Holyoke Historical Commission
Meeting Minutes
August 14, 2017

Attendance:
Richard Ahlstrom (Chairperson), Olivia Mausel, Joe Paul, Ali Puffer, James Sheehan, Frances Welson, Jean Jonker (Associate)
Absent: Christopher Gauthier (Alternate), Paola Ferrerio, Dan Fitzgerald

Guests: Robert Comeau, John Feydenkevez

Municipal Staff: Debbie Oppermann (OPED)

1) Call to order: Richard Ahlstrom called the meeting to order at 6:30pm.

2) Review of 7-26-17 minutes: The minutes were inadvertently left out of the meeting packet and so a decision was made to review them at the upcoming September 11th meeting.

3) National Register/Perkins Block – MA Development Finance Agency – MDFA has purchased the Perkins Block on Dwight Street and instructed Epsilon Associates, their historic preservation consultant, to apply for National Register of Historic Places designation. Epsilon provided the Commission with a copy of Part 1 – Evaluation of Significance that they submitted to the MA Historical Commission (the SHPO – State Historic Preservation Officer) for review and requests an opinion on the property’s eligibility for the National Register.

Frances Welson made a motion to support MDFA’s application for designation of the Perkins Block as a National Register of Historic Places site, Joe Paul seconded the motion and the motion was passed unanimously.

4) Walking Tours – Bob Comeau provided Commissioners with a handout outlining four (4) walking tours he has planned for this fall (2017) and asked the Commission if it would be willing to sponsor the tours in name only, no funding. He explained that each tour will include a church campus and neighborhood: (1) September 9 – Mater Dolorosa, (2) October 7 - Immaculate Conception Church, (3) November 4 - Blessed Sacrament Church and (4) December 2 – Precious Blood Church. The handout he provided contained a descriptive paragraph on each. Commissioners questions ranged from wanting to know who he does he research, to his background to whether or not he would ask for donations of food and clothing again for local charity. Mr. Comeau stated that he had been a high school science teacher, enjoyed researching historical sites using primary source materials and that he would not ask for donations at these tours.

James Sheehan made a motion to sponsor the fall tours as proposed by Bob Comeau, Ali Puffer seconded the motion and it was passed unanimously. The Commission thanked Bob and let him know how much they appreciate his work.

Mr. Comeau also thanked the Commission for sponsoring the tour he gave of the Holyoke Canal System in May. Debbie Oppermann said that she would ask if the tours can be advertised on the City’s web site.
5) **Mater Dolorosa:** John Feydenkevez, MD Preservation Society (an 8 member board of directors dedicated to preserving the former MD church), provided an update on the Society’s dealings with the Diocese regarding the purchase of the building.

Included in his comments were: a. the struggle to preserve MD is being watched worldwide, b. redevelopment concept remains the same = preserve the building for posterity and make into a cultural center for the city (not just for Polish heritage or for any sort of religious matters), c. the Society just submitted another proposal to purchase to the Diocese addressing each concern raised by the Diocese representatives, most notably Jack Eagan, their attorney and who, the Society believes, is the ultimate decision maker, d. the Polish Consulate General (NYC) is fully behind the project and is doing what it can to influence the Diocese with letters of support, finding financial support and making connections with cultural groups interested in using the building, e. there is concern that the Diocese is not acting in good faith, they offered to sell the property to the Society if the group would rehabilitate the building according to a Diocese crafted plan (a plan that the Diocese engineers will not put their stamp on) and to their engineer’s standards at an approx. cost of $5.3 million. The Society rejected this offer. f. The Diocese has also asked for a 5 year insurance policy protecting them from any liability associated with the building at a cost of $55,000 to the Society, which the group agreed to IF the Diocese would sell the building and allow rehabilitation to the standards determined by the Society’s consultants. g. the Society has worked with the Our Lady of the Cross parish to explain their position and to reduce conflict with the Society’s mission, h. the Diocese disclosed their engineering report to the Society, which the Society feels and knows in some cases, is greatly inflated (i.e. $935K for the roof alone). Several commissioners asked John myriad questions. John thanked the Commission for doing everything it had already done.

