

**Historical Preservation Commission**

**of the City of Onalaska**

Monday, March 2, 2015

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1 The Meeting of the Historical Preservation Commission of the City of Onalaska was called to  
2 order at 7:02 p.m. on Monday, March 2, 2015. It was noted that the meeting had been  
3 announced and a notice posted at City Hall.

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5 Roll call was taken, with the following members present: Ald. Harvey Bertrand, Nancy  
6 Tolvstad, Sandy Whiteman, Jim Nelson, John Grider

7

8 Also Present: Land Use and Development Director Brea Grace, Planner/Zoning Inspector Katie  
9 Meyer

10

11 Absences: Brent Larson, Gary Lass

12

13 **Item 2 – Approval of minutes from previous meetings**

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15 Motion by Sandy, second by John, to approve the minutes from the June 19, 2014 and September  
16 18, 2014 meetings as printed and on file in the City Clerk’s Office.

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18 On voice vote, motion carried.

19

20 **Item 3 – Public Input (limited to 3 minutes per individual)**

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22 Ald. Bertrand called for anyone wishing to provide public input.

23

24 **Nancy Tolvstad**  
25 **369 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue North**  
26 **Onalaska**

27

28 Nancy referred to the Chapter 6 of the Comprehensive Plan update that lists three historical  
29 preservation projects, one of which is the Carriage House, and inquired about the other two  
30 projects.

31

32 Brea said the City of Onalaska has designated three properties as locally historic structures – the  
33 Lumber Baron Inn (Carriage House), UnWine’d (formerly State Bank building), and D&M  
34 Recycling (formerly Onalaska Brewery and Onalaska Pickle and Canning Factory).

35

36 Ald. Bertrand called three times for anyone else wishing to provide public input and closed that  
37 portion of the meeting.

38

39 **Consideration and possible action on the following items:**

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42

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43 **Item 4 – Review and discussion of 2015 Comprehensive Plan Update, Chapter 6 –**

44 **Agricultural, Natural and Cultural Resources**

45  
46 Katie said the Long Range Planning Committee is in the process of updating the City of  
47 Onalaska’s Comprehensive Plan. The plan currently runs through a 20-year process (2005-  
48 2025), and it has reached the 10-year mark. The city is required by State of Wisconsin Statute to  
49 update the plan every 10 years. The Long Range Planning Committee has been going chapter by  
50 chapter and reviewing the different sections of the plan and asking other city boards, committees  
51 and commissions to review the chapters and provide feedback and/or comments. Katie said this  
52 evening the commission will be examining Chapter 6. Katie noted that the report discusses the  
53 archaeological background of the city and referred to page 14 of the chapter, which discusses  
54 how the City of Onalaska was founded. Katie said Tourism Director Jean Lunde had informed  
55 her that John Laird had jointly founded and platted the city with Thomas G. Rowe. This  
56 information will be included during revisions. Katie said the chapter also discusses the  
57 Historical Society, the city’s adoption of a preservation ordinance and its purpose, and the City’s  
58 certified local government status. Katie also noted that the chapter lists the two city structures  
59 (F.E. Nichols House and La Crosse County School of Agriculture & Domestic Economy) that  
60 have been designated as historic structures on both the national and state register. The chapter  
61 also addresses goals, objectives and policies as to how to identify, preserve and the city’s  
62 agricultural, natural and cultural resources. The final page of the chapter lists seven different  
63 policies on how the City can accomplish its goals.

64  
65 Katie welcomed feedback from commission members.

66  
67 Jim inquired about the source documents for the Comprehensive Plan.

68  
69 Katie said the Long Range Planning Committee utilized the 2005 Comprehensive Plan, which  
70 she said she believes was based off the 1990 Comprehensive Plan.

71  
72 In response to a question by Jim, Katie noted there are different aspects of the Comprehensive  
73 Plan and said, “This is an opportunity to look at the city holistically.”

74  
75 Brea said her department examines flood plain regulations and flood plain zoning and noted that  
76 other committees are examining this chapter.

77  
78 Jim said he had examined the flood plain maps and stated he is sure this area impacts historical  
79 artifacts. Jim said he is attempting to make a correlation between the Historical Preservation  
80 Commission and the Comprehensive Plan.

81  
82 Brea said the Historical Preservation Commission’s members provide a different perspective.

