

MEETING RECORD

NAME OF GROUP: HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION

DATE, TIME AND PLACE OF MEETING: Thursday, December 19, 2019, 1:30 p.m., Conference Room 210, 2nd Floor, County-City Building, 555 S. 10th Street, Lincoln, Nebraska

MEMBERS IN ATTENDANCE Liz Bavitz, Melissa Dirr Gengler, Jim Johnson, Greg McCown, Jim McKee and Greg Newport; (Nancy Hove Graul absent).

OTHERS IN ATTENDANCE Ed Zimmer and Rhonda Haas of the Planning Dept.; Shawn Ryba from South of Downtown Community Development Organization and other interested citizens.

STATED PURPOSE OF MEETING: Historic Preservation Commission Meeting

Chair McCown called the meeting to order and acknowledged the posting of the Open Meetings Act in the room.

McCown requested a motion approving the minutes for the meeting of November 21, 2019. Motion for approval made by Newport, seconded by Johnson and carried 6-0: Bavitz, Dirr Gengler, Johnson, McCown, McKee and Newport voting 'yes'; Hove Graul absent.

The opportunity was given for persons with limited time or with an item not appearing on the agenda to address the Commission. No one appeared.

Carol Hartweg requested to have her item heard first at today's meeting. Chair McCown agreed to have discussion on Carol Hartweg's item first.

CERTIFICATE OF APPROPRIATENESS FOR WORK AT THE DESIGNATED LANDMARK FARMSTEAD TO 17185 BLUFF ROAD, WAVERLY

PUBLIC HEARING:

December 19, 2019

Members present: Bavitz, Gengler, Johnson, McCown, McKee and Newport; Hove Graul absent.

Carol Hartweg shared that the problem they are having with the home is a lack of curb appeal, because there is no cover over the front steps. She explained that they have decided to simplify the plan after having discussions with Ed Zimmer. She stated she would like to add a front porch cover and widen the front door. The door cover is a basic design that will match the current roof pitch of the house. They would like to replace the front door with double

doors. This will take an additional three feet on each side of the existing door. They will be keeping the same raise of the steps, which is four steps and adding a handrail. The two enclosed porches will remain the same.

McCown asked how deep this would be. Hartweg stated 6 feet.

McKee stated that it looks good.

ACTION:

Newport moved approval of a Certificate of Appropriateness for the addition of a porch cover and widening of the front door, with details as proposed, seconded by Johnson and carried 6-0; Bavitz, Dirr Gengler, Johnson, McCown, McKee and Newport voting 'yes'; Hove Graul absent.

CERTIFICATE OF APPROPRIATENESS FOR DEMOLITION OF 1120 E STREET, IN THE EVERETT LANDMARK DISTRICT

PUBLIC HEARING:

December 19, 2019

Members present: Bavitz, Gengler, Johnson, McCown, McKee and Newport; Hove Graul absent.

Shawn Ryba appeared with photos of 1120 E Street and asked for approval to demolish the existing house. This property has been on the Problem Resolution Team List of the Lincoln Police Department for years. The Neighborhood Association has also complained about this property, which has been vacant for the past 12 years. He shared that Sean McClatchey with Urban Development, visited the property and stated the foundation was in major failure and there are gaping holes in the roof. Pictures of the roof and foundation were shown to the Commissioners and discussion continued. He explained that Mr. McClatchey stated that at a minimum, this house would cost \$250,000 just to do the minimum standard of rehab, which is not cost affective.

McCown asked if he knew when previous owners gutted this house, and if this was indicative of the entire structure. Ryba said it is the entire structure, and it is missing the HVAC, utilities and plumbing.

Gengler inquired about the plan for the site after the house is demolished. Ryba stated that they have not had that conversation yet. They would like to redevelop this property as affordable housing.

Gengler asked if it would be single-family housing. Ryba said yes, that is an option. This is a full lot and zoned as R-6 or R-7, so it could actually be a duplex. Gengler asked if that was an apartment building next door. Ryba shared that the house next door was a large historic home

used for a rentals.

McKee asked if all the Commission is doing is approving a certificate of exception, correct? Ed Zimmer suggested that seems the most appropriate action, as an exception on the grounds of a hardship.

ACTION:

McKee moved approval of a Certificate of Exception for the Demolition of 1120 E Street, seconded by Johnson and carried 6-0: Bavitz, Gengler, Johnson, McCown, McKee and Newport voting 'yes'; Hove Graul absent.

