

Oak Park Historic Preservation Commission
January 10, 2013 Meeting Minutes
Oak Park Village Hall, Room 201, 7:30 pm

ROLL CALL

PRESENT: Acting Chair Gary Palese, Joerg Albrecht, Garret Eakin, Frank Heitzman, Rosanne McGrath, Regina Nally, Drew Niermann, Tony Quinn, Tom Sundling
ABSENT: Chair Christina Morris, Greg Battoglia
STAFF: Douglas Kaarre, Urban Planner

AGENDA APPROVAL

*Motion by Heitzman to approve the Agenda as submitted. Second by Niermann.
Motion approved 9-0.*

NON-AGENDA PUBLIC COMMENT

None

MINUTES

Motion by Heitzman to approve the December 13, 2012 meeting minutes as submitted. Second by Albrecht. Motion approved 9-0.

REGULAR AGENDA

A. Garage Demolition Policies

Planner Kaarre summarized the existing garage demolition policy which states historic garages visible from the street should be maintained and repaired but may be altered to accommodate contemporary vehicles.

Commissioner Albrecht noted that to him, the visibility aspect was not as relevant as if the design of the garage was interesting and of the period.

Commissioner Heitzman said that the ordinance doesn't define what was interesting, but instead there may be garages that were built of the period and with integrity and that would be more in keeping with the HPC's mission.

Commissioner Albrecht agreed, but argued that taking out the visibility factor would make better sense.

Planner Kaarre noted that the HPC Ordinance was geared toward visibility – if something was not visible from the street the commission would not have purview. He went over the Secondary Building Policy. That policy has a section that demolition may be approved if it met all of the conditions listed such as the construction date is later than the primary building; the building is not character-defining in relation to primary building; the building is not the work of a builder whose work is significant in the development of Oak Park or the U.S.; it doesn't embody distinguishing characteristics of a similar type and style.

Commissioner Nally said she worried that could eliminate significant structures because of the later date issue.

Planner Kaarre suggested they add the period of significance of the historic district to it. He said where this plan differed was it said the building could be demolished if it could not accommodate two cars of modern size.

Commissioner Sundling said it was a very high bar to meet all the qualifications, almost as if it were impossible to demolish a garage.

Commissioner Albrecht said from personal experience sometimes it becomes very limiting to live with a garage that would not fit a modern vehicle.

Commissioner McGrath added that nothing was included about the condition of the garage as they had approved a number of garage demolitions on buildings that were in poor condition. She said she had a problem with meeting all of the conditions.

Commissioner Heitzman asked which conditions they would take out?

Commissioner Albrecht suggested character-defining would not be relevant as it could be interesting on its own and most structures would not be a significant architectural type or style so that should go as well.

Planner Kaarre reviewed the document that listed policy suggestions the commission created in 2002 that dealt with garages, specifically; it created a checklist to determine if garage was a significant or contributing structure. He said for contributing you would have to meet all the criteria listed.

Commissioner Heitzman said couldn't there be a situation where the garage was so deteriorated that it no longer could be a contributing structure based on the condition.

Planner Kaarre agreed. He read the criteria from the policy and explained that coach houses were added as there was an effort to conserve coach houses. He explained this policy wasn't put into place because it would have required amending the guidelines.

Commissioner McGrath said this policy put the HPC in the position of determining whether a garage could be demolished versus the Secondary Policy where all the requirements had to be met.

Planner Kaarre agreed, saying it was more flexible over things like usability, cost and condition.

Commissioner Sundling said he liked the caveat that if it was determined that a garage could be demolished the HPC can review the new structure.

Commissioner Eakin added that he thought it was important to eliminate the anonymous, plain box garages since we do live in our backyards as well.

Commissioner Nally said it was important that this was written in a way that encouraged people to think about retaining the existing structure rather than replace with a prefabricated structure. She said if you knew you had to replace it in kind, there would be more care to rehabilitate what you have.

Commissioner Albrecht suggested a survey to capture the variety and styles of garages that have been built.

Planner Kaarre said the Village did a coach house survey.

Commissioner McGrath asked about the difference between a contributing versus a significant accessory structure- would the requirements for demolition be greater?

Commissioner Palese agreed saying it wasn't explained.

