Mr. Douglas Bisson, Chair, called the meeting to order at 1:30 pm, introduced the Commission members, as well as the staff. Mr. Bisson explained the procedures for hearing the cases. Roll was taken with seven members present.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

Mr. Macchietto moved to APPROVE the November 9, 2011 meeting minutes as written. Mr. Santamaria seconded the motion.

AYES: Macchietto, Schleicher, Santamaria, Hogan, Novak, Garcia, Bisson

MOTION CARRIED: 7-0
NATIONAL REGISTER NOMINATIONS:

Case #H5-11-13
Alley Poyner Macchietto Architecture
Attn: Jennifer Honebrink
1516 Cuming Street
Omaha, NE 68102

REQUEST: Request for approval of National Register Nomination for Rent-A-Ford Capitol Garage
LOCATION: 202 North 19th Street

Jennifer Honebrink of Alley Poyner Macchietto Architecture appeared before the Commission. Ms. Honebrink requested approval of National Register Nomination for Rent-A-Ford Capitol Garage, also known as Capitol Garage. Ms. Honebrink stated the prospective owners are present today, and the actual owners submitted a letter stating they did not oppose the nomination.

Ms. Honebrink presented the Commission with a slideshow regarding the Rent-A-Ford Capitol Garage. She provided a brief history of the car rental industry and how it began in Omaha. In 1916, the Sanders family is credited with starting the industry of automobile rentals. An associate of the Sanders’ family, Mr. Goldstein, observed how Mr. Sanders rented autos. Mr. Goldstein began buying autos and renting them. Ms. Honebrink explained that in Chicago, Mr. Hertz started the Yellow Cab Company and was running a taxi service. Mr. Hertz saw the potential for the industry and proposed taking the industry nationally. Mr. Hertz purchased the Yellow Cab Company and renamed it Hertz. In Omaha, Mr. Goldstein bought into Mr. Hertz’ concept of automobile rentals.

Ms. Honebrink stated the first automobiles were stored in old livery buildings. As autos became more standardized, it became more possible to construct a building to store automobiles. Ms. Honebrink described the different architectural designs for storing the automobiles, including the elevator and railroad turntables. Ms. Honebrink described how ramps were developed as a system for parking automobiles, where people could drive in, park, and walk out. The Goldsteins needed a building with a large capacity using a ramp system. Ms. Honebrink provided the Commission with a history of parking garages in Omaha, indicating the Rent-A-Ford Capitol Garage was one of the two largest parking garages built. This garage could hold 300 automobiles, and it was the earliest building to use a ramp system. Ms. Honebrink showed original photos of the building and described its architecture. Ms. Honebrink stated the building’s brick work was framed over to modernize its look. Ms. Honebrink also showed photos of the interior, ramps and pillars of the parking garage.

Ms. Honebrink stated the nomination request for the Rent-A-Ford Capitol Garage was linked to the building’s relationship with the early automobile rental business as well as its use of early ramp-storage garages.

Mr. Santamaria asked if the building would continue to be a garage or would it be designated as a mixed-use structure. Darin Smith, the prospective buyer, stated the plan was turn the building into housing, specifically 32 loft-style apartments (1-2-3 bedroom), incorporating the ramps into the design. Mr. Smith stated an elevator would be installed on the north side of the building, and the stucco would be removed. Mr. Santamaria asked if the stucco was a result of roofing issues early on, and Mr. Smith stated he was not sure why it was added, other than to modernize the look of the building. Mr. Smith stated all the original substructure under the stucco still existed. Ms. Honebrink added she could not locate any history of a fire or any physical reason why the brick was covered.
Mr. Santamaria asked if the roof has been replaced. Mr. Smith stated the roof was newer, and it had been replaced within the last ten years. Mr. Santamaria stated that part of the nomination was to identify the building as a parking structure and save some of the historical elements. As indicated by Mr. Smith, part of the design feature would incorporate the ramps and would become living space. Mr. Santamaria stated the whole history of the automobiles being inside of this building was gone. Mr. Smith stated the garage doors would remain to keep the look of a garage, possibly a storefront type window. Mr. Smith stated the idea at this point was to keep the garage doors and the open space through to the other garage door on the south side of the building. Mr. Smith stated the intent was that when someone entered the building, they would see the original volume of space that had been a parking garage as well as the lower parts of the ramp and the garage doors.

Ms. Honebrink asked Mr. Smith if the garage door as well as the space at the bottom of the first floor ramp would be an open community space. Mr. Smith stated the area would be community space to get the feeling of a ramp and parking garage.

