

**Oak Park Historic Preservation Commission
October 12, 2023 – Meeting Minutes
Remote Participation Meeting, 7:30 pm**

Roll Call

Present: Chair Lou Garapolo and Commissioners David Bates, Sarah Doherty, Scot Mazur, Amy Peterson, and Mark Weiner
Absent: Commissioners Asha Andriana, Monique Chase, Andrew Elders, and Nicole Napper
Staff: Susie Trexler, Historic Preservation Urban Planner

Agenda Approval

Motion by Commissioner Doherty to approve the agenda. Second by Commissioner Peterson. Motion approved 6-0.

Non-Agenda Public Comment

None

Minutes

Chair Garapolo said he had some minor edits he would supply to staff.

Motion by Commissioner Peterson to approve the minutes for September 14, 2023. Second by Commissioner Bates. Motion approved 6-0.

Regular Agenda

- A. HPC2023-39: 819 N East Ave (Gruber):** Certificate of Appropriateness for two-story, rear addition; window alterations on the north side elevation; and demolition of chimney (Frank Lloyd Wright-Prairie School of Architecture Historic District).

Chair Garapolo introduced the item and Planner Trexler provided an overview.

Present on behalf of the project was Kim Smith, the architect. She said she has no comments and is open to questions.

Motion by Commissioner Doherty to open for discussion. Second by Commissioner Peterson.

Commissioner Peterson asked for clarification on the window types. Ms. Smith explained that all the existing windows have been replaced with vinyl except the windows flanking the fireplace. It's a hodgepodge because they were replaced over time. She said they plan to use 6-over-1 on the addition as this is probably the most appropriate. They tried to be consistent.

Commissioner Doherty asked if the infilled windows are on the north elevation. Ms. Smith said they are going to be closets. The windows are not original. She said the homeowners may decide not to build those closets because of the windows, as the wall is very blank without them. She said the roof

windows are existing and not historic. She said the current focus of the house is on the south side and they used this in their design.

Commissioner Doherty said there is a lot of room on either side of the house, but the addition is so far back, it's not noticeable. She said it's highly appropriate.

Chair Garapolo asked about the vertical trim demarcating the addition on the north elevation. Ms. Smith said the trim is there, but the addition is just one story on that side. Chair Garapolo asked if all windows will match and Ms. Smith confirmed.

Commissioner Doherty made a motion to approve the Certificate of Appropriateness for the project as proposed. Second by Commissioner Weiner. Motion approved 6-0.

AYE: Commissioner Bates, Commissioner Doherty, Commissioner Mazur, Commissioner Peterson, Commissioner Weiner, and Chair Garapolo

NAY: None

B. HPC2023-40: 411 N Oak Park Ave (Cedercreutz & Le Poole): Certificate of Appropriateness for dormer alterations (Frank Lloyd Wright-Prairie School of Architecture Historic District).

Chair Garapolo introduced the item and Planner Trexler provided an overview.

Present on behalf of the project was Errol Kirsch, the architect. He said there are approximately five different existing roof slopes on this residence. The existing pseudo-dormer was probably put there to support the former chimney. He showed a photo of the decorative siding on the north wing. He said the building was changed to a 2-flat in the 1960s and their intent is to affect the residence as little as possible. They will repeat the decorative fascia and window, just higher. The new dormer would be higher, as would the north gable. He said they will also remove the air conditioners in the front windows and replace them with transoms.

Motion by Commissioner Peterson to open for discussion. Second by Commissioner Bates.

Chair Garapolo asked about the windows on the rear elevation. Mr. Kirsch explained that the existing two windows are within 6 inches of the floor. For that reason, as well as the width, they are not sufficient to meet the exit requirement. So, they will be widened and lifted.

Commissioner Doherty said, to repeat what she said at the ARC, this is a historically sensitive solution to meet the homeowner's needs. Chair Garapolo explained the ARC meeting to the Commission, saying there were a few questionable options initially and Mr. Kirsch came to the meeting with the idea to shift the bathroom to the north side. It's much nicer and more sensitive to the house. He asked about the trim on the north elevation. Mr. Kirsch said they will match it and the siding will be raised to match.

