

**Historic Preservation Commission
of the City of Onalaska**

Thursday, August 11, 2016

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1 The Meeting of the Historic Preservation Commission of the City of Onalaska was called to
2 order at 4:00 p.m. on Thursday, August 11, 2016. 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, Sandy
6 Whiteman, Jim Nelson, Nancy Tolvstad, John Grider. Gary Lass arrived with the meeting in
7 progress.

8
9 Also Present: Interim Land Use and Development Director Katie Aspenson, Joe DeRose,
10 Wisconsin Historical Society

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12 Excused Absence: Jerry Sjolander

13
14 **Item 2 – Approval of minutes from the previous meeting**

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16 Motion by Sandy, second by John, to approve the minutes from the previous meeting as printed
17 and on file in the City Clerk’s Office.

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19 On voice vote, motion carried.

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

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

25
26 **Consideration and possible action on the following items:**

27
28 **Item 4 – Discussion and Consideration of Survey of Historic Properties Project within the**
29 **City of Onalaska**

30
31 Katie said the city had contracted with Traci Schnell of Heritage Research, LTD, to perform a
32 historical and architectural resources survey. Traci was provided with every property in the city
33 that was on record of being more than 45 years old, and she reviewed the properties that had the
34 potential of being significant. Katie said Joe DeRose of the Wisconsin Historical Society had
35 come to today’s meeting to discuss the survey that was completed for the city.

36
37 Joe said part of his job is to administer Certified Local Government Grants. The City of
38 Onalaska is a Certified Local Government, and therefore entitled to access federal funds to
39 undertake a project such as this one. Joe said the federal government has specific requirements
40 regarding how projects such as these are done. The primary focus of these surveys is to identify
41 properties that are eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. Joe told the
42 commission that the buildings Traci had surveyed as part of this project have been inputted into

Reviewed 8/18/16 by Katie Aspenson

**Historic Preservation Commission
of the City of Onalaska**

Thursday, August 11, 2016

2

43 the Architecture History Inventory database at wisconsinhistory.org, and he asked commission
44 members to contact him if they find errors. Joe said Traci had identified “a handful” of buildings
45 that qualify for the National Register, which largely is an honorific program for private property
46 owners. There are economic incentives for National Register-caliber buildings in the form of tax
47 credits. Joe invited commission members to attend the Wisconsin Historical Society’s two-day
48 conference October 21-22 in Wisconsin Dells for members of preservation commissions or local
49 historical societies.

50

51 Joe said the Architecture History Inventory database has been in existence since the late 1970s
52 and noted that the Wisconsin Historical Society had information on 30 buildings in the city
53 before this project began. Joe said Traci was tasked with reexamining the buildings to see if they
54 are still standing or have been altered, take photographs of them, note if they have been
55 demolished, and survey new buildings to determine if they qualify for listing in the National
56 Register. A property must possess “historic integrity,” meaning it must look like it did when it
57 was first constructed, in order to qualify for listing in the National Register. Joe said Traci
58 discovered that 10 properties out of the 30 already surveyed had been demolished. Four were
59 altered to the point that they no longer resembled what they used to look like, and Traci
60 identified 44 new properties that could be surveyed. Joe said Traci only examined the built
61 environment as it is today and noted she had identified the following buildings:

62

- 63 • Fauver Hill School, which originally was constructed in 1924 and had replaced an earlier
64 school that was constructed in approximately 1880. The school originally consisted of
65 one classroom, but it also had a kitchen and a library. Running water was added in 1932.
66 A playground and parking lot were added in 1957, as were three classrooms, two
67 restrooms, a teachers’ room and a multipurpose room. Four new classrooms were added
68 in 1966, and a gymnasium was added in 1974. This building is eligible for listing in the
69 National Register, and Joe said Fauver Hill School is “the educational link” in the city.
- 70 • Onalaska State Bank, which was constructed in 1912 and was the first bank in the then
71 Village of Onalaska. The bank closed in 1933 during The Great Depression. It was used
72 as a post office for 20 years (1937-1957). It also was a sporting goods store before once
73 again becoming a bank in 1968. It has been used as a restaurant since the early 1980s.
- 74 • Pertzsch House, which is associated with Irving Pertzsch and was constructed in 1951.
75 Irving Pertzsch started a construction company in 1929, and his firm was responsible for
76 constructing several bridges on Interstate 90 near Minnesota as well as paving State
77 Trunk Highway 35 when it was constructed in 1952. Irving first served as an Alderman
78 before serving as Mayor from 1936 to 1946. During his tenure as Mayor the Works
79 Progress Administration brought funds into the city to pave the streets and install sewage
80 lines. Irving again served as Mayor from 1950 to 1974.
- 81 • Onalaska Brewery, which has stone buildings dating to 1884. This structure was
82 converted to the J.S. Gedney Pickle Company in 1901. It then became the Onalaska
83 Pickle & Canning Company in 1906, and it remained in operation until 1957. The
84 structure was designated as a fallout shelter in 1963 by the United States Army Corps of

**Historic Preservation Commission
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Thursday, August 11, 2016

3

- 85 Engineers.
- 86 • Page House, which is associated with the cement block industry. Earl Page was a cement
87 contractor.
- 88 • Thompson House, which dates to 1885. Thomas Thompson was born in 1852 in Norway
89 and came to the United States in 1867. He moved to Onalaska from La Crosse in 1875,
90 and he served as the Postmaster from 1889 to 1894. He was the proprietor of the dry
91 goods store, which was destroyed by fire in 1903. He moved to South Dakota after his
92 store had burned down.

