

**City of Merrill
Historic Preservation Committee
Thursday, April 8th, 2021 at 5:15 P.M.
City Hall Common Council Chambers, 1004 East First Street**

Voting Members Present (5 of 5): Jeremy Thompson, Alderman Steve Sabatke, Elizabeth McCrank, Bea Lebal and Alderman Paul Russell.

Others meeting attendees (either in-person or remotely) included: City Administrator Dave Johnson, Building Inspector/Zoning Administrator Darin Pagel, City Attorney Tom Hayden, I/T Manager Dustin Brown, Heather O'Neill, Michael Caylor, Tina Scott (arr. 5:31 – Remote) and City Clerk Bill Heideman. Merrill Productions was present to videotape the meeting.

Call to order

Alderman Russell called the meeting to order at 5:16 P.M.

Minutes of previous meetings

City Clerk Heideman requested that he be allowed to amend the February 22nd, 2021 minutes to include Tina Scott as an attendee. Without objection, it was so ordered.

Motion (Sabatke/Thompson) to approve the February 17th, 2021 minutes, the February 22nd, 2021 minutes (as amended) and the March 11th, 2021 minutes. Carried.

Discuss policies and procedures for new nominations of historic structures

Building Inspector/Zoning Administrator Pagel stated that the fundamental question to address is the intent of the committee on designating historic structures. Does the committee want to designate structures without the owner's consent?

Alderman Sabatke stated that he is not in favor of "subjecting" property owners to designation. He then cited a list of potential historic structures. This list was created in 1992. He urged that the list be updated and then used a tool for considering future designations. Twelve (12) properties per year can be added to the list. The last time the list had addition(s) was in 2011. All properties on the list were included at the request of the property owners.

Alderman Russell urged that the list be updated regularly.

Discussion was then held on building demolition policies.

Bea Lebal raised the question of whether commercial buildings should be included as potential historic structures.

Elizabeth McCrank suggested caution if/when the ordinances are updated, in order to encourage attracting property owners for potential historic designations.

Alderman Russell reported that City Attorney Hayden is drafting an ordinance for consideration. The ordinance would expand the Historic Preservation Committee to include more members.

Jeremy Thompson issued a reminder that, while the Historic Preservation Committee can recommend historic designations, the City Plan Commission has the authority to make the final decision.

City Attorney Hayden suggested the possibility of the joint meeting (Historic Preservation Committee & City Plan Commission) to discuss these issues.

Alderman Sabatke suggested that, as a starting point, the committee should consider a limited number of properties (12 to 20) for designation. Properties to be considered should be “high-profile” properties.

Bea Lebal stated that she is hesitant to recommend designating additional properties at this time. It seems to her that the committee is currently five people with five different ideas. She would like to see the committee take a “step back”, analyze the current situation and establish some clear goals before moving forward.

Building Inspector/Zoning Administrator Pagel again stated that the crucial unanswered question is related to the committee’s intent. He suggested that something as simple as changing “shall” to “may” at several places in the ordinance as a possibility.

No action was taken.

Discussion on historic preservation standards

Due to time constraints, this agenda item was not discussed. It will be placed on the next meeting agenda.

Public Comment Period

Michael Caylor thanked the committee for restarting to address historic issues. He hopes that consideration be given to putting procedures in place to, in some manner, honor famous Merrill citizens of the past.

Heather O’Neill stated that she is opposed to changing “shall” to “may” several times in the ordinances related to historic preservation. In her opinion, the City needs to get “tougher”, not weaker, on matters of historic preservation. She urged the City and the Merrill Historical Society to work together.

Establish date, time and location of next meeting

Thursday, May 13th, 2021 at 5:15 P.M. in the City Hall Common Council Chambers.

Adjournment

Motion (Sabatke/Thompson) to adjourn. Carried. Adjourned at 6:03 P.M.

Minutes prepared and submitted by:

William N. Heideman CMC, WCMC
City Clerk