Historic Preservation Commission

2016 Annual Report
The Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) was established in 1980 to promote and protect the historic resources of Lincoln. Making an annual report of past actions and future goals is among the “Powers and Duties” of the Commission.

By Section 27.57 of the Lincoln Municipal Code, the Commission ordinarily meets monthly. Four of the seven appointed, volunteer citizen members constitute a quorum of the Commission. Commission membership is to include two architects, an American historian, a landscape architect (if available), a real estate professional, and two citizens at large. By having over half the members recognized as preservation professionals, the Commission also fulfills a key requirement for the City of Lincoln to be a Certified Local Government in cooperation with the Nebraska State Historical Society and the U. S. Department of the Interior. Membership had no changes in 2016. Members are architects Greg Munn (chair) and Liz Bavitz (previously Kuhlman), historians Jim McKee and Jim Hewitt, historic preservation consultant Melissa Dirr Gengler, realtor Tim Francis, and citizen-at-large Jim Johnson.

The Planning Department provides staff to HPC. Planners Ed Zimmer and Stacey Groshong Hageman are assisted by administrative assistant Amy Huffman. The Commission met for ten regular monthly meetings in 2016, plus three joint meetings with Urban Design Committee.

The Commission reviews applications for landmark designations and special permits for historic preservation, making recommendations to the Planning Commission and City Council. As the preservation board of a Certified Local Government, the Commission also is the first group to review and make recommendations on National Register nominations of Lincoln properties. The Commission reviews proposed changes to designated landmarks or properties in landmark districts, such as Haymarket. The on-going outreach efforts of the Planning Department in the area of historic preservation also fulfill a prescribed “Power and Duty” of the HPC.

**Certification Reviews**

The Commission considered over forty items on its monthly agendas in 2016. As usual, nearly half of the items involved properties in the Haymarket District, and fully a quarter of the year’s reviews were of commercial signs in Haymarket District. While this task sometimes seems tedious, the Commission’s oversight continues to contribute substantially to the successful revitalization of the former wholesale and railroad district.

The Commission reviewed two major rehabilitation projects outside Haymarket involving fraternities. At the northwest corner of S. 17th and C Streets, Chi Phi Fraternity had previously rehabilitated the landmark Morris Weil Mansion (1149 S. 17th) and acquired the smaller house north of it (1143 S. 17th). Both properties are in the Capitol Addition Landmark District and they were originally the homes of NBC Bank founder Morris Weil (1149) and his son Carl (1143). The north house was considered for demolition to create parking for the larger corner house. After much study, the proposal brought to the Commission instead linked the two houses and created parking across the length of the west side of the lot. Commission chair Greg Munn of BVH Architects was instrumental in designing this solution (and abstained from voting on the matter).
The Commission had previously approved the rehabilitation of 1149 S. 17th with a rear stair tower to provide necessary exiting for the mansion. The 2016 proposal instead accomplished access for both houses in the less obtrusive rear “link,” as well as preserving the historic grouping of the two houses, related both in occupancy and design. The Commission welcomed and approved this preservation solution.

In Greek Row Historic District on the UNL City Campus, Sigma Phi Epsilon Fraternity proposed major additions to the east and south sides of their 1929 chapter house, which already has a very prominent and carefully designed addition of 1967 on the street (east) façade.

The Commission thoroughly discussed the proposal, recognizing that architect Kevin Clark’s careful design drew closely on the original style and materials of the building, but would largely envelope the original building. The Commission approved a “certificate of exception” which is
provided for in its ordinance, recognizing that the constricted site did not provide alternative opportunities for expansion, valuing the continuation of a thriving fraternity on its original site, and acknowledging that the design solution is compatible with the overall character of the Greek Row District.

**Special Permit and Redevelopment Reviews**

The Historic Preservation Commission serves the city as a design and preservation advisor on redevelopment projects and other issues in proximity to designated landmarks or National Register properties, even when preservation certificates are not required under the zoning code. This year the Commission served this function on several issues, including major projects on which it met jointly with the Urban Design Committee (UDC).

In January the Commission and UDC jointly reviewed and recommended approval of the first phase of the large Telegraph District redevelopment project, focusing on three former LT&T buildings around 21st and L Streets. In April the Commission endorsed a Special Permit in Greek Row for a project to demolish the existing Lutheran Center at 535 N. 16th St., built in the 1950s, and replace it with a multi-purpose chapel, housing, office, and activities building. The existing building was not regarded as a “contributing property” when Greek Row Historic District was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1997 and the Commission recommended the new proposal as compatible with the overall character of that district.
In June, the Commission advised on a proposal for a Community Unit Plan on the former Zion Congregational Church site at 9th & D-to-E Streets in the South Bottoms Historic District. That landmark church burned in 2005. NeighborWorks Lincoln eventually acquired the property and is constructing 7 homes in six structures, with a “commons” or open space as a shared back yard. The Commission endorsed the proposal, finding the scale, density, and general style and materials of the proposed houses compatible with the overall South Bottoms District.

In September the Commission also endorsed a special permit for rebuilding the Farm House Fraternity at Idylwild and Apple Streets at the edge of the East Campus Neighborhood Landmark District, based on preliminary plans, recommending that the design return for review when further developed. Planning Commission included this condition in its eventual approval of the special permit. It was a busy year for review of major fraternity projects.