83  
84 Ald. Bertrand complimented Katie for helping him understand how the Historical Preservation

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85 Committee and the Comprehensive Plan “fit together.” Ald. Bertrand said one of the  
86 commission’s objectives is to encourage the preservation and rehabilitation of historical  
87 buildings. Ald. Bertrand said another goal is to continue to protect important archaeological sites  
88 in and around the City of Onalaska. Ald. Bertrand referred to page 21 of the chapter, which lists  
89 the policies and recommendations for Cultural Resources, and asked Katie to discuss this with  
90 the commission.

91

92 Katie discussed the following objectives for Cultural Resources:

93

- 94 • **Work with Centering Onalaska to continue to promote downtown Onalaska and its**  
95 **beautification.** Katie complimented Centering Onalaska for its care of the flowers and  
96 decorations.
- 97 • **Consider opportunities to develop key themes and identities for the downtown,**  
98 **including, but not limited to, a public art program.** Katie said this is an objective the  
99 Long Range Planning Committee has shown interest in considering, citing the example of  
100 a city that prominently displays murals, and also referring to an example Ald. Bertrand  
101 had shared with her of a town in Maine that prominently displays large wooden bears.  
102 Katie suggested there could be a discussion regarding finding a way to create a sense of  
103 place and celebrate the city’s culture.
- 104 • **Continue to document and protect the important archaeological sites in the city.**  
105 Katie said individuals who wish to construct in areas designated as archaeological  
106 districts must work with the State of Wisconsin for permitting.
- 107 • **Consider updating the Historic Preservation chapter of the Zoning Code to include**  
108 **specific design guidelines for historic districts.** Katie said there currently is no formal  
109 district on hand, but suggested it might be an option to have a district if additional sites  
110 are designated [in the City].
- 111 • **Inventory historic properties as identified by the Historic Preservation Commission.**  
112 Katie noted this commission and Common Council has the ability to designate properties  
113 in the City.
- 114 • **Continue to encourage and support property owners who wish to rehabilitate and**  
115 **designate their historic properties. Adaptive reuse of historic buildings should be**  
116 **strongly encouraged.** Katie cited the example of the UnWine’d building, which started  
117 as a bank but has been modified to a restaurant/wine bar. Katie said while the owners are  
118 continuing to improve the property, they also are retaining the historic aspects of the  
119 building.
- 120 • **Maintain Certified Local Government Status through the National Park Service.**  
121 Katie said it is crucial to maintain this status in order to pursue grant opportunities with  
122 the State of Wisconsin Historical Society.

123

124 Sandy referred to page 15 and noted that the La Crosse County School of Agricultural &  
125 Domestic Economy, which was located on the current site where Onalaska High School sits, and

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126 asked how the high school qualifies as a historic structure.

127

128 Brea said she is unsure, noting that the La Crosse County School of Agriculture & Domestic  
129 Economy is listed on the state register.

130

131 Nancy pointed out that there are pieces of the La Crosse County School of Agriculture &  
132 Domestic Economy located at the museum and also at Onalaska High School.

133

134 Brea referred to the Wisconsin State Historical Society's website and noted there is information  
135 on each listing. The structure was first listed on the National Register in 1987.

136

#### **Item 5 – Review and consideration of Wisconsin Certified Local Government 2014 Historic 137 Preservation Subgrant Application**

138

139  
140 Katie referred to the September 18, 2014 Historical Preservation Commission meeting, at which  
141 time the commission was informed that the city would be pursuing a Wisconsin Historical  
142 Society Grant to perform an initial inventory of different structures in the city. Katie said staff  
143 was informed on February 27 that the city had been awarded the grant. Katie said staff will be  
144 working with the state on obtaining the contract information. A preservation professional will be  
145 working with the city to perform an inventory of all the city's homes and other commercial  
146 structures from 1975 and forward. Katie encouraged commission members to share any  
147 information they have with the preservation professional. Katie said the next step will be to sign  
148 the contract and hire a professional, adding a public meeting will likely be held this summer.

149

150 Motion by Sandy, second by Jim, to accept and proceed with utilizing the Wisconsin Certified  
151 Local Government 2014 Historic Preservation Grant.

152

153 Brea noted that the grant would total \$6,600, and the deliverable would be a historical inventory  
154 that would list properties older than 1975 and serve as an educational piece for the City.