Commissioner Peterson asked about the age of the historic photo. Mr. Kirsch said it's from a newspaper the owner has, and is from close to the construction date of the house.

Commissioner Peterson made a motion to approve the Certificate of Appropriateness for the project as proposed. Second by Commissioner Bates. Motion approved 6-0.

AYE: Commissioner Bates, Commissioner Doherty, Commissioner Mazur, Commissioner Peterson, Commissioner Weiner, and Chair Garapolo

NAY: None

- C. HPC2023-41: 631 Forest Ave (Anthony & Candice Drew):** Certificate of Appropriateness to add a second floor and side addition (Frank Lloyd Wright-Prairie School of Architecture Historic District).

Chair Garapolo introduced the item and Planner Trexler provided an overview. She said the applicant attended the August and September ARC meetings.

Present on behalf of the project were Jim Vanderheyden, the architect, and Candice Drew, the homeowner. Mr. Vanderheyden explained the changes made through the ARC reviews. He said the house is very high off the ground, the door is nine steps up. It is tiny in scale to the houses next door. The concern of the ARC was that the addition would overpower the existing house. He showed renderings and said the second-floor addition is modest in scale to the house. They are keeping much of the front portion of the house and the entire north façade. The roofline is made to extend with the eaves all the way around the house. So, the addition is very complimentary. The views are from across the street; it will disappear even more if you're in front of the house. They will match the existing windows and stucco.

Motion by Commissioner Doherty to open for discussion. Second by Commissioner Peterson.

Chair Garapolo thanked the applicant for being so responsive to the ARC. Commissioner Doherty said what she noted before is that this house is an anomaly on the street. There are a few others on the block that also have additions. She said her concern was to not lose the historic character and this house was added to the historic district as a bungalow. She said the design has come a great way from where it was in terms of not losing the house, but she's still finding it overwhelming with the combined side addition and the second-floor addition.

Commissioner Peterson said the north side is appropriate. The south side, with the side addition and the two stories, seems to overwhelm the original house.

Commissioner Weinder said it's a good fit based on what is there. He said the applicant did a good job.

Chair Garapolo said he's not concerned with the side addition because there are side additions on the block. The scheme has come a long way and is much more sensitive to the house. He asked why the number of stairs was brought up. Mr. Vanderheyden said he was commenting on how much higher this bungalow is over the ground than the average bungalow.

Commissioner Peterson said even though she feels the south side is overwhelming, it's partly the angle. She said she also looked at other examples. 221 S Harvey Ave is similarly disproportionate but the HPC approved it.

Chair Garapolo said other houses on the block have side additions, so it is not objectionable. Commissioner Doherty said there are seven side additions on the block. Five are in the back third of the house and three are in the front third.

Commissioner Weiner made a motion to approve the Certificate of Appropriateness for the project as proposed. Second by Commissioner Peterson. Vote 4-2. The Commission took no action.

AYE: Commissioner Bates, Commissioner Mazur, Commissioner Weiner, and Chair Garapolo

NAY: Commissioner Doherty and Commissioner Peterson

Planner Trexler explained that since not all Commissioners are in attendance, the applicant can attend another meeting in order to receive votes from the other Commissioners. She said they may also redesign the project, request a public hearing, or withdraw their application.

- D. HPC2023- 42: 618 N Ridgeland Ave (Mike & Michele Bibbey):** Certificate of Appropriateness to rebuild front porch with stucco columns, altering the knee wall to a balustrade (Frank Lloyd Wright-Prairie School of Architecture Historic District).

Chair Garapolo introduced the item and Planner Trexler provided an overview. She said the applicant attended the May and July ARC meetings.

Present on behalf of the project were homeowners Mike and Michele Bibbey. Mr. Bibbey said the primary reason for the change is the water issues and the porch is sinking. The same issue has occurred with several other houses on the block. This is a flaw with the design. They want to remove the knee wall and replace it with a balustrade. He said there are photos of similar houses with different porches. He said they want to add stucco posts at the bottom of the stairs as well.

