

Oak Park Historic Preservation Commission
January 11, 2018 Meeting Minutes
Oak Park Village Hall, Council Chambers, 7:30 pm

ROLL CALL

PRESENT: Tom Abrahamson, Jennifer Bridge, Sandra Carr, Adam Engle, Darrick Gurski, Rebecca Houze, Laura Jordahl, Chair Christopher Payne, Aleksandra Tadic, Noel Weidner

ABSENT: David Sokol

STAFF: Douglas Kaarre, AICP, Urban Planner

ATTORNEY: Greg Smith, Klein, Thorpe & Jenkins

AGENDA APPROVAL

Motion by Jordahl to approve the agenda as submitted. Second by Abrahamson. Motion approved 10-0.
AYE: Abrahamson, Bridge, Carr, Engle, Gurski, Houze, Jordahl, Tadic, Weidner, Chair Payne
NAY: None

NON-AGENDA PUBLIC COMMENT

Chris Donovan, 733 S. Elmwood Avenue, stated that he came before the Commission last September when they were discussing the possibility of nominating the Foley-Rice Building (644 Madison Street) as a Historic Landmark. The Commission has been discussing this for 10 years. During that time the building has been vacant and the owners have only been paying one-third of the taxes due to an exemption. In these times when the budget of Oak Park is suffering, perhaps something could be done to move forward. He looked at the historic preservation ordinance and the ability to nominate landmarks and he has found what he thinks is a glaring hole. In Oak Park anyone can nominate a building if it meets certain criteria. Anything else, such as a building permit, requires the consent of the owner, but the nomination of an historic landmark does not. He thinks that is a flaw and it has probably resulted in this building not being developed, sold or torn down for redevelopment that will increase the tax base. When you look at the state statute, Oak Park has the ability to do that, but as a Home Rule community that can be changed. If you look at the ordinance in Downers Grove, nominating an historic landmark requires the consent of the owner. He is proposing that the ordinance be changed to require owner consent and to raise the bar on the number of criteria to establish that building as an historic landmark. Right now only one criteria has to be met. How does this affect Oak Park and why is the Essex-Foley family only interested in selling the building, and is this preventing them from doing so? He was told by Mr. Kaarre that he would be notified once the next steps were known. He'd like to know what the next steps are. How can he proceed to get this topic in front of the Commission? The document on the website to submit items is from 2016. He wants to know the process to submit something to get it in front of the Village Board to change the ordinance.

Chair Payne stated that updating the historic preservation ordinance is on the Commission's 2018 draft work plan for later this year. It's not something that they will do right away, but after they have completed the revisions to the Architectural Review Guidelines, which they are in the process of submitting to the Village Board for approval. Once they begin looking at the ordinance there will be time for public comment regarding these issues.

Chris Donovan responded that when the Foley-Rice building was on the agenda in September they asked for a one-year extension. That has now expired. Will it be extended until that discussion happens?

Chair Payne stated that the Foley-Rice landmark nomination will be on the Commission's February agenda for continuation for another six months. They are not looking to encumber the sale of the

property by designating it as a landmark before its appropriate. They are holding off on the landmark designation at the request of the owner so it does not encumber their sale. It's only at the point when there is a new owner who wishes to use the landmark designation for development purposes that they will move forward.

MINUTES

Motion by Abrahamson to approve the December 14, 2017 meeting minutes as submitted. Second by Tadic. Motion approved 10-0.

AYE: Abrahamson, Bridge, Carr, Engle, Gurski, Houze, Jordahl, Tadic, Weidner, Chair Payne

NAY: None

REGULAR AGENDA

- A. **HPC 2018-01: 500 Linden Avenue (Ganesan)**: Review of a Zoning Variance application to subdivide the property into two lots, allowing for construction of a new single-family home in the current front yard along Chicago Avenue (*Frank Lloyd Wright-Prairie School of Architecture Historic District*)
James Collins was present representing the property owner.

Chair Payne introduced the application.

