
MANHATTAN/RILEY COUNTY PRESERVATION ALLIANCE NEWSLETTER

OCTOBER, 2007

A LETTER FROM OUR PRESIDENT, LINDA GLASGOW

The primary purpose of this newsletter is to remind everyone of the October 1st Planning Board meeting, 7:00 p.m. at City Hall.

The Alliance offers an important point of view in the community's ongoing discussion of growth and development.

It is time for Manhattan to decide if it wants a traditional, urban, integrated, historic downtown or a main street with an attached suburban strip mall. I urge everyone to attend the meeting and to bring your friends. Even if you don't want to make a speech, your presence will make a statement.

The Manhattan/Riley County Preservation Alliance new membership year has begun and I would like to thank everyone who has joined or renewed. A reminder to everybody else: it's never too

late to join!

The September 13th annual meeting at Manhattan's Union Pacific Depot was productive and informative. The 2007-2008 board of directors and officers were elected. See page 2 for more information on the meeting and election results.

Pausing just a minute before looking to the year ahead, I would like to thank all of the officers and directors who faithfully served this organization during the 2006-2007 year.

I want to particularly recognize the work of out-going president Judine Mecseri. The Alliance is more organized and financially secure than ever because of Judine and the hardworking committees that she assembled. Judine stands in a long line of former Alliance presidents who have worked to

preserve the very best of Manhattan and Riley County.

Looking to the future, I would like to continue along the path that has been laid. It's teamwork that has taken us this far and it will be teamwork that takes us forward. .

To those members whose preservation interests primarily lie in parts of Riley County outside the borders of Manhattan, I want to thank you for joining the Alliance and invite you to become more active in the organization. The Manhattan/Riley County Preservation Alliance is interested in knowing about preservation issues throughout the County.

The next Board meeting, open to all members, will be on October 11th at Manhattan's Union Pacific Depot, 7:00 p.m. Please notify me of agenda items a week in advance.

MARK YOUR CALENDAR

MONDAY, OCTOBER 1 – PLANNING BOARD MEETING

7:00 P.M. AT CITY HALL

2007—2008 Officers & Directors

Barbara Anderson

Meghan Dowdy

Kathy Dzewaltowski

Fran Ellis

Gary Ellis—*Vice President*

Linda Glasgow—*President*

Bonnie Lynn-Sherow

Judine Mecseri

Michael Mecseri

Jayne Morris-Hardeman

Debbie Nuss—*Program Chair*

Pat O'Brien

Marina Pecar-Krstic

Barbara Poresky—*Treasurer*

Debbie Saroff

Georganne White—*Secretary*

Board Highlights: The Annual Meeting

President Judine Mecseri called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. on September 13th at Manhattan's Union Pacific Depot.

Treasurer Barbara Poresky reported a healthy balance in the treasury.

The Board discussed its opposition to a proposed modification to the Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) between the City of Manhattan and the Cultural Resources Division of the Kansas State Historical Society. The MOA protects the historic Strasser House from demolition or relocation. Bernd Foerster volunteered to represent the Manhattan/Riley County Preservation Alliance at an upcoming meeting between the City and the Kansas State Historical Society to discuss modification.

The board considered the possibility of hiring an attorney who specializes in preservation litigation to assist us in our opposition to the amendment of the Planned Unit Development (PUD) which currently governs the downtown redevelopment area.

The board also discussed placing an ad in The Manhattan Mercury prior to the October 1st planning board meeting.

Results of the election of the board of directors and officers can

be seen on this page. Thanks to all who are willing to serve.

The annual meeting concluded with a program. The Alliance's own Dr. Lauren Ritterbush of Kansas State University's Department of Sociology, Anthropology, and Social Work gave a PowerPoint presentation about the archaeological sites of Manhattan and vicinity.

Members learned that Riley County holds a wealth of archaeological information that has been deposited over the roughly 12,000 years of human habitation.

As we consider preservation issues, Lauren suggests that we think of the entire span of time in which humans have called this area home.

Archaeological information is becoming increasingly endangered by development. Five professional archaeologists reside in Riley County. Even if all five were to work on Riley County sites full time, they would be unable to discover and study all the existing "history beneath our feet."

Lauren expanded our view of what it means to be a preservationist. Judging by the many thoughtful questions at the end of her talk, the audience took her remarks to heart.

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Photo courtesy of the Riley County Historical Society

Poyntz Avenue, South 300 Block, looking east, 1940's

AN EDITORIAL BY BERND FOERSTER

The meeting sponsored by the Manhattan/Riley County Preservation Alliance about the northern section of the downtown redevelopment project displayed justified anger.

