

Benton County Historic Resources Commission

Meeting Minutes Monday, November 15, 2021

The meeting was held in person at the Willamette Grange, 27555 Greenberry Rd, Corvallis.

A. Call to Order and Introductions.

The meeting began at 6:42 pm.

In attendance were Scott McClure (Chair), Cody Hull, Tanya Freeman, David Mayfield, Jay Sexton, Paul Berg, and Nancy Taniguchi (Vice-Chair)

Benton County staff: Inga Williams, Associate Planner, and Darren Nichols, Comm Dev Director

Introductions made around the table in response to the presence of the new Community Development Director.

B. Approval of September 20, 2021 Minutes

Comm. Taniguchi made a motion to approve the minutes, seconded by Comm. Sexton, the motion passed unanimously.

C. Discussion of County Courthouse – requested by Comm. Mayfield

Comm. McClure is the current HRC member who is also on the Courthouse Preservation Committee. Comm. McClure gave a brief summary of present issues associated with the continued usage of the courthouse, mainly the retrofitting of the building to current seismic requirements.

Comm. Mayfield indicated that he had researched all of the information available online regarding the Justice System Improvement Program and believed that the county was not considering continued use of the courthouse as a courthouse. The information online stated that the courthouse was unsafe, could not be expanded, and had accessibility issues. He was interested in knowing more about why this decision was being made.

Comm. McClure said that a seismic retrofit takes up a considerable amount of interior square footage and that may be some of the issue. He wants to see some kind of planning process in place now for reuse of the building because a building that is not in use quickly deteriorates.

Comm. Mayfield stated that there is no discussion in the online information about the value of the courthouse as a National Historic Register property.

Comm. Freeman asked why the county was talking about building a new courthouse if the new building will cost so much more than retrofitting the old courthouse.

Comm. Berg stated that Oregon State University has seismically retrofitted a number of their buildings very successfully. Comm. Mayfield stated that those with the expertise exist and should be consulted.

Comm. Taniguchi asked what could the HRC do? Write a letter stating that the courthouse has a lot of value to the community. She expressed that the courthouse should be the commissions main concern at this point because it is very important to the city and the county.

Consensus is that the building needs to have a purpose and the purpose should be as a courthouse. The Justice System Improvement Program team should be doing work to make clear the value of the existing building before asking the public to decide on what level of funding should be used for the old courthouse.

Another item is what does the court system look like in the future? The pandemic has shown that the courts do not need a lot of room to continue to function.

Comm. Dev. Director Nichols asked each commissioner to state what is most important to him or her about preserving the courthouse. Some points of importance from commissioners:

Comm. Sexton – The courthouse is an iconic structure, it is on the national register and almost unique in that it continues to serve its original purpose.

Comm. Freeman – The building is our town square, where people go to rally, the rocks used in building the courthouse were locally sourced from Witham Hill so there is regional history involved

Comm. Taniguchi – There is a picture of the courthouse on everything to do with the county – iconography

Comm. McClure – there is gravitas in the courthouses history

Comms. Hull and Berg agreed with what was already stated.

Comm. Dev. Director Nichols made some suggestions about moving this topic forward. He said that he would speak with the Board of County Commissioners and ask how they want to receive the HRC's message as advocates for the courthouse. This was made into a motion that was moved by Comm. Mayfield and seconded by Comm. Taniguchi. It was approved by unanimous vote.

Another motion was made, upon suggestion by Comm. Dev. Director Nichols, that staff generate a letter based on tonight's discussion. The motion was moved by Comm. Sexton and seconded by Comm. Mayfield. The vote to approve was unanimous.

D. Historic Resources Survey - Updating Project - How's it going?

Comm. Taniguchi stated that she has been working through Alsea and thought that we would definitely need to do a windshield survey. Comm. Freeman said she had nailed down 6 or 7 resources but that it was difficult. Comm. Freeman indicated that there might be a video that Public Works created of every single road in the county. This might be a resource to utilize.

Work will continue on this topic.

E. Discussion about 2022 Historic Preservation Month

Staff indicated the commission needed to start thinking about HistPresMo as the month usually comes up quickly and next year we will be involved in the Heritage Conference at the end of April. Staff indicated that it was very likely that we could have in person activities next year and to work towards that goal.

A suggestion was made to ask if we could have our Awards Ceremony as the new downtown museum.

Comm. Hull suggested that the commission give Emeritus Commissioner Landis an award for his long service on the commission.

The commission asked staff to check on the availability of the Footwise window.

F. Items from the Public

None.

G. Items from the Commissioners

None.

H. Items from Staff

None.

I. Adjournment

Meeting adjourned at 8:01 pm. A tour of the grange was given by Comm. Sexton to show the renovations from the replacement of the roof.