In October and November, the Commission again met jointly with the Urban Design Committee to review two redevelopment proposals in the Haymarket vicinity. The first was a restart of a mixed use redevelopment of “Canopy Lofts” abutting the Lumberworks Garage at O and Canopy Streets. Both groups endorsed the preliminary design, while the Commission encouraged further study of the O Street component for greater compatibility with Historic Haymarket. The Commission endorsed the revised design in November.
The second joint review in November addressed a mixed use hotel and residential project at 9th & O Streets, bounded on the west by Haymarket, north by Old City Hall, east by the Terminal Building, and south by Mission Arts building—all designated National Register historic properties. The tall (12-16 stories) project would share the south side of O Street between 9th and 10th Streets with the iconic Terminal Building of 1916, which at eleven stories was briefly Lincoln’s tallest commercial building. Both design boards endorsed the proposed design in its downtown setting.

**Historic Designations**

Three individual landmarks and a National Register listing were approved by the Commission in 2016, representing a diverse range of historic resources. In March the Commission, on behalf of Lincoln as a Certified Local Government, reviewed and recommended the National Register listing of Sky Park Manor at 1301 Lincoln Mall. Janet Jeffries authored the very thorough nomination of the International Style apartment tower, designed by Lincoln architect Selmer Solheim and built in partnership with Carl Olson. The State Historic Preservation Board also endorsed the nomination and the National Park Service formally listed the property before the year’s end.
In September Stacey Groshong Hageman of the Planning Department authored a Lincoln Landmark application, at the request of the Parks & Recreation Department, of the former Zoo Aviary/Chet Ager Building on Antelope Park Triangle. The building will be leased to Lincoln Children's Zoo as part of the expansion of that leading Lincoln attraction. The designation will assure the on-going historic preservation review of any future changes to this Davis & Wilson designed limestone structure, built in 1936 as a WPA project. Now over 80 years old, the building is being returned to its original function. The Commission recommended the landmark designation, an action repeated by the Planning Commission. The City Council voted the designation and Mayor Beutler added his signature, completing the process.

Two more landmarks received Commission approval in December 2016, along with requests for special permits to assist in their preservation. Planning Commission has also voted to approve both. City Council action is pending, early in 2017.

The former First German Congregational Church, now First Street Bible Church at 100 W. F Street, is a 1920 frame building designed by Lincoln church architect A. W. Woods. The special permit will assist the congregation in adding a needed classroom wing at the rear of the building.
Kelly Langer applied for a landmark designation for the John G. Cordner house at 325 S. 55th Street, and a special permit to develop a “pocket neighborhood” of eight additional houses on the 1.25 acre remnant of Cordner’s original 10-acre house lot. Cordner was a carpenter who became an architect, practicing in Lincoln from the late 1880s into the 1930s. This was his family home. Langer is a housebuilder and is in the process of rehabilitating the main house, which stood empty for approximately 15 years, into his family home. The Preservation Commission and the Planning Commission have approved the project; City Council action is pending.

Outreach

Outreach efforts in 2016 included numerous walking tours, television programs (in cooperation with Preservation Association of Lincoln and Nebraska State Historical Society), and illustrated talks to groups from 3rd graders to senior citizens. Ed Zimmer is an active contributor to the Historical Society’s website “Place Makers of Nebraska: The Architects” (co-editing with project leader David Murphy and Lynn Myers of Omaha), which is growing into a rich resource on Nebraska’s built environment. For more information on Nebraska architects, visit the website at: http://www.e-nebraskahistory.org/index.php?title=Place_Makers_of_Nebraska:_The_Architects

Grant Support

Lincoln’s historic preservation program has benefited by a formal partnership with the State Historic Preservation Office in the Nebraska State Historical Society since the 1980s. Lincoln was designated as one of Nebraska’s first “Certified Local Governments” (CLG) in 1984, establishing the program’s standing within the federal/state/local historic preservation structure outlined in the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966. As a CLG, Lincoln is eligible to apply for annual support from the Historic Preservation Fund of the U. S. Dept. of the Interior and has received such support annually since the 1980s, typically totalling about $25,000 annually. These grants require a 60/40 match, which has been met in-kind through Planning Dept. staff time. The funds support broadcast costs of 5CityTV, graduate interns (usually UNL Community & Regional Planning students), and staff training. Ed Zimmer attended the National Association of Preservation
Commissions’ biennial conference in Mobile, Alabama in July. Stacey Hageman traveled to Los Angeles and participated in a seminar on mid-century modern historic resources in December, gaining insights that will contribute to the National Register nomination of the Eastridge neighborhood, which Ed and Stacey are preparing.

**P. S.: On-going Projects**

Among the many multi-year preservation efforts in Lincoln, the progress in 2016 on the rehabilitation of the Schwarz building at 8th and O is especially welcome, renewing one of Haymarket’s finest early warehouses and strengthening the District’s south edge. The installation of Harry Tompkins’ fused glass column “Starry Night” at the north end of the Gallery Alley pedestrian way completes the current work on that link between the heart of Haymarket and future South Haymarket development.

The Historic Preservation Commission was closely involved in many stages of the Schwarz project and reviewed the Tompkins art work as the most visible element of Gallery Alley from prominent vistas within Haymarket.