

**City of Merrill
Historic Preservation Committee
Monday, February 22, 2021 at 6:00 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.

Other meeting attendees (either in-person or remotely) included: City Administrator Dave Johnson, Building Inspector/Zoning Administrator Darin Pagel, City Attorney Tom Hayden, Information Technology Manager Dustin Brown, Alderman Steve Hass, Alderman Mike Rick, Alderman Mark Weix, Alderman Rick Blake, Alderman Steve Osness, Keith Boyce, Rose Ponko, Emily Peterson, Sabrina Wagner, Patti Wendt, Chris Vorpapel, Laurie Thiel, Martha Bergh, Amanda Wegner, Delmar Polak, Sue Tesch, Lucas Tesch, Erin McCarthy, Scott Gomoll, Jack Froom, Marinella Froom, Calvin Callahan, Meagan Schafer, Linda Tryczak, Matthew Kloth, Sherry Heath, Peter Breitwisch, Tina Scott and City Clerk Bill Heideman. Merrill Productions was present to videotape the meeting.

Call to order

Alderman Russell called the meeting to order at 6:01 P.M.

Preliminary Hearing on Historic Structure designation of T.B. Scott Mansion

Motion (Russell/Sabatke) to designate the T.B. Scott Mansion, 501 S. Center Avenue, as a City of Merrill Historic Structure.

City Administrator Johnson read a statement submitted by the Holy Cross Sisters. The letter stated that their research did not indicate that any records/documents included language prohibiting demolition of the mansion.

Sue Tesch mentioned that the mansion is a unique and historic building. She reported that a petition to save the mansion currently contains in excess of 2,400 signatures.

Sherry Heath stated that, if the mansion is demolished, we will be losing a part of history. If possible, she hopes the mansion is saved.

City Administrator Johnson reported on the status of mansion demolition. There is no longer heat in the building, and demolition is well underway.

Matthew Kloth stated his hope that at least portion(s) of the mansion could be preserved.

Jack Froom questioned whether all avenues to save the mansion have been explored.

Sabrina Wagner reported that the City of Wausau made three houses out of a mansion. If the entire mansion cannot be saved, she hopes portions of it can be salvaged.

Emily Peterson urged anyone that has the power to save the mansion to do so.

Keith Boyce stated that the mansion is a part of Merrill's legend. He sees no positive aspect to demolishing the mansion. In his opinion, the mansion somewhat belongs to the entire community, and preserving artifacts from the mansion is not the same as preserving the entire structure.

Peter Breitwisch observed that the mansion is not the only component that makes up Merrill.

Alderman Steve Osness stated his fear that there has been a lack of transparency by City administration. Discussion were held between the hospital and the City administration, but the Common Council members were "kept in the dark" on the results of those discussions. Realistically, he does not think that the mansion can be saved. He stressed that we need to determine how and why this happened, and he urged that an investigation be held to answer those questions.

Tina Scott reported that the Wisconsin Historic Trust Preservation (Madison) is willing to come to Merrill and do 3D scanning of the mansion. There would be no cost, and the scanning would not alter the structure in any way. The result would be a three-dimensional representation of the mansion.

Patti Wendt stated that, while she would prefer to see the mansion preserved, she questioned whether it would be financially possible and practical to do so.

Sabrina Wagner stated that she would like to see the 3D scanning project be approved and completed. She also suggested that volunteers would be willing to help save the mansion.

Sherry Heath raised the question of the Merrill Historical Society's position. Merrill Historical Society President Bea Lebal responded that, based on City Attorney Hayden's legal opinion, it would not be appropriate to comment at this time.

Sue Tesch mentioned that "This Old House" has expressed interest in helping preserve the mansion.

Michelle Salter stated that there was a great deal of misinformation and outcry on social media on the mansion, and she suggested that the City could have been more transparent on this issue.

Alderman Russell declared the public hearing closed.

City Attorney Hayden reminded everyone that, if the motion to designate is approved, the next step would be a public hearing as part of a City Plan Commission meeting. The scheduling of that meeting would be subject to notice of public hearing publishing timeframes.

Jeremy Thompson remarked that the owner of the mansion does not want any historic designation for the mansion. Alderman Russell responded by asking if this has been confirmed.

Alderman Sabatke stated that, in his opinion, the motion to designate the mansion a historic structure is “too little, too late”. Communication from City administration has been very bad, in his opinion. We need to take steps to open communications and take necessary steps to ensure that something similar does not happen in the future. He hopes that certain things from the mansion can be saved.

Alderman Mark Weix stated that he was informed in the fall of 2020 that the mansion would be demolished. He then gave additional details on his perception of the events related to the mansion.

Motion to designate the T.B. Scott Mansion as a Historic Structure carried 3-2 on roll call vote. Voting No – Jeremy Thompson and Bea Lebal.

Public Comment Period

The comments made previously served as the public comment period.

Establish date, time and location of next meeting

Building Inspector/Zoning Administrator Pagel reported that, based on publishing timelines, March 11th would be earliest date that the City Plan Commission could hold a public hearing on designating the mansion a historic site.

The City Plan Commission will hold a public hearing at 6:00 P.M. on Thursday, March 11th, 2021 in the City Hall Common Council Chambers.

The next Historic Preservation Committee meeting was scheduled for 5:15 P.M. on Thursday, March 11th, 2021. It will also be held in the City Hall Common Council Chambers.

Adjournment

Motion (Sabatke/Thompson) to adjourn. Carried. 3301Adjourned at 7:00 P.M.

Minutes prepared and submitted by:

William N. Heideman CMC, WCMC
City Clerk