Planner Kaarre provided the staff report. The *Howard W. Jenkins House* was constructed in 1919 by Guy & McClintock and designed by architects Tallmadge & Watson. It is a Contributing Resource within the *Frank Lloyd Wright-Prairie School of Architecture Historic District*. In 2006 the current owners provided their consent to designate the property as an Oak Park Historic Landmark, which was approved by the Village Board on May 1, 2006.

The property owners have recently submitted an application for a Zoning variance to allow them to subdivide their property from east to west, creating a new vacant lot in place of their yard along Chicago Avenue. Although the property address is on Linden Avenue, and driveway access is currently from Linden, the front door is on the south façade and the house faces Chicago Avenue. A number of properties on both sides of Chicago are similar in terms of scale, site and house orientation.

The property owners are seeking a variance to subdivide their lot and construct a new single-family home in what is essentially their front yard. They need a variance because the minimum lot size in the R1 district is 10,000 s.f. (they would only have 8,060 s.f.), and the minimum lot width in the R1 district is 50 feet (they would only have 46 feet).

Section 7-9-10 of the Historic Preservation Ordinance outlines the circumstances when the Historic Preservation Commission may review an application for a zoning amendment, variance, special use permit, subdivision or planned unit development:

- 1) Property in any designated historic district,
- 2) Any eligible or designated historic landmarks, or
- 3) Any property located within two hundred fifty feet (250') of such landmark.

The ordinance then states that when reviewing one of these applications, the Commission shall:

- 1) Evaluate the anticipated effect of the proposed subdivision on the designated historic landmark, and

- 2) Consider the long-term compatibility of the proposed subdivision with the character of the affected historic resources, and
- 3) Consider the effect of any proposed subdivision on the long-range preservation of these resources.

When reviewing the application, the ordinance states that the Commission may use the criteria for reviewing a Certificate of Appropriateness in terms of the Standards for Rehabilitation. As part of the Guidelines, the following of the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation is most relevant to the application:

- 2. The significant original qualities and/or historic character of a property shall be retained and preserved. The removal or alteration of historic or distinctive architectural materials or features and spaces that characterize a property shall be avoided.*

The Architectural Review Guidelines also address establishing historic contextual character by identifying what to look for in the immediate neighborhood, including siting, scale and street rhythm.

In addition to removing the front yard and altering the character of the property, this proposed new lot currently includes the historic wrought-iron and brick fence belonging with the house at 500 Linden. Should the variance be approved and the lot subdivided, this historic fence must remain in place unless the Historic Preservation Commission approves its alteration or removal. However, that request is not on the agenda this evening.

The property owner provided an updated project summary. The Zoning Board of Appeals is holding the public hearing on February 7, and the Commission may provide comments and forward them for consideration.

Jim Collins, 419 Randolph Street, stated that he is an architect and has been an Oak Park resident for over 40 years. He used to sit on this Commission, is on the committee to restore Unity Temple, and has also been employed by the Village as a plan reviewer. He has taken abandoned buildings and placed them on the National Register of Historic Places. He's very concerned about the history of Oak Park through its architecture. Unfortunately Mr. Ganesan could not be here this evening. Their children are in college and they no longer need the large house that they have. In the side yard that faces Chicago Avenue he feels they could build a new house there that would be compatible and meet all the requirements of the ordinances and blend in with community. Mr. Ganesan has all of the information on costs and hardships and he is representing him as an architect. He has great respect for history.

Chair Payne asked for questions from the Commission.

Commissioner Abrahamson stated that the staff report indicated that the house faced Chicago Avenue, yet you stated it was a side yard. He asked if he could clarify that.

Jim Collins stated that the address is on Linden Avenue and the entry is on Chicago which is the side of the house. The front door faces Chicago.

Commissioner Abrahamson stated that it appears the front of the house faces Chicago Avenue, and asked if that was correct.

Jim Collins stated that it may not be oriented to the south but is like the Robey House where the entrance is hidden to the side. When you walk in it makes a better architectural feature.

Chair Payne asked for comments from the Commission.

Commissioner Gurski asked if the owners are planning to subdivide the lot themselves or sell it all off completely.

Jim Collins stated that they wish to downsize and asked him to design a new house for them to live in.

