

## **MINUTES**

### **Cheney Historic Preservation Commission December 4, 2008**

**Commissioners Attending:** Christ Stewart, Charlie Mutschler, Fred Lauritsen, Scott Wilbanks, Steve Emerson and Chris Stewart.

**Commissioners Absent:** Bettye Hull and Aimee Flinn.

**Staff Attending:** Brian Jennings, Patti Dean & Susan Beeman.

**Councilpersons Attending:** None.

**Call to Order:** Vice Chairman Stewart called the meeting to order at 5:20 p.m.

**Approval of Minutes:** The minutes of the November 20, 2008 meeting were approved as distributed.

**Citizen Participation:** None.

#### **New Business: Sterling-Moorman House Project – Table at Winterfest.**

Chairman Stewart reviewed plans for the display table at the Winterfest craft fair this coming Saturday.

#### **New Business: Possible 6<sup>th</sup> Street Historic District.**

Chairman Stewart introduced members of the Commission and staff for the benefit of members of the public. Ms. Beeman gave an overview of the results of national register versus local register designation. Listing on the national register of historic places is an honorary designation conferred by the National Park Service which puts no restrictions on the use or renovation of the buildings listed. Listing on the local register of historic places does place a requirement that any repair or modification of the building which would require a building permit be approved by the local Historic Preservation Commission, and receive a Certificate of Appropriateness for the work to be done.

Commissioner Emerson summarized the 2005 West Cheney Historic District report, which was a survey of 30 properties in the west end of town, primarily located between 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup>, near Sutton Park. The recommendation section of that report concluded that there were about 130 properties within the study area. Of those, 48 had been inventoried, including 30 inventoried in 2005. Eighteen properties have been determined eligible for national register listing. This adds up to an eligibility rate of roughly 40%, which, for district potential, is only fair. This does not mean that a potential district is not there, or could not be there at some future date. It does mean that further inventory and research should be pursued within the study area. Also, restoration of

buildings with compromised integrity could also change the nature of the neighborhood and improve that percentage.

Commissioner Emerson explained that the West Cheney Historic District report concluded that what had been studied had a 'fair' chance of being designated as a district. But requirements for formation of a district may be less stringent than for individual register listings. Efforts by local residents could bring additional buildings into compliance with national register standards. This neighborhood has a unique character, and a long-time identification with the college, including a number of faculty members who have lived there. He encouraged that further investigations be done, and expressed a belief that this area has good potential for formation of a historic district.

Judy Hamel, 217 W. 6<sup>th</sup> Street, said that it appears to be important how the district is defined, and asked for a recommendation on how to identify appropriate boundaries. Commissioner Emerson agreed that it is important to identify the best buildings, but also recommended that we be inclusive, rather than exclusive. We recognize that Cheney is a working class town, and this is a working class neighborhood, with many of the residents associated with the college.

Ms. Hamel asked about the reason for having a national register district versus a local register district. Commissioner Emerson said that a national register district may have more prestige, but there are more financial incentives to be in a district at the local register level.

Ms. Hamel said that some people who have discussed this were concerned about honoring and preserving this local neighborhood, thinking of district nomination as a way of maintaining it.

Commissioner Emerson noted that historic preservation laws were written to not be dictatorial, and to not prevent property owners from doing what they want to do. Historic district designation is probably not a good way to enforce character onto a neighborhood. That might be better done by talking to neighbors and creating neighborhood pride, encouraging residents to voluntarily protect the character of the neighborhood.

Ms. Hamel asked about the process of establishing a historic district. Commissioner Emerson said that the process could be initiated through Cheney Planning Department staff, or the neighbors could hire a consultant who would do the research, photograph the houses, and write a nomination. At the national level, a nomination is a form where you state the rationale for forming the district.

Ann Heehn, 811 Golden Hills Drive, asked about 'historic' houses that have been extensively remodeled. Some of the houses in this area have been drastically changed, and some are in very poor condition.

Commissioner Emerson explained that the level of maintenance of a property is usually not considered when determining register eligibility. The reviewers are more concerned with integrity: does it look the way it did when it was built?

Chairman Stewart referred to the map of inventoried properties, and said that she understands the passion that has driven members of the neighborhood here tonight. She encouraged them to

obtain copies of the inventory records, and to share the information with neighbors. She noted that one resident of the neighborhood, Pat Kennedy, did go through the local register process just a couple of years ago. It might be helpful to visit with him and see how he feels about the process.

Julie Jackson, 14 6<sup>th</sup> Street (Ratcliffe House), said that it is the intention to promote pride in the neighborhood and help encourage better maintenance and upkeep, then she would like to see something that encourages signage as a reminder of the historic nature of the neighborhood.

Commissioner Mutschler said that it is always an option for a property owner to buy a plaque. Unfortunately, the City does not have the funding to provide them.

Commissioner Emerson said that Brown's Addition in Spokane is a good example of a neighborhood that stays clean and litter-free because of the cohesion of the neighbors. That area has been a historic district for many years, but you can still drive through and find places that are trashed.

Mr. Jennings offered a reminder that contacting the code enforcement office is always an option.

Ms. Hamel said that she likes Ms. Jackson's idea of signage, so that when you walk into an area, you have a sense that there is a neighborhood, and also a sense of the history.

Mr. Jennings added that the status of owning or living in a historic neighborhood could add something to the area, too. Once Spokane's West Central neighborhood received the district nomination, there was quite a lot of press about it, and people began to look differently at their homes, and to understand that there was a story there.

Commissioner Emerson said that in his opinion, the biggest incentive to keep a nice historic neighborhood is home ownership. He just did a study of the Canon Hill neighborhood and found that a large reason that it stays in good repair is that houses have not been rented out or subdivided. It is easier to keep up the maintenance.

### **Staff Reports:**

Mr. Jennings reported that the Community Development Department did receive funding in the 2009 budget for an update to the Comprehensive Plan, and we are in the process of consultant selection.

Ms. Beeman noted that this was the final meeting of Commissioner Emerson's term on the Historic Preservation Commission. He has served two full terms, having been appointed in December 2001. He has been involved in numerous projects for the City, and staff and the remaining members of the Commission have benefitted from his expertise and his commitment to the preservation of Cheney's historic resources.

Commissioner Mutschler presented a certificate of appreciation, and thanked Commissioner Emerson for his wise counsel and good-humored advice. Chairman Stewart offered a toast to Commissioner Emerson, with thanks for all that he has done for the commission.

**Adjournment:** There being no further business, Chairman Stewart adjourned the meeting at 6:23 p.m.

**Approved:**

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Bettye Hull, Chairman

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Susan Beeman, Secretary