Ms. Novak asked Mr. Smith if, in the individual units, the existing material would still be exposed. Mr. Smith stated the ceilings will be open, and the columns will be exposed in the corridors, which is indicated in the proposed drawings.

Mr. Garcia asked Mr. Smith if the south area of the building would be exposed and if there would be ornamentation. Mr. Smith answered there would be.

Mr. Mike Leonard, Landmarks Administrator, asked Ms. Honebrink if the intent for today's meeting was to get the building nominated. Once the building is nominated, any changes that would occur to the building would come back to the Commission for certificate of approval. Mr. Leonard asked Ms. Honebrink if a plan would be submitted at that time. Ms. Honebrink stated they were not asking for local landmark status, but the project was currently under review for a tax credit process. Mr. Smith stated at this point, they were looking for approval from the Landmarks Heritage Preservation Commission, and then on to the state as part of the redevelopment. The state and federal officials would have to approve the next phase for rehabilitation. Mr. Macchietto stated the role of the Commission was to determine whether or not the building met the criteria to be placed on the national register. If it does, the Commission would make the recommendation. The recommendation would then be forwarded to the state for the next step, at which time the federal tax credits are reviewed by state and federal officials.

Mr. Garcia asked Mr. Smith where the tenant parking would be located. Mr. Smith stated there was a parking lot to the north, and that it would be outside parking. Mr. Santamaria noted that although the building is a parking structure, it looks architecturally similar to an industrial/manufacturing building. Mr. Santamaria stated this building was probably one of the earliest purely concrete structures in Omaha. Ms. Honebrink stated this building was built in 1924 and a number of the apartments she has nominated were concrete structures. Mr. Macchietto stated the role of the Commission was to determine whether or not this building met the criteria for the National Register. Mr. Schleicher stated the building is listed under criterion A & C, and C is architecture.

Mr. Bisson asked Ms. Honebrink what the plans were for the west façade. Ms. Honebrink stated it was painted brick with in-filled windows. Mr. Smith added that they plan to open up the windows. Mr. Macchietto asked Ms. Honebrink if she had any information on the architect who designed this building. Ms. Honebrink did not have that information. Mr. Smith noted the building’s location near Creighton and Central High School would add additional housing to the area. Mr. Bisson asked Mr. Smith how many units the building would have. Mr. Smith answered stated there would be 32 units: 15 one bedroom, 8 two bedroom, and 9 three bedroom units, basically larger loft-style apartments.

Motion by Mr. Schleicher to approve the National Register nomination for Rent-A-Ford Capitol Garage. Seconded by Mr. Bisson.
AYES: Schleicher, Santamaria, Hogan, Novak, Garcia, Bisson

ABSTAIN: Macchietto

Motion Approved: 6-0-1

DISCUSSION:

Mr. Mike Leonard discussed the status of the Kierle House. Mr. Leonard stated he spoke with Bruce Hamilton of the Florence Historical Foundation as well as Paul Nelson. Mr. Leonard stated he was advised that St. Phillip Neri Church had voted 217 to 36 to proceed with a day-care facility on the Kierle site. Mr. Leonard stated that when he spoke with Mr. Hamilton, he was under the impression that they would convert the house into a day-care facility. Mr. Leonard stated that when he spoke to Mr. Nelson, he was under the assumption that the idea was to tear the house down and build a completely new day-care facility, or they might want to use the house. It had not been decided. The house was advertised for sale this weekend. Kay and Gordon Hammond are the realtors who have the house listed for sale. St. Neri Church is intending to purchase the house for $136,000. The buyer from Landmark Inc. could not come up with the amount of money they were hoping to come up with. As it stands, St. Phillip Neri Church has the best bid in for the house and do not have the money in hand, but they have a donor who will match funds. It appears that the details have not been concluded.

It was suggested by Mr. Nelson that Landmarks Heritage Preservation Commission send a letter to the church and mention the possibility of a feasibility study to do an adaptive re-use on the house and convert the house into a day-care facility as opposed to tearing it down. Mr. Leonard did not know who would fund the feasibility study. Mr. Leonard stated that between now and the January 12, 2012 meeting, he would do some fact-finding and have additional information. Mr. Leonard stated he would keep the Commission members informed.

Mr. Leonard wanted to thank John Schleicher for his work on the Landmarks Heritage Preservation Commission.

It was the consensus of the Commission to ADJOURN the meeting at 2:10 p.m.