Commissioner Jordahl reviewed their response to the standards and was led to believe that they were interested in subdividing because of the value of the house. Are they planning to sell?

Jim Collins stated that they will live in the new house on the new lot and sell the existing house. The plan is to retain the historic fence. They would just put the gates back off of Chicago Avenue.

Commissioner Gurski asked if there was ever another house on that site.

Jim Collins stated not that he knew of.

Commissioner Gurski stated that it is hard to support when you see other houses taking down houses that were put up after subdivision to restore the larger lots.

Commissioner Jordahl stated that she is very much opposed to the variance. It seems from the zoning map that the lots are all the same size along the east side of the 500 block of Linden, and subdividing the lot would be incompatible with the block. One of the main features in the landmark designation report is that it is an excellent example of Colonial Revival style architecture. One a main feature of the style is an elaborate entrance, which this house has, along with wonderful windows. That entrance faces Chicago Avenue and a new house on a new lot would completely obliterate the front façade of the house.

Commissioner Carr stated that she agrees, especially given the nature of the entrance and how beautiful it is – it has a beautiful pulvinated frieze – and blocking that off would be quite concerning. It would only be 12 feet from the new house and block the light. It would be out of scale with the intersection which is open due to large setbacks.

Commissioner Houze agrees with the last two comments. The project would disrupt the rhythm of the block and the intersection with the large lots and setbacks. In reference to Section B of the Architectural Review Guidelines, which deals with establishing historic contextual character, she feels the most relevant are siting – building setbacks, massing – major divisions of the street façade, and scale – lot width to building width, which would change dramatically. She does not support the variance request.

Commissioner Engle agrees with all of the comments so far. The character of that stretch of Chicago Avenue is of large lots with large homes. It's a special feature of that part of Oak Park. To place a new home in front of this magnificent house would disrupt the character of the neighborhood. It was also reverse a positive trend of previous properties of removing newer construction to expose the older, historic buildings. He does not support the variance request.

Commissioner Abrahamson stated that he also does not support the variance request. The basis of the argument was financial and the way he reads it, an undersized lot that is 20% smaller than the

minimum needs a large house in order to command a high price. It would also disrupt the aesthetics of the neighborhood and doesn't make sense to him.

Commissioner Bridge agrees with the previous comments. The proposal would be detrimental to the landmark. It would completely block the façade and affect that corner and block in a detrimental way. She doesn't feel it meets with the Guidelines.

Commissioner Weidner stated that he is also opposed. It would obscure the front façade and entrance and he is most concerned about the precedent it would set for the other large lots. If the programming doesn't work for the homeowner they should find a home in Oak Park that does work for them and allow someone who would be a good steward of the property to take ownership.

Commissioner Tadic agrees with the comments and is strongly opposed to the variance request. A new house would disrupt the block and intersection. It would totally block the view of the front entrance, a key architectural element of the house. The financial explanation they provided doesn't make sense.

Chair Payne recommended that the variance not be granted for the partition of the property and allowance of a new structure on the south end of the current property. The building setback would be different from the other corners of the intersection. It's already been stated that there is an estate-like presence, and to completely alter one of them would set a bad precedent for the others. He doesn't know how you could maintain street rhythm that exists by introducing another home on this lot, because it would create a tightly grouped set of homes next to homes that have larger front yards and would not be compatible with the neighborhood in that respect either.

Motion by Engle to forward the comments made by the Commission to the Zoning Board of Appeals for consideration when reviewing the variance request for 500 Linden Avenue. Second by Tadic. Motion approved 10-0.

AYE: Abrahamson, Bridge, Carr, Engle, Gurski, Houze, Jordahl, Tadic, Weidner, Chair Payne

NAY: None

CONSENT AGENDA

None

OTHER BUSINESS

ADJOURN

Motion by Weidner to adjourn. Second by Bridge. Motion approved 10-0.

AYE: Abrahamson, Bridge, Carr, Engle, Gurski, Houze, Jordahl, Tadic, Weidner, Chair Payne

NAY: None

The meeting adjourned at 8:00 p.m.

Minutes prepared by Douglas Kaarre, AICP, Urban Planner.