Planner Kaarre said the ordinance doesn't define what is 'significant' but that the additional information was more educational, and that the guidelines would be the same whether it was contributing or significant. A short discussion ensued on what it means to be a significant structure in the policy.

Commissioner Heitzman asked why garages were given a pass on demolitions and why weren't they considered the same way as the primary buildings?

Commissioner Nally said because the preservation ordinance treats them differently.

Planner Kaarre reiterated that the preservation ordinance deals with any scope of work needing to be visible from the street for the Commission to review.

Commissioner Sundling stated that garages are less-important structures than houses.

Commissioner Palese said in many cases the garage was built a long time after the primary building and you can't really see it from the street and unless it is unique and takes on a significance on its own it wouldn't be as important.

Commissioner Heitzman said as a commission their mission was to protect historic structures and they weren't doing a good job of it, unless they say garages were not important.

Planner Kaarre said previous commissions have always felt there needed to be more flexibility when it came to garages and demolitions.

Commissioner Palese said the guidelines seem to be adequate if you follow it, it was simple, but it provided for everything except for maybe a coach house.

Planner Kaarre said the problem was it said to maintain and restore historic garages without saying what historic was and the commission has to determine that every time, so part of the intent was to create a blueprint of what was an historic garage so that it would be clear.

Commissioner Heitzman said it was the same criteria in the ordinance on what determines a historic building and once a building was considered historic you cannot demolish it, you have to maintain and repair it.

Commissioner Albrecht noted that you could keep the original garage and build a second one next to it.

Commissioner Eakin described a project where he did just that, but you have to connect them because you can only have one accessory structure.

Commissioner Nally noted that is a zoning requirement.

Commissioner Eakin said he felt there was erosion in the quality of life by tearing down old garages and replacing with low-quality new garages made of aluminum or vinyl with bad windows and no overhangs.

Commissioner Heitzman agreed that there are ways to integrate the old garage into a new design.

Commissioner Nally said she agreed that there was a need for criteria on when a contributing garage structure could be demolished and she added could they require that the HPC review the new structure.

Commissioner Heitzman said it would fall under the new building policy that already exists. The zoning and preservation ordinances are looked at together, not one over the other. There should be criteria for demolition other than if a garage is contributing or non-contributing.

Commissioner McGrath referred to the policy which indicated that the HPC would have review over the new building.

A short discussion ensued about whether a contributing structure should ever be allowed to be demolished or whether owners should be guided on alterations and repairs to better meet their needs.

Commissioner Heitzman said that adding a second story to garages was an issue they often see and there weren't very clear guidelines on that as well.

Commissioner Palese said there was a consensus that something different than the current policy was needed and clear language was needed on when you would be allowed to demolish. He said there should be more reliance on the owner to prove demolition of a contributing structure was necessary.

Commissioner Heitzman said it would be extremely rare to allow the demolition of a contributing structure, whereas that was not the case with garages in the past.

Commissioner Nally said they should take demolition out of the conversation by changing the language of the guidelines to encourage repair or alteration.

Planner Kaarre suggested fleshing out both concepts- the idea that alteration should be the first option and demolition a last resort, but with clear guidelines on what would qualify for demolition.

Commissioner Palese summarized that they needed to add more language that defined what a contributing and non-contributing structure was and that would also have some language on when the HPC would consider a demolition of a contributing structure.

B. Historic Windows

The commission moved on to the discussion of historic windows. There was a short discussion on whether replacing windows should be considered demolition or not.

Planner Kaarre indicated that he often receives permits for replacing just one or two windows and so it wasn't easy to classify it as demolition as it wasn't in the ordinance. There was a consensus that more discussion on the topic was necessary for the future.

OTHER BUSINESS

Planner Kaarre said the design guidelines focus group will have its second meeting next week. The group had a lot of comments about the format and the way the report was written. The comments were revised and given back to the consultant to change. The group will review the changes at the meeting.

ADJOURN

Motion by Eakin to adjourn. Second by Niermann. Motion approved: 9-0.

AYE: Albrecht, Eakin, Heitzman, McGrath, Nally, Niermann, Quinn, Sundlin, Vice Chair Palese

NAY: None

Meeting adjourned at 9:30 p.m. Minutes prepared by Angela Schell and Douglas Kaarre.

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