93

94 Joe inquired about the folding garage doors on the Frank & Sophia Uehling House, which is
95 located at 512 4th Avenue North and was constructed in 1929, noting they are “extremely rare” if
96 they are original. Joe referred to the building located at the back of the property and said Traci
97 believed it had housed poultry due to the significant number of windows.

98

99 Gary said he believes the structure is now utilized for storage.

100

101 Joe said the Wisconsin Historical Society lacks sufficient information to determine if the
102 building is eligible for the National Register.

103

104 Joe said the houses that have been identified as being eligible to be placed on the National
105 Register qualify for tax credits and encouraged the commission to contact the homeowners about
106 researching this program. Joe said his office must give its approval to any work the homeowners
107 wish to do to the house, such as replacing the roof, repairing windows, painting the exterior,
108 installing a new furnace or central air conditioning, and replacing knob-and-tube wiring. Joe
109 said homeowners can receive a 25-percent credit off state income taxes owed if the work is
110 approved by his office and done to specifications. Homeowners who spend \$10,000 would
111 receive a \$2,500 credit. Joe said the program will not work if the property is owned by someone
112 who does not have Wisconsin tax liability. Joe suggested contacting the homeowners via direct
113 mail.

114

115 Gary asked if homeowners face certain restrictions once they register the home.

116

117 Joe said the property just has to be identified as being eligible and not listed in the National
118 Register. Joe said individuals who sell the home within five years of taking the credit must pay
119 back a prorated portion. Joe noted there also is a federal tax credit program for income-
120 producing properties. The 20-percent federal tax credit is in addition to a 20-percent state tax
121 credit. Joe said it is more open-ended as to what can and cannot be done to income-producing
122 properties, noting that the threshold for what makes an allowable project is based on the value of
123 the property.

124

125 Joe said Traci had identified the following churches as potential local landmarks:

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Thursday, August 11, 2016

4

- 127 • St. Patrick’s Catholic Church, which was constructed in 1960 by and designed by a La
128 Crosse firm that also designed Irving Pertzsch Elementary School.
129 • Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints
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131 Joe reiterated that the property owners should be notified about the tax credits, and he told Katie
132 he is willing to assist her in notifying people the information on the 55 buildings uncovered
133 during the survey and on the inventory. Joe noted that another grant cycle soon will begin and
134 told the commission that if its members are interested in pursuing funding to nominate the seven
135 buildings that were identified for listing in the National Register he will need a letter of intent by
136 Friday, September 9. Joe said he also will need an estimate from a consultant. Joe said an
137 owner’s approval is not necessary for a property to be listed in the National Register; however,
138 he or she cannot object to it being listed. Grants are due on Friday, November 11. Funding is
139 distributed in February 2017. The project must be completed by August 2018.
140

141 Ald. Bertrand asked if there is an impetus in Wisconsin to preserve the past.
142

143 Joe said the National Parks Service funds the Certified Local Government program, and this
144 money comes from the Historic Preservation Fund, which gives \$50 million yearly to all 50
145 states to do this type of work. Joe said he believes the funding source is “safe” due to its size and
146 bipartisan support.
147

148 Gary asked Joe to explain the pros and cons of a property being listed on the National Register.
149

150 Joe said there is a Frequently Asked Questions list for the National Register on
151 wisconsinhistory.org. Joe said there are only two restrictions associated with having a property
152 listed on the National Register:
153

- 154 • It is illegal to sandblast the building if a property listed on the National Register.
155 • Joe said his office must be notified by a city and given 30 days to photograph a building
156 if an individual who owns a property on the National Register seeks a demolition permit.
157

158 Katie said the rules are more restrictive when a property is locally listed.
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160 Gary inquired about the benefits of being locally or nationally designated.
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162 Joe said there are strong protections for a property if it is locally designated, but he also noted
163 that property owners might object to the fact a local jurisdiction is stating what can and cannot be
164 done to a local landmark.
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166 Motion by Ald. Bertrand, second by Jim, to approve the document for the Survey of Historic
167 Properties Project within the City of Onalaska.
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5

169 On voice vote, motion carried.

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171 Katie said the commission will discuss the next steps at its next meeting.

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173 **Adjournment**

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175 Motion by Sandy, second by Ald. Bertrand, to adjourn at 4:58 p.m.

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177 On voice vote, motion carried.

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179

180 Recorded by:

181

182 Kirk Bey