

MINUTES
REGULAR MEETING
ST. ALBANS CITY HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION
6:00 PM TUESDAY, JANUARY 10, 2023
ST. ALBANS CITY HALL, 100 NORTH MAIN STREET

Approved March 14, 2023

Commission Members Present: Laz Scangas, Chair; Richard Stahl; Barbara Weinstein; Lisa Evans (via Zoom); Joe Luneau (via Zoom, arrived at 6:25 PM, left at 6:53 PM).

Commission Members Absent: LisaMarie Charlesworth; KarenMarie Peltier

City Staff Present: Chip Sawyer, Director of Planning & Development; Angela Bernard, Minute Taker.

Members of the Public Present: Louise Haynes.

1. Begin Recording and Open Meeting - **L. Scangas opened the meeting at 6:06 PM.**

- a. Introduction of attendees – introductions were made.
- b. Public Comment on issues not on agenda – none.
- c. Discuss additions or deletions to agenda – none.

2. Discuss French-Canadian Historic District project.

- a. Presentation by Mrs. Louise Haynes on the French-Canadian Community in St. Albans

L. Haynes gave the Commission a background on her French heritage project. She explained how she found that the majority of the French who came to town in the 1850s were mainly people who came to work on the railroad. In looking at their background, who they were and where they settled, she discovered that the focus of their settlement and where they built their houses was west of the railroad track (Lake Street neighborhood).

L. Haynes related to the Commission some of the French surnames of the new settlers. She explained that many of the settlers held their own private mass in the basement of St. Mary's Church, presented in French. The Bishop at the time authorized another parish, around 1871. The church was placed in the new settlement where the French were moving, in the location where Holy Angels Church is located still. There were also French doctors, dentists and other community services moved to the area in that time.

They then decided to establish a school in the neighborhood. They hired French speaking nuns from Canada to come down, live there in a convent, and to teach there, grades 1 - 8. That school taught in ½ day in French and ½ in English. After grade 8, students had no choice but to go to an English-speaking high school, so they established a two-year secondary school, grades 9 & 10 as well, with a mission of training office workers until the 1960s.

L. Haynes explained that after the 1960s that area of town became less and less French/English bilingual, and more diverse. She showed a chart explaining where the district in town would be. She recommended looking at the entire area from Lower Welden Street to Lower Newton. She asked the Commission what they are considering for historic structures in the town. L. Scangas said they weren't sure because it's a new project that's still in development. He explained that the State of VT did a full survey of all structures in the city in the 1980s, which will be very helpful with the project.

L. Scangas asked if any of the new settlers came from France or from Canada. L. Haynes said majority Canada and she didn't know of any settlers directly from France. There were a lot of women who were sent over from France to marry men here to establish French families in town.

L. Haynes described some of the fairs, festivals, and parades that used to be held year-round in the neighborhood and the international audiences they would attract.

B. Weinstein asked how many of the families worked for the railroad. L. Haynes said her best guess was more than half, possibly 60%, were employed for the RR. L. Scangas asked how many French-Canadian families were here. L. Haynes said she didn't know, but one could guess by looking at old directory listings and the surnames listed there.

B. Weinstein asked about a display she had seen at the St. Albans Museum a few years ago that included a diagram of the neighborhood, with tiny blocks to represent the houses. L. Haynes said she can't find it, but they're looking.

L. Scangas asked when the community peaked. L. Haynes said around the 1950s or 60s.

L. Haynes then showed the Commission a huge binder that describes families from the area. She explained that they've done community outreach to try and flesh out the records with more families, but it's hard to get people to send information in.

L. Scangas asked if L. Haynes had a list of French-Canadian families they could start with. L. Haynes said no, but she showed him a directory from the city in the 1930s, and said they have some directories going back to the 1880s. L. Scangas said to justify the district, they need a list of names and families.

C. Sawyer said the Commission could find prominent French-Canadian citizens or organizations in order to establish a historic district, as opposed to having a list of specific names and families. L. Scangas asked if there were any wealthy or powerful French families in the area. L. Haynes said no, not really, but that she could come up with a list of some of the most well-connected residents, such as doctors and priests. No one really stuck out with wealth, it was more about what was good for the community.

L. Scangas asked if L. Haynes had any background on when and why the parishes of St. Mary's and Holy Angels didn't get along and began having tensions. She explained that the west side of the tracks was considered more blue collar, and there was a separation from the people on the east side of town.

L. Haynes asked what the Commission would like from her next. L. Scangas said they're not sure, because this is just the beginning of the project, but he will let her know.

L. Evans shared a blog from a historian writer who specializes on French Canadian history, as well as an article that he's written specifically focused on St. Albans.

3. Approval of Minutes.

R. Stahl made a motion to approve the minutes from October 2022, as presented. Second by L. Evans. Minutes approved with all in favor at 7:23 PM.

4. Other business – none.

5. Review next meeting date/time – next meeting is set for March 14, 2023 at 6:00 PM.

6. Adjourn.

L. Scangas adjourned the meeting at 7:24 PM.