

Historic Preservation Commission
March 10, 2025
City Hall, Edward & Martha Berry Conference Room

Attendance:

Members – Mark Snider, Mary Anne Reeves, Meghan Jennings, Cyrus Moore, Richard Vedder, and Bill Walker

Guests – Andrew Chiki, Tim Traxler, Max Baker with OU Student Historic Preservation Group, Tom O'Grady with Southeast Ohio History Center, Micah McCarey with Athens City Council, Alan Swank with Athens City Council, Bob Eichenberg

Absent – Tim Anderson and John Valentour

Agenda

1. **Call to Order** – Mary Anne, Chair, called the meeting to order at 5:32 p.m.
2. **Disposition of Minutes** from the November 18 and February 10 meetings.
 - Ed motioned to approve the November and February minutes.
 - Bill seconded
 - All in favor. None opposed. Motion passes.
3. **New Business**
 - Andrew Chiki
 - Andrew shared with the Commission an idea of his to create a Historic Preservation Easement. This easement is legal through Ohio Revised Code and would allow historic properties to receive tax incentives to renovate facades. The easement would be treated as a donation and a qualifying 501c3 would manage the easements and “donations.” The donation would be income tax deductible, encouraging property owners to pursue the easement. He shared that the Commission could work to identify properties, even outside of the Uptown Historic District, whose facades would benefit from this type of program. He explained that properties, even if purchased by the university or government agencies, would be required to meet all stipulations of the easement. Andrew has talked with Heritage Ohio and a group in Cleveland that is currently managing this same easement program.
 - Mary Anne commented that properties could also benefit from federal historic tax credits.
 - The Commission asked for clarification on what a qualifying 501c3 would be. They asked specifically about the Southeast Ohio History Center.
 - Andrew stated that the History Center would technically qualify but he cannot speak as to if the History Center is interested in being associated with the program.
 - Mark asked if a property with an applied easement is sold, if the new owner could remove that restriction.
 - Andrew stated that legally they could not. He acknowledged that it could be a dissuasion for a potential seller.
 - Mark stated that the new owner would still benefit from the property tax deductibles.
 - Ed mentioned Seaman's and Stewart-McDonald as projects outside of the Uptown Historic District where the Commission got involved by supporting their renovation proposal.

- Mark reiterated that eligible properties with the easement would either have to be in the existing Historic District, is on the National Register of Historic Structures, or is eligible for a National Registered structure. Mark asked what the impetus of the proposed easement is.
- Andrew stated that it's something he has been looking into based on previous conversations he has had and observations of retail vacancies throughout uptown. He stated that this is one of the few ways that the City can influence the preservation of historic structures outside of existing Historic District boundaries.
- Andrew stated that he would request from the Commission a list of properties they would like to see as a part of this easement program.
- Ed stated that in theory he is interested in the program but he requested that a more formal proposal and document be provided to the Commission for review.
- Andrew stated that as of right now he would like some reflection, feedback, and potential properties, which could help him and the City administration review the viability of the success of this program.
- Bill stated that the bylaws allow the Commission to review and support historic properties outside of the existing historic district.
- Mary Anne stated that previously established National Register properties may no longer be eligible due to interior renovations.
- Andrew stated that he has talked with two existing property owners uptown who have polar opposite viewpoints on historic preservation; he shared that both property owners are in support of the easement program.
- Alan asked about the income tax incentives – if they were federal, state, and/or local.
- Andrew stated that it would apply at all.
- Alan asked about the property tax. He asked if it would affect the County's numbers; especially if multiple properties are in the program.
- Andrew stated that it could.

