

Athens City Historic and Architecture Preservation Commission
Athens City Hall, First Floor Conference Room
Monday, December 8, 2014
Minutes

1. Call to Order

Mary Anne Reeves called the meeting to order at 5:35 PM. Members present include Mary Anne, Joanne Prisley, Ann Fidler, Cyrus Moore, Guy Philips, Sarie Landers, Keith Chapman, and Paul Logue. Guests include Linda Philips, Ada Adams, Henry Woods, Ron Luce, Michele Papai, Mike Canterbury, and Donald Newell.

2. Disposition of Minutes

The minutes from November 2014 were reviewed by the commission. No changes were noted. Guy moved to accept the November 2014 minutes. Ann seconded the minutes. All voted in favor.

3. Next Meeting

January 12, 2015 at 5:30 PM

4. New Business

a. Union Street fire—Keith says there was a local designation with respect to the Zarney plan. Mary Anne asked about the current state of buildings and the need to do the tax credit work. She suggests hiring a consultant to look into the history of the buildings and getting the registry amended. Guy is interesting to find out what this would cost and getting it done. In combination tax credits could be up to 45%.

Guy summarized the current situation. He would like to buy the Kismet building from the out of town owners. Some owners want to tear down and rebuild like it was but new. Keith says some tax credits can be sold. Guy asked about how to rebuild and what the city's role is with zoning and rebuilding.

The commission will draft a letter regarding the securing of the facades and rebuilding. The letter will be sent to elected officials and BZA.

5. Old Business

a. Mount Zion Church update – Henry Woods introduced himself to the commission. Henry is an Athens native and grew up at Mount Zion. They have been in contact with President McDavis and OU legal John Biancamano. They are trying to get title to the church but title is held by a woman named Cindy Johnson who is currently incarcerated in Geauga County. In order to get deed the title holder must be sued. Ms. Johnson could then sue them back. Legal fees could be high and no one is taking this up at this time. Mr. Biancamano is checking with the state attorney general's office to see if they can help. Ada Adams introduced herself. She is a Nelsonville native and was married at Mount Zion. She said that they are talking with other local attorneys including Scott Robe and James Sillery who may be of assistance too.

The church was built by Edward Berry, owner of the Berry Hotel and was a prominent Athenian. The church is on the national registry of historic places. Ron Luce described the legal complications. The church is deeded to the congregation. Due to issues within the congregation it no longer exists. Ms. Johnson is claiming to be the head of the congregation and has incorporated the Mt. Zion name and has filings with the IRS as well. Legal issue asks who has rights to the building. Ms. Johnson is classified as a vexatious litigator by the state. The upper window of the building is unsecured and needs secured. Michele Papai from city council has gotten the city involved in 2012 to secure a basement window. The city Service Safety Director is cautious about the city getting involved in securing the high window due to trespass issues. Legal definition of a congregation requires people to meet in a religious manner on a regular basis. Joanne recommended working with the County Health Department to help with securing the top window. Keith asked if there is an opportunity for a law school to take this on as a class case. Local attorneys are interested in helping but are concerned about the time this will take. Henry said the building should be restored and made into a historical site that helps to tell the local history of African Americans in the region, as well as a church and meeting space.

The commission will write a letter about the urgency of the legal matters addressed “to whom it may concern”. Ann Fidler is willing to help with legal issues. Mary Anne and Paul will help with this. Keith motioned to approve the writing of the letter. Guy seconded the motion. All voted in favor. The motion passed.

b. Historic districts/tax credits—Guy mentioned enterprise zones as a possibility as well as state and federal credits.

c. Inventories—Mary Anne shared the “How to Complete the Ohio Historic Inventory” document that Ohio History Connection puts out. Paul will get a few copies ordered. Ann knows of an OU student that may be interested in helping with inventories. Cyrus has already done a lot of research on many buildings in Athens. Mary Anne wants to inventory and register other areas of the city for designation including Utah Place.

6. Adjournment

Guy motioned to adjourn the meeting. Meeting adjourned at 7:15 PM.