, but rather the HPC make a recommendation as to whether it should be preserved. As background, it was formerly a schoolhouse in a residentially zoned neighborhood. The current owner wants to convert it to an office building, which would not be allowed, so he must request a variance or rezoning. The City Attorney has advised that if the City can show a good reason, such as the need to preserve a building in a town with a preservation ordinance, a case could stand up in court. The HPC would be the appropriate body to undertake an objective review. For example, if the HPC recommends for preservation reasons that the building should be saved and needs to be rezoned, the Plan Commission can make the rezoning conditional upon preservation of the building. The owners have stated they would be willing to tear down the building.

Bell asked how the neighbors feel about this issue, and Tarum said most would like to see the building preserved and have some of the asphalt removed. The present office tenant has a small staff, but zoning goes with the property. A local developer looked at making the building into condos, but it was not economically feasible. No formal plans have been submitted yet, but staff believes it would be best for the City to approach the neighbors.

Hoeffler questioned if it would be possible to schedule a walk-through inside the Blaine Street School, and Tarum said she could make arrangements after the holidays.

Vasilion asked about Hill's interest in historic preservation, and Hill said she began working at the museum in 1976 as temporary job. Her love of Batavia has grown from there. She wants to see Batavia to continue to have a high regard for its homes and structures and believes it has done a very good job keeping true to its history. Much of that can be credited to Mayor Schielke and others with a passion for history.

Winter explained that she moved to Batavia in 1981 and began working for the museum about 11 years ago. She started working with the exhibits and her interest led to a more in-depth role. The museum's relationship with the school district has produced a strong local history educational program in Batavia. She reviewed plans for upcoming programs the museum would like to achieve in that area.

Members of the commission thanked Hill and Winter for attending the meeting.

## **6. REPORT ON GOALS AND OBJECTIVES**

### **A. Identification of Buildings and Historic District: LaLonde**

LaLonde reported that he and Fessler reviewed information from Lane Allen and then took a drive-around tour to approximate a reasonable boundary. He then distributed a map that showed a possible downtown district, which also includes Wilson Street up to Prairie, along with parts of North and South Batavia Avenue (commercial property) and the river.

The commission must discuss defining this area and determine what information is still needed.

Fessler indicated he has been sorting some of the information from Allen and has discovered materials that would be helpful to the other commissioners.

LaLonde explained the red outline on his map is the proposed downtown historic district. He still wants to clarify the boundaries of TIF #3, however. Monzani said that commissioners were given the boundaries of TIF #1 and TIF #2 in previous materials, but if anyone needs it resent please advise her.

Bell said Allen recommended the initial historic district include an overlay of all limestone buildings in Batavia.

LaLonde said the yellow boundary on his map indicates residential areas with enough historical structures to potentially warrant an extended boundary. Of course, it will need more discussion and review since the area is quite large and

includes about 500 properties. This would also significantly increase the number of man-hours needed to complete surveys.

Fessler commented that his research of other communities indicated they started with a smaller core section of town with multiple historic districts within that area. Perhaps this would be the best approach here.

LaLonde believed the downtown area should be the initial focus for a historic district.

Vasilion asked if the commissioners were in agreement that it would be best to focus on the downtown district first. Hoefler favored this approach, as the community may more readily identify with that area.

LaLonde asked if there would be any reason the commission could not redefine or expand boundaries, and Vasilion said there were none. LaLonde said he wants to be well positioned before designating boundaries. There is already an expectation that the downtown will be defined at some level.

Fessler said residents of a particular area might even request their area be considered for a district.

Bell asked about consent requirements, and Monzani said residents would have to present a position with two-thirds of the property owners supportive. A district does not have to be contiguous, or adjacent, to another historic district.

Vasilion suggested that the map be identified as an "area of study" since there is no foundation upon which to make an official recommendation yet. The boundary will shrink or expand as the commission studies it further.

LaLonde said he and Fessler will determine what information is available, by address, and then begin to complete documentation for the balance of the buildings in the defined downtown district.

Vasilion asked if commissioners wanted to establish a regular Saturday working time, and it was the consensus that this should be done. Hoefler would be available on Saturdays after spring break.