4. Old Business

- Paul Logue Memorial
 - Bill reported that the City would waive the application fee for the memorial tree. The total price would be around \$425 for the tree and the plaque. He stated that the tree would cost around \$200-\$250 which an anonymous person has offered to donate the funds. He then stated that the balance would be about \$200 for the plaque.
 - Meghan stated that the City has money in the budget for Commissions to spend throughout the year. She stated that the City could cover the \$200.
 - Bill reported that Paul's wife used to
- Presbyterian Church
 - Mary Anne communicated that Reverend Martin is out of town but once he is back in Athens, he is interested in the plaque. She will coordinate with the Reverend on the timing of the ceremony once he returns.
- Mansfield House
 - Bill stated that he asked Max to attend tonight's meeting in regards to this property. He stated that Tom would introduce Max.
 - Tom explained the intentions of OU's student historic preservation group. He then introduced Max.
 - Max then introduced herself and the history of the group. She stated that they produce newsletters and run social media. She then further explained that the

student group would be interested in partnering further with the Commission on projects. She also mentioned that she has emailed with President Gonzalez.

- Ed mentioned that there are people in the community that have raised money for a statue of Menasseh Cutler, the founder of Ohio University, on college green. He stated that he has received pushback on the idea. He stated that his group focused on the statue should meet with the student university preservation group.
- Mary Anne mentioned the paper on the Mansfield House that Bill shared with the Commission.
- Bill shared that the paper is a study of the history of the Mansfield House.
- Mary Anne shared original photos from house's original location (Athens Mall) before it was moved to its current location (Athens' City Recreational Center).
- Alan asked that the Commission share a list of potential users for the Mansfield House.
- Mark shared the idea of having a coffee shop in the Mansfield House.
- Mary Anne mentioned Barney Grueser had interest in the structure.
- Andrew shared that he has been talking with Grueser. He shared that his focus has been on the Armory project and that once that project comes to a close, he has capacity to pursue other historic renovation projects.

5. New Business, Continued

○ Tim Traxler

- Tim introduced himself and his history with Athens. He shared his concerns over replacing the brick crosswalks uptown with stamped concrete. He shared that the stamped concrete was proposed due to address ADA compliance issues. He shared that he would prefer that the City consider replacing the crosswalks with new brick pavers. He stated that this material could still be ADA compliant and would still maintain the historic character of Athens. He asked that the Commission reconsider their letter approving the proposal to replace the crosswalks with stamped concrete. Tim talked to the importance of bricks in Athens' identity. Tim passed out photographs for the Commission to review. The photos were of the Union and Court Street intersection, brick crosswalks in Columbus, and a criterion bicycle race which was previously hosted in Athens. Tim stated that he met with the City of Columbus' Streets and Roads Department to discuss their management practices of their brick crosswalks. Tim then shared documents pertaining to concerns or opposition to the city replacing brick streets with pavement. He also shared documents related to brick management from other areas in the nation. He reminded the Commission of the Essence of Athens Plan. He also shared a visitor's guide from Athens County Visitor's Bureau which heavily utilized brick imagery as a part of their marketing.
- Mark stated that he thinks the Commission would be willing to discuss the letter.
- Andrew stated that he presented back in 2023 on behalf of the Disabilities Commission. He stated that the current Athens Block, as it stands, does not allow for ADA compliant crosswalks.
- Tim shared that brick pavers could be utilized in the crosswalks, rather than original Athens Block. Tim shared that within the discussion of cost efficiency, the historic significance of the bricks.
- Andrew shared that back in 2023, when he presented, the costs the City was reviewing was brick pavers were around \$50/square feet where stamped concrete was around \$30/square feet.
- Tim stated that the brick in front of Baker Center is very nice.

- Alan stated that ADA compliance is a concern of his but that the “qualities and characteristics” of Athens are more important. He stated that if the Historic Preservation Commission reconsidered the letter, that it would help provide guidance
- Cyrus stated that the original presentation made the Commission feel like there weren’t other options at the time.
- Bill recommended that the Commission reconsider the letter. He also recommended that the Commission could create a subcommittee to discuss the project.
- Andrew stated that that discussion should include members of the Disabilities Commission and other interested parties.
- Max shared that selling bricks that are removed from the crosswalks could help cover the cost difference between brick crosswalks and stamped concrete.

6. Announcements

- Mary Anne announced that the next scheduled meeting is April 14, 2025.

7. Adjourn

- Ed motioned to adjourn at 6:53 p.m.
 - Bill seconded the motion.
- All in favor; none opposed. Motion passed.