

CITY OF MESA
MINUTES OF THE
HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMITTEE

DATE: August 9, 2001 **TIME:** 6:00 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Chair Victor Linoff
David Dean
Vince Anderson
Pat Mendivil
Christi Miller
Lori Osiecki
Tracy Wright Wagner

STAFF PRESENT

Kathy Guthmiller
Greg Marek
Amy Morales

OTHERS PRESENT

Debbie Abele
Caryol Gebhardt
Cindy Kustwan
Heather Scantlebury

1. Call to Order

The August 9, 2001 Regular Meeting of the Historic Preservation Committee was called to order at 6:02 p.m.

2. Consider Minutes of July 12, 2001 Regular Meeting

It was moved by Pat Mendivil, seconded by Vince Anderson, to RECOMMEND APPROVAL OF THE July 12, 2001 Minutes, as amended.

**Vote: 7 in favor
0 opposed**

3. Items from Citizens Present (no action to be taken)

No items from citizens present.

4. Discuss Comments on Historic Preservation Plan

Mr. Greg Marek noted that Staff, Historic District neighborhood representatives, and focus group members have had the opportunity to review the Historic Preservation Plan. Few comments were received; the overall impression of the Plan was very good.

Ms. Debbie Abele suggested the following three categories be addressed:

1. Format (page numbering, layout, darkness of type/font, etc.)
2. Content (necessary areas included and explained properly)
3. Spelling/typing errors

Historic Preservation Committee members presented comments and suggestions about the Historic Preservation Plan to be integrated with the final draft.

Some of the comments included:

- Using the wording “non-residential structures” instead of “commercial structures” to maintain consistency
- Spelling out acronyms that may be unfamiliar to the public
- Listing names of focus group participants in Appendix
- Noting that it is a 5-year plan
- Emphasizing the IMMEDIATE need for a full time staff position in the Historic Preservation Office
- Referencing specific items in the index, such as studies & actions
- Compiling a summary/“To Do” list of recommendations
- Notate a need to investigate the adoption of amendments to the Building Code that would govern the rehabilitation of properties

5. Discuss and Consider Adaptive Reuse of the Current Mesa Arts Center Building (Irving School) located at 155 N Center Street

Mr. Marek updated Committee members on adaptive reuse possibilities of the current Mesa Arts Center building (Irving School), referring to a fact sheet that was handed out.

The preferred use would be as incubator space for arts groups. Staff has talked about having a non-profit organization be the property manager, with the City maintaining ownership of the building.

Housing for Mesa (HFM) has expressed interest in being the property manager. This organization, since it is non-profit, would be eligible for grants and loans that could be used for the renovation of the building.

Mr. Marek suggested an outline be drafted of what the Historic Preservation Committee would like to see happen to the building, and Ms. Gerry Gerber (City of Mesa Arts & Cultural Director) will take Committee member comments to the Museum and Cultural Advisory Board. If both boards feel it is a worthwhile project, a Request for Qualifications (RFQ) would be issued. Staff

has discussed the possibility of a Cultural and Technology District in the downtown area.

Chair Victor Linoff stated that reasons for saving the building must be clearly established, and suggestions for adaptive reuse should be compiled. Also, structural components need to be analyzed (e.g., what would need to be done to the building to make it suitable for leasing).

Mr. Marek stated that he and Ms. Gerry Gerber have discussed first coming up with a Request for Qualifications, then presenting it before the Historic Preservation Committee and the Museum and Cultural Board to see what level of interest is generated.

Mr. Vince Anderson agreed that the process needs to start now, and that working on a Request for Qualifications was an excellent idea. The City Council will be looking to the Historic Preservation Committee and the Museum and Cultural Board to come up with recommendations.

Mr. David Dean asked if a subcommittee of Historic Preservation members would be working more closely with Staff in the steps to be taken after the Request for Qualifications has been completed.

Mr. Marek responded that workgroups of two could be utilized.

