

**Mobile Historic Development Commission
September 8, 2025
Richards-DAR House Museum
256 N Joachim Street
5:30 PM**

Call to Order:

The meeting commenced at 5:30 p.m.

Present:

Virginia “Ginny” Behlen, Peters Drey, Jaime Betbeze, Jean Dodge, Jessica Fairley, Jeffery Hartley, Alison Henry, Joan Hoffman, Tim Maness, and Ivy Thompson

Absent:

Virginia Edington, Kimberly Knowles, and Stephen McNair

City Staff:

Annie Allen, Kimberly Branch-Thomas, Bruce McGowin, and Meredith Wilson

Approval of Minutes:

Minutes from the previous meeting were approved via a voice roll call vote.

Treasurer’s Report:

Mr. Betbeze, on behalf of Treasurer Virginia Eddington, reported that the easement and general accounts are steady at \$28,004 and \$1,450, respectively, with no transactions in either account since last month.

Procedural and Administrative Updates:

The new president, Alison Henry, will initiate a voice roll call at the start of meetings to track attendance. Commissioners were reminded of their duty to serve the citizens of Mobile and prioritize attending the monthly meetings, which are typically held on the first Monday of each month at 5:30 PM, except for June and December. These meetings usually last 30-45 minutes. June and December meetings are reserved for Banner and Shield. A strong request was made for commissioners to promptly respond to staff emails regarding their attendance to ensure a quorum can be confirmed in advance.

Old Business

1. Update on Design Guidelines Project

Per Meredith Wilson: Stakeholder meetings for the design guide project will occur between September 15th and 19th. A draft will be posted online for public feedback on September 19th, with the comment period open until October. A presentation summarizing the updates will be given to the full commission on October 6th, with a special meeting planned for November to approve the final draft. Hard copies of the draft were not available at this meeting due to printer issues.

2. Update on 906 Center Street

An update on 906 Center Street was discussed and needs to be an ongoing discussion with interested parties. It has been removed from the demolition list and letters sent to the owner. Possibly something that the Friends can work to help find fund raising opportunities.

New Business

1. Banner and Shield – proposal for online application process

Approximately 15 applications have been received for the Banner and Shield program. The eligibility for homes has been expanded to include those built up to 1950, which may require more research for properties outside of historic districts like Oakley and Leinkauf. The commission plans to utilize interns from the University of South Alabama to assist with property searches, though the cost for this service is not yet determined, with consideration for potential payment. The program is a source of revenue, and the commission plans to increase the price and promote it on the "Friends of the MHDC" social media page, which currently has 34 followers.

2. Training and Events

Ms. Henry announced that a mandatory commissioner training session will be held on September 30th from 5:00 PM to 6:30 PM on the third floor of the RSA Tower. This training is required by state statute and local EVOL, and Annie and Meredith will be presenting.

Ms. Henry also announced that The unveiling ceremony for the Pelican Girls historic monument is scheduled for December 7th at 4:30 PM at the corner of Church and Royal. The commission is erecting the monument, but it was paid for by the Friends of MHDC, the Sybil Smith Foundation, Alison Henry, and another private donor. Despite not paying, the monument will state "erected by the Mobile Historic Development Commission 2025." The monument will feature the story of the girls on one side and their names from the ship's manifest on the other. A dessert and champagne reception, approved by the Friends, will follow the unveiling at the museum, which will be closed to the public during the event.

2. Ordinance for Vacant Commercial Properties

Mr. Betbeze announced that the city administration is introducing a "Vacant Structures Registry" ordinance tomorrow, targeting vacant commercial properties within the downtown Henry Aaron loop. The ordinance applies to properties vacant for six months or more and requires owners to have insurance in place, fire protection (with working plumbing), and to secure the building envelope completely to prevent vagrants. The goal is to incentivize owners to lease, fix, or sell their properties and address public safety and preservation concerns, such as those highlighted by the Hoffman building fire. The ordinance will include an annual fee and a \$500 fine, with exemptions for properties actively undergoing repair.

The commission voted to pass a resolution in support of this ordinance and discussed having members speak in its favor at the upcoming city council meeting, likely on September 16th, as significant pushback is anticipated, including from Councilman William Carroll.

Mr. Betbeze agreed to draft the resolution expressing the commission's support for the proposed ordinance. Ms. Henry agreed to notify commissioners if the ordinance would be discussed at the next city council meeting so that commissioners can attend and speak in favor.

There being no additional business, the meeting was concluded at 6:05 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by Tim Maness, Secretary