LaLonde felt it would be advantageous to invite Alderman Miller, Lane Allen, and Becky Hoag to a work session and have them explain the materials in the binder. A tentative date of Saturday, January 11, from 8:30-11:30 a.m. was proposed for this meeting. Monzani will make arrangements. She explained that meetings of more than two commissioners must be posted at least 48 hours in advance by law. Vasilion volunteered use of his office for the meeting. Monzani will also see if Tarum is available since she may also be able to provide information that was obtained for the facade improvement program. Monzani recommended that one official database be used for all information. She will also begin inputting survey

data after commissioners have reviewed the survey notebooks, and then a decision can be made regarding additional fields needed.

Commissioners decided to hold regular work sessions and enlist some of the volunteers to assist.

### **B. Development of Procedures and Standards – Bell**

Bell said he is generally available for meetings during evenings and weekends.

Fessler mentioned that he found design guidelines for a downtown historic district in the Batavia MainStreet Program files from Lane Allen. He distributed a draft copy to Bell.

After a quick review of the document, Bell said most of the items on the draft coincided with items he had also identified.

Bell explained that most preservation commissions have a packet of information that includes introductory information, architectural styles common in the community, and several other characteristics encountered in a project under the application for a certificate of appropriateness (additions, new buildings, all projects, and signage).

Bell said handouts could be made as elaborate as the commission wants, and many communities use illustrations for awnings, signage, entrances, etc. He asked Monzani if the commission could hire an illustrator.

Hoefler noted that there is a Xerox design system in his school system. Many local businesses in that community use students in the high school graphic arts classes since the equipment is state of the art. When the commission begins to compile the brochure, he can approach the district about a cost and the type of software they use. Monzani reported that her department can use Publisher, but capabilities are limited.

Vasilion and Bell will meet to review information gathered thus far and come back to the full commission for discussion.

### **C. Monitoring of Projects Impacting Historic District – Fessler**

No new information to report at this time.

### **D. Public Relations – Hoefler**

Hoefler distributed a first draft of a mission statement. Commissioners can review it for discussion at the next meeting.

Hoefler is going to meet with the City's web site coordinator to discuss adding a link to a web page for the HPC. He will also contact the web designer at his school district to get ideas and find out how to begin work on a site. During a recent visit to Lemont, he observed signage in their downtown that identifies it as a historic district; he will begin to explore different options for signage. Hoefler is also going to collect brochures or models for materials the commission will be preparing.

Hoefler reported that he would be unable to attend the December 23 meeting due to a work schedule conflict.

Commissioners requested that Monzani schedule a meeting with MainStreet, to be followed by meetings with Elgin and St. Charles. These should not be held at consecutive meetings.

Vasilion informed the commissioners that he had recently met with Alderman Hart, Chairman of the Civic Improvements Committee. Hart is primarily concerned with the downtown district, and said several facade grant applications are pending. He is anxious to have the commission review facade grant rules and make any suggested changes. The commission should be in a position to review applications when they are received. Monzani explained that the facade review program runs on a calendar year, so if an application is received in 2002, it is earmarked for 2002 funds. She is not involved in the processing procedure, but thought there would not be a long carry-over into 2003.

Fessler said Allen had informed him of two applications coming up on the 17<sup>th</sup>. Monzani said she was not yet aware of those applications. The paperwork is submitted to the Community Development Department. There have been inquiries about 4 East Wilson, but no official submissions were received. Vasilion said he will contact Allen about the process for handling those applications and go over it with Monzani.

Vasilion said Hart also emphasized the HPC must be prepared to distinguish the difference between maintenance and improvements with respect to the facade improvements.

## **7. SCHEDULING OF MEETINGS AND WORK SESSIONS**

Vasilion said he'd like to review materials the Depot Museum's Research Center has on the Blaine Street School on Saturday, December 14. Monzani requested that commissioners advise her any time more than two of them will be meeting so public notifications can be made.

The next Historic Preservation Commission meeting will be held December 23, 2002.

**8. OTHER**

None.

**9. ADJOURNMENT**

A motion was made and seconded to adjourn the meeting at 7:15 p.m.

Minutes prepared by  
Kathy Montanari