Ms. Caryol Gebhardt (Mesa Encore Theatre) addressed the Committee and asked if plans for refurbishing the Mesa Encore Theatre with a different theme would be acceptable, taking into consideration the City's Performing Arts Center and rent prices. Ms. Gebhardt noted that they are trying to keep their theatre prices affordable. She expressed interest in their organization managing the building and having it available for lectures and other groups, and wanted to make sure this use would be compatible with what the City intended.

Mr. Marek said that the theatre could be multi-purpose, but should have one property manager.

Chair Linoff recommended that Ms. Gebhardt put any ideas and suggestions in writing, and send them to the Historic Preservation Office and to the Arts and Cultural Division.

Mr. Dean encouraged Ms. Gebhardt's organization to submit an application once the Request for Qualifications is formalized.

Chair Linoff added that if another organization ended up being the facility manager, the Mesa Encore Theatre could still share the building as a tenant/partner.

Mr. Dean noted that the building plans should be available at the Arizona Historical Society for anyone interested in renovating the building.

Mr. Dean asked if the Committee wanted to take any action to form a workgroup at this time.

Ms. Christi Miller questioned what the next step would be after the Request for Qualifications is presented to the Historic Preservation Committee in September.

Mr. Marek clarified that both the Historic Preservation Committee and the Museum and Cultural Board would review the Request for Qualifications. If approved, it would be presented to the General Development Committee and City Council.

Mr. Marek distinguished between a "Request for Qualifications" and a "Request for Proposals." A Request for Proposals would be issued to candidates that have been deemed qualified through the Request for Qualifications process.

Chair Linoff suggested having a joint meeting of the boards responsible for making the recommendation. Out of those boards, a workgroup could be established to further collaborate if necessary.

Mr. Dean recommended forming an "Irving School sub-work group" that would be readily available.

Mr. Anderson noted that the work group should include members from the Arts and Cultural Board as well as the Historic Preservation Committee.

Mr. Marek stated that he would talk about the workgroup and joint meeting ideas with Ms. Gerry Gerber, and then discuss a course of action at the September Historic Preservation Committee meeting.

6. Update on the Relocation of the Mitten House and the Pomeroy House

Mr. Marek informed Committee members that the project is going forward.

Mr. Tony Felice is working with the Real Estate Division, providing them with any necessary information.

The contractor is on hold until after the school sessions begin, so more progress should be made after September.

7. Discuss New Jersey Rehabilitation Code

Committee members received a packet of information concerning the New Jersey Rehabilitation Code. Several Committee members were able to attend the presentation given by Mr. Bill Connolly (author of the Code).

Mr. Marek summarized that New Jersey had the same problem that most cities face with older buildings: it is less expensive to leave these older buildings vacant and dilapidated than it is to rehabilitate them to be in compliance with current building codes, which are designed for new construction.

New Jersey introduced a code (which has been recognized with national awards) to address these issues. The New Jersey Rehabilitation Code has been in existence for about 3 ½ years, and has proven success with statistical results. Prior to the adoption of the code, about 15% of building permits were for rehabilitation. The year after the code was adopted, 60% of the building permits were for rehabilitation. The cost savings was estimated to be from between 10% – 40%.

The New Jersey Rehabilitation Code would pertain to existing buildings, including historic buildings. The code is broken down into sections, which makes it easy to use. The code is geared for predictability and proportionality. The New Jersey code is based on the BOCA code, which is different from the ICBO and the Uniform Building Code (currently used by the City of Mesa). A list of suggested changes has been compiled for the New Jersey code to make it consistent with the Uniform Building Code (UBC). So far, no cities utilizing the UBC have adopted the New Jersey Rehabilitation Code. A lot of city Building Departments have been resistant to adopting this code.

Several surrounding communities showed interest in the New Jersey Rehabilitation Code by attending the presentation given by Mr. Connolly.