RECOMMENDATION ON NOMINATION OF ROBBERS CAVE TO THE NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES

PUBLIC HEARING:

December 19, 2019

Members present: Bavitz, Gengler, Johnson, McCown, McKee and Newport; Hove Graul absent.

Zimmer stated as a Certified Local Government, the Lincoln Historic Preservation Commission has the responsibility of reviewing all National Register nominations within the jurisdiction, and making recommendations to the Mayor and the State Historic Preservation Board. Zimmer shared that the Mayor will also write a letter for this nomination when she receives this Commission's recommendation. This is Matt Hansen's third National Register nomination, but it is by far the largest and most complicated. Their job as Commissioners is to render advice to the State Historic Preservation Board and the Mayor, if this property and the nomination of the property meet the criteria for the Register. Zimmer stated that he is recommending this nomination.

Matt Hansen stated he is a Historic Preservation Architect with the Office of the Capitol Commission at the Stated Capitol, although this nomination today has nothing to do with his employment. He shared that he has volunteered to do this because he feels this is an important property. Hansen introduced some of the attendees: Joel Green, researcher, author and guide at Robbers Cave; Sam Manzitto, property owner; Mohammad Ebrahim Mohammadi, UNL College of Civil and Environmental Engineering; David Calease, History Nebraska National Register Coordinator of Historic Places; Kelli Bacon, History Nebraska Certified Local Government Coordinator.

Hansen shared the history of Robbers Cave has been shrouded in folklore, myths and legends for years, which made it quite a task to substantiate. The earliest recorded documentation on the cave was for a real estate transaction on December 16, 1864. The United States of America deeded 160 acres of land that included the cave to Daniel Low, Andrew Cochran, and W.W.

Chipman. There were stories that these three men were involved in a quarrying operation at the site, although there is no documentation to support this claim. In 1867, Low, Cochran, and Chipman sold the property to Stephen Nuckolls and William Donovan, who were real estate investors. In May 1869, Nuckolls and Donovan ran a classified advertisement on a parcel of this property for a brewery in the Nebraska State Journal. Hansen cannot prove that this is the cave property, but everything aligns with the location, the property size, and the description making it highly likely to have been the same. The property, then sold in 1869, to Michael Ulmer and Andrew Lindner, who had each independently owned and operated several breweries in Minnesota and Wisconsin before coming to Nebraska. The two men founded a company called the Lincoln Brewery. They built a two-story building and an icehouse on the property. The cave tunnels radiated into the sandstone bluff from the corner of the foundation, at the far right. The brewery used the tunnels for storage and fermentation. Jacob Andra hired in 1869, to help with the brewery and to lower the floor of the natural tunnel that connected to the basement of the Lincoln Brewery. Andra spent nearly three years doing the excavation work with a pickaxe and shovel. Today, the marks from Andra's pickaxe remain clearly visible on the roof of Tunnel No. 3. In 1875, the brewery was auctioned in an attempt to settle debts after Ulmer's death.

Hansen shared that the brewery operations stopped on the property in the 1880's. In 1885, there was a fire at the brewery building. The Lincoln Fire Department did not respond to the fire because the brewery's distance was too far for their fire-fighting equipment. There is also documentation in 1885, that the cave was used for social and entertainment activities. The Lincoln Police Department had received several calls to investigate reports of the cave harboring criminals and stolen goods. The Police found nothing suspicious, but did discover evidence that parties were held there. The cave had become a social, entertainment and recreation destination. Hansen explained that this is the argument for the cave's significance to the National Register.

McCown inquired if there was an original opening for the cave, and wondered how the cave had been discovered. Hansen stated that it is difficult to document the extent of the cave, but geologists have looked at the tunnels in the cave and determined that portions of the cave appear to have formed by a natural process, and Andra's job was to make them larger.

Hansen shared in the 1880's the cave was use by different groups and particularly by fraternities. This use continuing to increase from the 1880 to the early 1900's. In the 1900's, the owners began to rent out the cave. In 1909, there were souvenir booklets published of the cave, and the second edition was printed in 1920. These booklets included descriptions of the cave, photographs and a map of the tunnels in the cave. There are five tunnels in the cave with Tunnel No. 3, being the deepest one. There is evidence electricity was installed in 1911. The owners installed a dance floor in Tunnel No. 4 in late 1922. The dance floor was for parties because they were trying to promote the cave. Hansen showed the Commission several photos from 1912 and later, of different groups that used the cave.