6) **Old Business:**

a. **Preservation of City Hall Portraits:** Olivia Mausel reported that the two pictures in the worst condition are being restored by Vitek Kruta (see description of full project 7/10/17 minutes). Although there are 18 portraits that are in need of restorative work, only two will be worked on due to budget constraints. Eventually the portraits will be rehung in City Hall on a picture hanging system (similar to picture rail)

b. **Medal of Honor Project update** – Olivia Mausel, Jim Bronson, and Debbie Oppermann met on 8/11 to work on a CDBG and SHRAB funded project that will erect a monument in Veterans Park for three (3) Medal of Honor recipients in Holyoke (see 7/10/17 minutes). Veterans Park (aka Hampden Park) is a historic district placed on the National Register of Historic Places 2012. Next steps: Jim and Olivia will meet w/ Holyoke Monuments to determine the type and style of the monument and get pricing information. Debbie will find out what type of procurement procedure is necessary to comply with the grants.

c. **Preservation Plan** - Debbie Oppermann reported the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission, the consultant preparing the report, has completed the rewrite and is now working with its graphics department on reformatting the document. She expects the draft final report in the OPED office this week.

d. **Bylaws Review & Revise Update** - Debbie Oppermann reported that she has made all changes that were discussed at the 7/10 meeting to the bylaws but was awaiting guidance on a few issues from the City Solicitor including ad hoc committees and the possibility of including a requirement for staff.

e. **Native American Project** – Olivia Mausel provided Commissioners with a copy of the Town of Deerfield’s Archaeological Accountability Policy and asked everyone to consider using it as a template for future action regarding archaeological resources. The policy requests that archaeologists, prior to excavating a community’s rich archaeological resources, inform the
Historical Commission of their intent and provide the Commission with the basic information regarding their research. The request is the result of difficulties experienced by this subcommittee in getting information about Holyoke’s archaeological artifacts (primarily from the Depot Hill area) now housed at Amherst College and the Springfield Museums. Alexandra Puffer asked about Northampton’s use of a similar policy and expressed her support for looking into this further. The subcommittee will provide additional information at a later date.

f. Designation of M. Crescentini to CPC- Debbie Oppermann submitted a letter to the Mayor indicating that the Historical Commission designated Marco Crescentini to represent the Commission’s interests on the Community Preservation Committee. There was some discussion about the number of people that the City has added to the committee beyond the requirements set by law. Once Debbie finds out the date of the first meeting, she’ll let the Commission know.

g. 394 High Street- The Commission was informed that the Office of Community Development had issued its Intent to Request the Release of Funds for the demolition of this property that the Commission had reviewed a few months ago.

h. City demolition with CDBG funds – The Office of Community Development submitted Project Notification forms to the MA Historical Commission for four (4) properties that the City seeks to demolish. The Commission was copied on those submissions per law – copies provided in meeting packet.

a. 569 Bridge Street (1900) The City’s Survey Board report describes the building as a shell, roof gone, 1st floor has collapsed into the basement, windows are gone – asked that it be demolished immediately

b. 56 North Street (1880) – Building dilapidated, not a feasible rehab

c. 808 Dwight Street (1885) – The Survey Board reports that the building is dangerous, unused, uninhabited and abandoned

d. 107 Clemente Street (1900) The Building Department issued a notice of violation for an unsafe structure

7) New Business

a. Mt. Tom Lodge- The Lodge, (Freemasons) 235 Chestnut Street, has asked the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission to quote a price for preparing an Inventory Form B and National Register of Historic Places nomination. The effort is a means of 1) historic recognition and 2) hopefully securing funds for preservation. The Form B is the first step in the National Register nomination process. With the development and preservation efforts going on in this area (housing, library, Holyoke Catholic, theater, Veteran’s Field, etc.) it makes sense as a strong link in the chain.

Due to staff receiving material for this meeting after the agenda had already been circulated, two items were discussed under new business that did not appear on the agenda 7b. and 7c.

7b. Preservation MA Conference - The statewide nonprofit historic preservation organization, is holding their annual conference on September 22, 2017. The cost is $50 – Office of Planning & Economic Development will pay for the registration fee if anyone is interested in attending. Debbie asked everyone to consider going if possible. She will contact all Commissioners via email by Friday (8/18) to take advantage of early registration pricing.

7c. 120 Walnut Street – Debbie Oppermann reported that she received a Demolition Application from Damian Cote, Holyoke Building Commissioner that morning. This is the only information received at this point. She circulated the Application and a Google street view
photo of the property. There was a brief review of procedure and the Commission decided to hold the required public hearing at its next regularly scheduled meeting on September 11th.

Alexandra Puffer and Jim Sheehan offered to do the research for the Historical Significance Assessment Form. Debbie said that she would take them up on their offers if she was unable to get the work done.

8) **Next Meeting**- September 11, 2017

9) **Adjourn**: a motion was made by Joe Paul to adjourn the meeting at 7:55, seconded by Ali Puffer – passed unanimously.

Submitted by,

Debbie U. Oppermann