Mr. Marek suggested forming a task force that would look at the New Jersey Code's applicability to the City of Mesa. The task force should be comprised not only of City staff, but also of outside sources such as architects, contractors, and others involved in rehabilitating existing buildings. Each of the New Jersey Code's suggested amendments could be analyzed individually to determine if it applies to Mesa.

The Building Department has already formed an internal team to look at amendments to the Building Code that would address existing buildings, but the team is not specifically looking at the New Jersey Code.

Mr. Marek stated that he brought this issue up at a Land Development Team meeting, and an agenda item will be added for the next meeting to discuss the process of how existing buildings are addressed. The Building Department will play the lead role.

Mr. Marek suggested that a definite time frame is needed to go through the process. The amendments would not only affect historic buildings, but also other existing buildings throughout the community.

It was noted by Mr. Marek that the Economic Development Division and Mesa Town Center Corporation are very supportive of examining the possibility of integrating the New Jersey Rehabilitation Code into the City of Mesa's Building Code.

Mr. Anderson recounted a personal experience in which difficulties were encountered in remodeling a church. A building permit was already acquired, but since the project was taking some time, the inspectors kept changing the rules. With amendments in place such as the New Jersey Rehabilitation Code, this type of problem could be averted.

Chair Linoff said he felt Mr. Connolly's presentation was very impressive, and believes Mr. Connolly is right when he suggests that the building codes are designed for new buildings. Chair Linoff noted that rehabilitation of historic properties and existing buildings should make more economic sense.

Mr. Marek stated that according to Mr. Connolly, the biggest obstacle faced when implementing something like this is inertia.

8. Director's Report

Mr. Marek informed Committee members that the next City Council meeting is August 27th. The ordinance to designate the Robson Historic District as a Local Historic District will be introduced.

Mr. Marek noted that Ms. Virginia Aguero and Ms. Barb Atkinson have raised the necessary funds to begin the National Register designation process for the Expanded West 2nd Street and Robson Historic Districts.

Mr. Marek acknowledged that the Historic Preservation Committee Handbooks are in the process of being updated.

Historic Preservation Committee members watched a short video entitled "*Covering Mesa: Historic Preservation*," produced by Mesa Channel 11.

Committee members appreciated the recognition of preservation efforts.

9. Committee Member Comments and Questions and Future Agenda Items

Mr. Anderson relayed a conversation he had with Councilmember Walters, in which she noted that, in regards to protecting historic buildings, Historic Preservation Committee members need to be proactive to the City Council.

Chair Linoff briefly addressed the forthcoming challenge of dealing with post-war homes.

Mr. Marek said that the Fraser neighborhood has expressed interest in going through the Historic District designation process. Mr. Marek informed them it would need to be an organized neighborhood effort.

Committee members discussed the possibility of training residents on how to go about filling out the survey sheets and going through the process to apply for Historic District designation.

Ms. Miller suggested the possibility of partnering with the Neighborhood Services Office in these efforts.

Ms. Miller noted that there are more tax incentives in the Wilbur Historic District neighborhood for low income and seniors than there are for historic preservation. After looking at the County records for homeowners on her street, Ms. Miller found only two that had applied for the tax incentive. Ms. Miller said that people seem to be overly concerned about the tax incentive impact.

Chair Linoff added he is looking into this issue. He said that the concern expressed by Mayor Hawker and Councilmember Walters is when there is a property tax reduction for historic properties, it takes money away from schools. Chair Linoff noted he wasn't sure if this was the case, but even if it were, property values tend to increase, which would offset any losses. Also, it is for a 15-year period.

Mr. Marek recognized that only a few people take advantage of the tax incentive. Documentation has shown Historic District property value

increasing from 10%-40%, which would offset losses. If the homeowner does apply for the tax incentive, a contract must be signed with the County Assessor stating that the property will be maintained to keep its historic integrity for the duration of the 15-year reduction. From what has been seen, any impact to school districts has been minimal.

10. Adjournment

8:12 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Gregory J. Marek, Historic Preservation Officer
Minutes prepared by Kathy Guthmiller