155

156 On voice vote, motion carried.

157

#### **Item 6 – Discussion regarding Historic Preservation outreach efforts**

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159  
160 Katie said staff had created a webpage at cityofonalaska.com website. The site may be found  
161 under "Department & Services." Once visitors reach "Planning/Zoning," they may click  
162 "Historic Preservation." This is a page devoted to the City of Onalaska, its origin and historical  
163 information. There also are links to the Onalaska Area Historical Museum, Holmen Area  
164 Historical Society, La Crosse County Historical Society, and the Mississippi Valley  
165 Archaeological Center. Katie noted the three locally designated historic structures and their  
166 original construction dates have been listed. Located beneath this information is a request for the  
167 individuals who own one of these structures and want to make alterations to the structure to

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168 complete a Certificate of Appropriateness Application. Katie also noted the site includes links to  
169 the Wisconsin Historical Society webpage as well as a page that allows viewers to visit historic  
170 sites, properties and archaeological sites located in both the City of Onalaska and the Town of  
171 Onalaska.

172

173 Sandy noted she has spoken with individuals who believe it is detrimental to have a historical  
174 designation and suggested including a list of “pros” behind having a historical designation.

175 Sandy also suggested including contact information for those who might have concerns.

176

177 Jim suggested including adding incentives to having a historical designation.

178

179 Katie noted that the Historical Society puts out a Top 10 list of the economic benefits behind  
180 having a historical designation and said this would be valuable information to include.

181

182 Brea acknowledged that there are rumors regarding individuals having to obtain approval from a  
183 city to, for example, change the paint color of a structure with a historical designation. Brea  
184 referred to Wisconsin Historical Society representative Joe DeRose’s presentation at the  
185 September 18, 2014 meeting and said Joe suggested having a couple of individuals designate  
186 their properties as historic the first year. These individuals will then speak positively about the  
187 program. Brea said brochures can be created describing what it means to have a property receive  
188 a historic designation.

189

190 Ald. Bertrand asked Brea if it is likely 10 to 20 historic structures will be identified.

191

192 Brea said the ideal situation would be to locate between 10 and 15 property owners who are  
193 willing to designate their homes as historical properties. Brea said it will be important to educate  
194 the community and also promote this initiative.

195

196 Jim recalled a past Historical Preservation Commission meeting where there had been a  
197 discussion regarding the F.E. Nichols House out building (Carriage House), which needs  
198 maintenance. Jim said at the time the interpretation of the historical designation was that it  
199 encompassed the entire property and all the structures on it.

200

201 Nancy said it was her understanding that the property owners had intended to repair the Carriage  
202 House. Nancy added she believes the property owners ultimately decided doing so would be too  
203 costly.

204

205 Jim asked if grants include financial assistance to property owners to help them maintain the  
206 historical significance of a structure.

207

208 Brea noted there is no city funding for this, nor is there funding available from the Wisconsin  
209 State Historical Society. Brea noted Joe DeRose had suggested utilizing the Wisconsin

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210 Development Economic Corporation and said staff can look into possible grant programs.

211

212 Sandy said it is possible that grant funding could be obtained from a barn preservation group,  
213 especially if animals had at one time been housed in the Carriage House.

214

215 Brea said the Common Council first must accept the Wisconsin Certified Local Government  
216 2014 Historic Preservation Grant before she and Katie return before the commission with a  
217 contract to hire a preservation professional. Brea said by that time the project schedule should be  
218 established, noting this discussion likely will take place at the next Historical Preservation  
219 Commission meeting. Brea also said there could be other opportunities for outreach events,  
220 suggesting that perhaps representatives from Mississippi Valley Archaeology Center could  
221 attend the next meeting. Brea also suggested that perhaps a public event could be held in the  
222 future.

223

224 Jim said there are a number of gravesites from the Civil War era that are in need of repair and  
225 referred to a former cemetery caretaker who attempted to maintain the headstones. Jim also  
226 suggested contacting descendants of individuals who settled in the City of Onalaska.

227

228 Brea said she and Katie can ask Joe DeRose about grant opportunities that would assist in  
229 funding tombstone improvements.

230

231 **Item 7 – Consideration and approval of 2015 Historic Preservation Commission Meeting**  
232 **Schedule**

233

234 Katie referred to the meeting schedule included in commission members' packets and said it  
235 might be necessary to add a meeting to the schedule.

236

237 Motion by Jim, second by John, to approve 2015 Historic Preservation Commission Meeting  
238 Schedule.

239

240 On voice vote, motion carried.

241

242 **Adjournment**

243

244 Motion by Jim, second by Sandy, to adjourn at 7:55 p.m.

245

246 On voice vote, motion carried.

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248

249 Recorded By:

250

251 Kirk Bey

Reviewed 3/6/15