Hansen shared that the cave is in a protected environment and has survived surprisingly well, because it is not subjected to the elements of aboveground. The tunnels today, are slightly deeper because of the erosion to the floors from all of the visitors to the cave. Some of the lines in the sandstone are still exactly as they were. The cave also has beautiful stratifications of the sandstone walls.

Hansen stated that Light Detection and Ranging (LIDAR) recordation took place September 2019, by Dr. Richard Wood from the University of Nebraska, College of Engineering. History Nebraska funded the LIDAR recordation by Dr. Wood. LIDAR is a laser scanning that is done to create an accurate and detailed map of the cave in two and three-dimensions and is accurate to the sub-millimeter level. The information collected by the LIDAR has tremendous potential to yield additional information about the cave in the future.

Hansen stated that they are primarily using the timeline for the cave based on its appeal for social, entertainment and recreational venues for the area and for the State, and not the brewery, for the nomination. This destination has been bringing people to the State for years, which continues today. There is an amazing degree of preservation on the property, it is unique to Lincoln and the State of Nebraska, and worthy of the inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places.

McCown was curious about the humidity levels and keeping them down in the cave, and asked if there was a lot of spalling to the walls and if they needed to apply preservation techniques. Hansen stated with seasonal fluctuations, there is a degree of sluffing, which occurs on a microscopic level. McCown inquired if they would be applying anything to preserve what is there. Hansen stated he did not think he would advocate any kind of an artificial application to the walls, and further explained that this has been going on for over a century. It is also important to maintain the original ventilation systems, because restoring the original airflow to the cave will help to prevent damage to the cave.

Joel Green stated when Blue Blood brewing created the emergency exit they stifled the airflow. There are plans to put the airshaft back by Sam Manzitto, the current owner, to return the airflow.

Johnson inquired about the Statement of Significance, Item G, which states "less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years". Hansen explained that you have to establish a period of significance. In this case, it was decided to end at 1973, which was when the cave was closed to the public, after being open since 1906.

Newport inquired about the name "Robbers Cave" for the property and wondered when the transition occurred. Hansen stated that there are references referring to the cave as "A Robbers Cave", in the 1880's. When the brewery owned the cave, it was called the cellar or the

vault. After, the brewery had stopped, the newspapers records of the cave were stories of legends and folklores and the mythology created around the cave were seen.

Bavitz shared that it is a great project and is curious of the next steps if the cave achieves the register, and if this will change anything in the operation. Hansen stated that it would not change anything. The reason for having the cave on the National Register is to have it recognized as a Significant Historic Place in the community and to give it an added distinction. They hope that it will increase interest in the cave and bring in additional people.

Green stated since 2016, close to 60,000 people have toured the cave.

Zimmer stated that he hopes the Mayor's letter will mention the redevelopment agreement between the City and the owners for construction on the brewery, which required reopening of the cave to the public.

Sam Manzitto stated they have been able to keep the cave open and there will be another restaurant on top and not a brewery. He shared they have owned the property for three years and have opened the cave up. The previous owner had covered the caves opening with a slab of cement. They do plan to fix the ventilation to the cave. The name "Robbers Cave" will be in the new venue.

McCown stated that at this point the Commission is just an Advisory Board on the nomination.

ACTION:

Johnson moved for recommendation of the nomination of "Robbers Cave" to the National Register of Historic Places, seconded by Newport and carried 6-0: Bavitz, Gengler, Johnson, McCown, McKee and Newport voting 'yes'; Hove Graul absent.

CERTIFICATE OF APPROPRIATENESS FOR WORK AT THE ROGERS HOUSE, A DESIGNATED LANDMARK AT 2145 B STREET:

PUBLIC HEARING:

December 19, 2019

Members present: Bavitz, Gengler, Johnson, McCown, McKee and Newport; Hove Graul absent.

No information to present.

CERTIFICATE OF APPROPRIATENESS FOR WORK AT THE WOODS BROS. COMPANIES BUILDING, A DESIGNATED LANDMARK AT 132 S. 13TH STREET

PUBLIC HEARING:

December 19, 2019

Members present: Bavitz, Gengler, Johnson, McCown, McKee and Newport; Hove Graul absent.

No information to present.

Zimmer shared that he vacationed last August in Michigan and toured several historic houses designed by Frank Lloyd Wright. There will be an informal noontime bring-your-own-lunch gathering, in room 303 on Friday, December 20, to share pictures from his trip. The houses featured are from 1908, 1940 and a couple from 1950's and everyone is invited to attend.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 2:30 p.m.

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