

**CITYWIDE PRESERVATION PLAN
PUBLIC HEARING #1
NOVEMBER 6, 2008**

The Van Buren Historic District Commission held a Public Hearing on Thursday, November 6, 2008 to discuss and take input on Citywide Preservation Plan that will be created specifically for the City of Van Buren. Phil Thomason and Associates out of Nashville, TN have been contracted to put together this plan. The activity which is the subject of these minutes from this public hearing has been financed entirely with Federal funds from the National Park Service, Department of the Interior, administered through the Arkansas Historic Preservation Program, an agency of the Department of Arkansas Heritage. However, the contents and opinions do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the Department of the Interior, nor does the mention of trade names or commercial products constitute endorsement or recommendation by the Department of the Interior or the Arkansas Historic Preservation Program.

PRESENT: Vickie Davis, Chairman
 Dwight Hopkins, Vice-Chairman
 John Symonds
 Paul Gibson
 Jody Rhoads
 Cami Brown, Recording Secretary
 Phil Thomason, consultant

OTHERS
PRESENT: Boyd Mahar, AHPP
 Rhea Roberts, HPAA
 Billie Ann Patterson
 Bill Swaim, Alderman
 Jean Arends-Allison
 Sheila Bell
 Maryl Koeth, A & P Commission
 Mary Ann Dodd, Alderman
 Jane Owen
 Bernie Manard
 Elaine Stanfield
 Duane Howard
 Pat Howard
 Janice Cochrane
 Jane Rowe

Marr Lynn Bearden
Tom Wing, Prof. at UAFS
Randy Smith, Liaison for Fairview Cemetery/City of Van Buren
Brad Baldwin, City Engineer
Richard & Kaye Gilstrap
Barb Little
Debbie Foliart
Allen Foliart
John Hall, County Judge
Larry Brandenburg
Jason Myers

Chairman Vickie Davis called this public hearing to order at 5:30 P.M. Mrs. Davis welcomed those in attendance, and gave them a brief summary of what this public hearing was for, and at that time introduced Phil Thomason of Thomason and Associates out of Nashville, Tennessee.

Mr. Phil Thomason commented part of the process for putting together a citywide preservation plan for the city would include conducting interviews and public hearings of the next 5 to 6 months. This allows for the public to be involved in the process. Mr. Thomason then presented a power point program to the audience, and gave them information about citywide preservation, and what this plan means to the City of Van Buren. Mr. Thomason included in this presentation areas in our city that have structures that could be included in such a plan. He commented on such things as our residential areas, on our riverfront and its disconnection from our Historic Main Street District, and the Drennen-Scott House project. After giving the audience general information about the process to putting together a citywide preservation plan Mr. Thomason opened the floor to questions.

One citizen commented he lives on the river in a houseboat, and wanted to know when looking at the riverfront, what exactly might happen in that area. Mr. Thomason commented that many cities have developed the riverfronts because people like being there. With such access, this could have a positive economic impact for our city. The history of the riverfront is a vital part of our Historic Main Street. Reconnecting to the riverfront is reconnecting to a main vein of our town's history.

Jane Owen asked Mr. Thomason how one determines a district and what goes in one when you are looking to create a district. Mr. Thomason commented a district can be one or two blocks or 1,000 properties. He commented they map out an area and try to determine where does a sense of a historic district begin and end in that area. The area is mapped out to see if there is a connection between areas, or if the area would stand better alone. He commented historic preservation looks for close boundaries.

Debbie Foliart asked Mr. Thomason after his process is complete, what happens then, to which Mr. Thomason responded a draft preservation plan would be put together and brought before the citizens in another public hearing.

Jane Owen asked if there would be different plans for different area, to which Mr. Thomason commented you can “tailor” guidelines to reflect the wishes of property owners in an area. He then mentioned a conservation zone, and that in such a zone the Historic District Commission looks at new construction and additions to make sure it is compatible with what is existing, as well as try to find alternatives to demolition by neglect.

Billie Anne Patterson commented she owns the old Brody House on Cane Hill and wanted to know will it be included in such a plan and when will commission know such information. Mr. Thomason commented as this plan comes together there will be more public hearings, and the commission also commented they would keep Mrs. Patterson informed.

Sheila Bell addressed Mr. Thomason about demolition and how it can be dealt with. Mrs. Bell commented that recent demolition of some historic properties was devastating to her, and she wanted to know what can be done. Phil Thomason commented that cities deal with this issue in different ways. He commented some cities just won't issue a demolition permit for a period of time, like six months to a year in order to provide a period of time to see what alternatives are available. In some communities where you have a property that is just falling down, and the owner has no intention of doing anything about the property, the city will be aggressive enough to confiscate the property, do the repairs and put a lien on the property for the cost of repairs. Some cities will seize the property and do a demo by neglect order, which Mr. Thomason said was a bit extreme. Mr. Thomason went on to comment this really depends on how a community feels and how aggressive a community wants to be. Mr. Thomason commented this is one of the topics where he wants feedback from the public, and one of the things he will be discussing with the city, how does one get a demolition permit, and is that process really one that is appropriate, and is it one that everyone is comfortable with, or do we want to look at various triggers for that demolition permit.

Judge John Hall commented he would like to make sure the county is included in this process, as they have buildings in the city, including the courthouse which is in the Historic District. Phil Thomason replied that he would be coming to Judge Hall soon to talk about this plan, to which Judge Hall said thank you.

At this time Chairman Vickie Davis asked Phil Thomason to speak about the tax breaks, tax incentives for work done on a property that is on the National Register. Mr. Thomason commented he didn't think this is being taken advantage of. He also commented that it looked like a lot of the work being done on Main Street would qualify for this tax incentive. He gave some examples of investment figures and what would return to an investor on this tax incentive program to put it in perspective for the audience. Mr. Thomason commented there is a movement in the state to pass a tax credit

on state taxes that would be applicable not only on commercial property but also residential property. Mr. Thomason commented where states have enacted this tax credit, it has made enormous difference in rehabilitation in older neighborhoods and downtowns. Barb Little asked Mr. Thomason if you have already done the work can you grab that tax break anyway. Mr. Thomason commented it is more difficult, but can be done if you have very good documentation of what the building looked like before the work, and good records of the work that was done, and if the building is in service after the work.

At this time Rhea Roberts with the HP Alliance introduced herself and commented that if anyone wanted more information they could contact her in Little Rock. Mr. Thomason commented anyone living in an older area, in a historic district should try to get this legislation passed, as it will make a big difference in returns with increased property taxes, increased sales taxes, and it would be a win-win for everyone.

Phil Thomason asked if anyone had any other questions to which there was no response. Mr. Thomason gave the audience his website information so he would be available for any questions and comments. He thanked the citizens for coming out and commented he was looking forward to the future public hearings.

This public hearing was adjourned.

Vickie Davis, Chairman

Cami L. Brown, Recording Secretary