Hy-Vee, the suggested occupant of the large site, has a good reputation as a grocery store and would be welcomed. However such a facility in the vicinity of Dillons, Wal-Mart and the new Kansas owned Ray's Apple Market is questionable at best. The obvious unwillingness of stores appropriate for our downtown to become a part of this development should tell us something.

The proposal again shatters everything we were told since the beginning of this project. We were led to believe that a nationally renowned architectural firm would be a part of the project, but its name disappeared early in the process. There were public sessions with many displays of colored renderings of what we might expect that have absolutely no resemblance to any-

thing that is even being considered now. Several excellent ideas and different versions provided by the outstanding local firm of Brent Bowman also seem gone from the latest proposal.

There were lengthy discussions of housing that was to replace some of the residences we have already lost, but housing has disappeared from the project. There were indications that landscaping was to provide a pleasant buffer to separate adjacent neighborhoods from the commercial area, but that concept has disappeared as well. The part of the project that faces residential areas was to be appropriate in scale and character to the adjacent neighborhoods, but the proposed giant store is neither. No wall or fence could hide the conflict.

The community reluctantly agreed to the loss of a few good buildings to ensure that at least one historic building would be saved, and an agreement was reached to save that structure in an appropri-

ate setting. It might then be eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places. That would no longer be possible if the structure is moved and its orientation changed as shown on the latest proposal. Anyone familiar with the cost of moving masonry structures can predict that affordability will be the next reason for dropping such a commitment.

Eminent domain should not be used to create environments that make conditions worse. The continuing process of bait and switch must come to a speedy end. Our current City Commission has inherited an impossible situation, should not throw any more tax money at this unfortunate project and should be very careful about what might happen with the development on the Southside.

Bernd Foerster is professor and dean emeritus of the Kansas State University College of Architecture, Planning and Design. This article first appeared in *The Manhattan Mercury* and is reprinted with permission.

AN EDITORIAL BY KATHY DZEWALTOWSKI

As I continue to advocate for the preservation of the Strasser House (the stone house in the north redevelopment that is supposed to be saved) and to do my homework, I'm learning about Dial's history, specifically its history of tearing down historically significant properties.

In Independence, Missouri, in 2003, Dial received approval for a \$1.6 million nine-home revitalization project, just a block-and-a-half from President Truman's boyhood home.

To make the project more economically feasible, Dial wanted to tear down two homes. The Independence Heritage Commission and the city's Historical Preservation Department did not want the homes torn down because of their close proximity to Truman's home.

The homes were not historically significant on their own but were considered significant because of how they contributed to the Truman district and to the environs of Truman's home. The two homes were in disrepair, but preservationists believed the homes could be renovated at a reasonable cost.

The Heritage Commission denied Dial's request to demolish the

homes and recommended that the two homes be rehabilitated, and if Dial didn't want to do it, Dial should allow someone else to do the rehabilitation. Independence newspaper articles seem to indicate that there was community support for both sides of the preservation-demolition issue.

Dial appealed the Heritage Commission's recommendation to preserve the two homes to the Independence City Council. The City Council approved the demolition of the two homes. Following the decision, Independence's Community Development Director said the city had been "looking for developers to renovate the area around the Truman home."

It wasn't so very long ago that Dial had plans to fit the Strasser House in with the redevelopment and use it for a day spa or something of the sort. In a recent Mercury article (9/9/07), Rick Kiolbasa, of the Dial Corporation, described the Strasser House as being in "pretty bad shape." He went on to say, "It has some fire damage and termite damage. It needs a lot of help."



Photo courtesy of the Riley County Historical Society

Poyntz Avenue, North 300 Block by *Studio Royal*

Mr. Kiolbasa's comments remind me of comments made by Jim Harpool, then president of Dial, about the two homes in Independence: "It would be nice to save everything, regardless of cost. I just do not know how that is possible."

Any Manhattanites who may have been giving Dial the benefit of the doubt regarding Dial's intentions for the Strasser House only need to look to Independence and that community's demolished historically significant homes to see what Dial is going to do here.

While you're at it, look up The Pavilions, the strip mall Dial developed in Independence. The site plan looks familiar.

Is Manhattan getting the redevelopment the community wants? Or, are we getting what Dial knows how to do--strip malls and tear downs of historic properties?

Kathy Dzewaltowski serves on the Manhattan/Riley County Preservation Alliance's board of directors. This article originally appeared as a blog on The Manhattan Mercury's website and is reprinted with permission.

*Tired of seeing historic buildings lost to thoughtless development
and being told that this is "progress?"
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