

Roll Call Number

Agenda Item Number

★ _____

15-A

Date July 27, 2009

Receipt of letter from Dale and Barbara Henning regarding proposed development in Court Avenue area.

Moved by _____ to receive and file.

COUNCIL ACTION	YEAS	NAYS	PASS	ABSENT
COWNIE				
COLEMAN				
HENSLEY				
KIERNAN				
MAHAFFEY				
MEYER				
VLASSIS				
TOTAL				

CERTIFICATE

I, DIANE RAUH, City Clerk of said City hereby certify that at a meeting of the City Council of said City of Des Moines, held on the above date, among other proceedings the above was adopted.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand and affixed my seal the day and year first above written.

MOTION CARRIED APPROVED

Mayor

City Clerk

Dale & Barbara Henning
55 Meade Drive
Coralville, Iowa 52241
319-887-7040 Barbara@henning-nm.us

July 22, 2009

To the Members of the Des Moines City Council

We understand that a new hotel may be built in the Court Avenue area. While such a project is certainly good news, the fate of a supremely important site—the birthplace of the City of Des Moines—should be considered prior to any construction. Fort Des Moines No. 2 is important as the symbol of the very beginnings of the Capital City. In addition, historic archeological investigation could yield valuable information about this very early time in Des Moines.

Without some archeological survey and analysis, the past uses of the Court Avenue area would be forever lost to us. The investigation need not halt or even delay hotel construction. The alley, in particular, promises to be a treasure chest of secrets from our past.

There is precedent for actually finding pieces of our heritage, of Fort Des Moines No. 2, very near the proposed hotel site. In 1985 a hearth from the fort was located beneath 1850s flood-related deposits just south of Market Street.

The proposed hotel site, which is north of Market Street, has a strong potential for unearthing similar exciting information that is directly related to our heritage. A recent land use history of the area estimated that about half the area never had basements and that there is some three feet of fill over the 1840s surface. Investigation of the alley behind the properties on S.W. 2nd St. and perhaps the lower level of the buildings offer the distinct prospect of literally unearthing our past.

Both of the undersigned have strong ties to Des Moines and its past. Dale Henning, a former member of the board of the State Historical Society of Iowa, has led archeological investigations of the Fort Des Moines No. 2 area as well as at Terrace Hill. Barbara Henning (formerly Barbara Beving Long) has researched the fort area, completed numerous National Register nominations for Des Moines properties, and written a book about Polk County history. Her family came to the county in 1850, not long after Fort Des Moines No. 2 ceased its military function and became the locus of urban development.

Why not sponsor an archeological investigation? There is nothing to gain and much to lose should the City fail to act responsibly. Please investigate Fort Des Moines No. 2.

Sincerely,

Barbara Henning
Dale Henning