

**City of Merrill
Historic Preservation Committee
Wednesday, February 17, 2021 at 5:00 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.

Others meeting attendees (either in-person or remotely) included: Mayor Derek Woellner, City Administrator Dave Johnson, Information Technology Manager Dustin Brown, Building Inspector/Zoning Administrator Darin Pagel, City Attorney Tom Hayden, Alderman Steve Hass, Tina Scott, Linda Tryczak, Christine Martens, Richard Smith, Joe Chilsen, Don Boquist, Diane Marnholz, Kristen Van Der Geest, Chris Vorpapel, Michelle Salter and City Clerk Bill Heideman. Merrill Productions was present to videotape the meeting.

Call to order

Mayor Woellner called the meeting to order at 5:00 P.M.

July 30, 2018 meeting minutes

Mayor Woellner requested that, because he is not a voting member of the committee, the minutes be amended to reflect the fact that he did not second the motion to adjourn the meeting. Without objection, City Clerk Heideman was directed to make that amendment.

Motion (Russell/Sabatke) to approve the minutes of the July 30th, 2018 meeting, as amended. Carried.

Elect Chairperson of Historic Preservation Committee

Alderman Sabatke nominated Alderman Russell. There were no other nominations. By voice vote, Alderman Russell was elected the Chairperson.

Consider designation of T.B. Scott Mansion as Historic Site

Alderman Russell made introductory comments. He reported that this meeting is being held because two hospital firms are in the process of completing a sale, and the sale could affect the future of the T.B. Scott Mansion.

Alderman Russell requested that the order of the agenda items be changed and that public comment be taken next. Without objection, it was so ordered.

Public Comment Period

Several people spoke in favor of saving the mansion if possible. Some were at the meeting site and others attended remotely via phone.

Consider designation of T.B. Scott Mansion as Historic Site (continued)

Alderman Russell reported that he did not become aware of the potential demolition of the mansion until February 14th. Upon learning of it, he requested that a meeting be scheduled as soon as possible.

Alderman Sabatke reported that, as a committee member, he had asked that he be included in discussions on this issue. He expressed surprise that he was not included in those discussions.

Mayor Woellner replied that alderpersons do not need to know every detail related to all discussions or administrative decisions. He stated that he shared any information he deemed important.

Mayor Woellner then provided information on policies and procedures related to the designation of historic structures. This process began in 1992.

Mayor Woellner reported that, at a meeting in 2018, he requested that the Historic Preservation Committee designate the T.B. Scott Mansion as a historic site. He added that, at that time, the Historic Preservation Committee was uncomfortable doing so, and the committee did not approve his request.

Also in 2018, City staff had meetings with Ascension, the owner of the mansion, regarding renovation of the mansion. Building Inspector/Zoning Administrator Pagel mentioned that Ascension decided the guest list for these meetings. Ascension did submit a renovation plan to the City.

Elizabeth McCrank questioned whether the City has a right to know what private property owners are planning to do with their property.

City Attorney Hayden provided legal information related to agreements, covenants and deeds.

Jeremy Thompson asked whether Ascension had completed the renovation plan. Building Inspector/Zoning Administrator Pagel responded that Ascension had not fulfilled the agreement based on the renovation plan. However, they are not in violation because, to date, there have been no citations issued.

Elizabeth McCrank questioned whether the property could be platted again. Building Inspector/Zoning Administrator Pagel responded that the Zoning Board of Appeals could approve a variance in a case of non-compliance.

Alderman Sabatke suggested doing a title search on the property. City Attorney Hayden does not think a title search would be appropriate in this case.

Alderman Sabatke asked whether there has been work related to demolition being done at the property. City Administrator Johnson replied that floor tile is being removed, but no "wall" work has been done yet. The Merrill Historical Society has requested that they be allowed to take possession of some items in the mansion.

Mayor Woellner stated his opinion that the only hope for saving the mansion is if something goes wrong with the demolition. He suggested that it be designated a historic site, which would then lead to a public hearing at a City Plan Commission meeting. The public hearing at a City Plan Commission meeting would require publishing a Class 1 notice.

Alderman Sabatke suggested, in case of demolition, the City should ask the demolition company to donate some items or materials to the City for future use.

February 19th was suggested as the next meeting date, based on City Attorney Hayden's explanation of the 24-hour notice language in the Open Meetings Law. However, City Attorney Hayden does not think a public hearing could be held on February 19th, because a public hearing notice could not be published before that meeting date.

Alderman Russell noted that neither of the hospital corporations nor the demolition firm were in attendance at the meeting. He speculated that, at this time, the only way to delay or halt the demolition would be to take those firm(s) to court.

Mayor Woellner suggested having a meeting, with a public hearing, on Friday, February 19th. Alderman Sabatke agreed with the suggestion.

City Administrator Johnson reported that, in 2018, Shuette Movers estimated that it would take \$700,000 to move the building. They estimated that it would take 2 to 3 million dollars to renovate, and then there would be ongoing maintenance cost. A lot to put the building on would further add to the costs.

Motion (Sabatke/Thompson) to schedule a Historic Preservation Committee meeting for February 19th, and to include a public hearing on that meeting agenda. The purpose of the meeting/hearing would be to consider designating the T.B. Scott mansion as a historic site. Carried.

Discussion on committee powers and future action

This agenda item was not discussed.

Consider purchase and placement of historic plaques at old Fire Station

Building Inspector/Zoning Administrator Pagel reported that the current owner, the Merrill Area Housing Authority, does want any historic designation for the site.

Alderman Sabatke noted that the building housing the Craig Nienow's law office is the oldest wood structure in the City.

Jeremy Thompson gave a verbal report on the policies and procedures for historic designations.

Update on renovation of cattle barn @ Merrill Festival Grounds

City Administrator Johnson reported that he is seeking additional funds from the Bierman Foundation to be used for renovation.

Alderman Sabatke requested that the minutes note that the City is grateful to the Bierman Foundation for their financial help with the renovation.

Update on future of former American Legion Building

City Administrator Johnson reported that the Merrill Historical Society will soon be moving everything out of the building and storing it at their new storage facility. That leads to the question of what will happen to their current storage facility (former American Legion building).

Representing the Merrill Historical Society, Pat Burg reported that the building was appraised at \$104,000. To date, the Merrill Historical Society has invested approximately \$57,000 in the building.

Establish date, time and location of next meeting

Monday, February 22nd, 2021 at 6:00 P.M. in the City Hall Common Council Chambers.
Note: An earlier motion scheduled the next meeting for Friday, February 19th.

Tina Scott raised the possibility of contacting the contractor to request a delay in demolition of the T.B. Scott Mansion. City Administrator Johnson replied that he has already contacted the contractor, and was told that they intend to proceed with the demolition.

Adjournment

Motion (Thompson/Sabatke) to adjourn. Carried. Adjourned at 7:02 P.M.

Minutes prepared and submitted by:

William N. Heideman CMC, WCMC
City Clerk