Motion by Commissioner Peterson to open for discussion. Second by Commissioner Bates.

Commissioner Peterson said because they just saw a similar project, she wants to note some of the differences. They have clear evidence of the damage, and there is an existing scupper, which was the Commission's recommendation in the other case. Mr. Bibbey said they discussed adding more scuppers with architects and whatever they do won't help.

Commissioner Doherty said if these are original porches, they're all 110 years old. It's hard to see a house in Oak Park that doesn't have a sinking porch. This is an issue we're going to see. She said her concern in general is that if knee walls are a poor design, we have to get rid of all of them. She said the other solution she's heard is drilling holes to help with water drainage. In comparison to the other knee wall project, an abundance of evidence and opinions from non-invested professionals has been provided.

Mr. Bibbey said the stucco columns are existing and steps are not original. He said they would add stucco posts at the bottom of the stairs. Commissioner Doherty said the challenge is to maintain as much of the Prairie style as possible, so she's not opposed to adding stucco posts at the top and the bottom of the stairs. Mr. Bibbey said they might need to add a third column, but won't unless they have to. Commissioner Doherty agreed they should avoid a third column, but if it's needed, it should go by the stairs.

Chair Garapolo said he's having a problem with wiping out all these knee wall porches. He asked if the porch is not sloped to the scupper. Mr. Bibbey said the porch is steeply angled towards the front. The problem is the corner where there is sloping. He said they've been told no matter if they add scuppers, there's going to be a back-up in the corner. Chair Garapolo said if the porch is going to be rebuilt, could it not be rebuilt to align with the scupper or scuppers. Mr. Bibbey said the recommendations they received were against that. Chair Garapolo said he does not agree and doesn't see the need to go away from the knee wall. It's important statement of the house, visually. If the house is 100 years old, it took a while to sink. That's a long time. He said he's not in favor of

changing the design. If they're going to rebuild the porch, they must rebuild it in kind to solve the problem.

Commissioner Weiner said he doesn't know what the difference in cost between these things would be. Chair Garapolo said that might be worth looking into, but it may be the same cost. Mr. Bibbey said he doesn't understand how a dollar amount would affect the project. Commissioner Bates said the porch needs to be rebuilt. There's some hesitancy to rebuild it in a way that is not appropriate. If they were to show an extraordinary difference in cost, the Commission would consider that. Mr. Bibbey said they're not trying to get a cheap porch, they want one that will last. Commissioner Doherty said this one lasted over 100 years. That's a reasonable life for a porch. Chair Garapolo said if the cost is the same, and it can be rebuilt to match and solve the water problem, that's the solution. They should rebuild in kind.

Commissioner Doherty said as part of the rebuild, they can consider moving the scuppers and drilling holes to have additional places for water to drain through the floor.

Chair Garapolo asked Commissioners if costs should be considered and Commissioner Doherty said she doesn't think it is relevant. Commissioner Peterson asked if they would consider a modified version, for example, with more scuppers or drilling holes. Mr. Bibbey said they've had quite a bit of discussion on different concepts and are not interested in doing that again.

Commissioner Doherty said she doesn't think a good approach for knee walls is to remove them all.

Ms. Bibbey said they got recommendations from three professionals not to rebuild the knee wall and asked if the Commission thinks they should anyway. Chair Garapolo said they are recommending rebuilding the porch and solving the problem but with a knee wall. Ms. Bibbey said they are not going to argue with the professionals and they say there is no solution. They said they need a railing. Commissioner Peterson said they've had other houses that have rebuilt their knee walls. She said she understands these professionals don't agree, but others do. Commissioner Doherty said the current configuration has existed for 110 years. If it has to be replaced in kind, it won't have to be addressed again in 10 years. Ms. Bibbey said that's not what the professionals said. They said don't rebuild the wall. So, they'll have to find someone who will. Chair Garapolo said they're looking for an architect and a contractor who will replace the wall and solve the drainage problem. They need to have a solution. Ms. Bibbey asked if the next step is to find someone who will tell them otherwise and Chair Garapolo confirmed.

The Commission took no action.

- E. **HPC2023-37: 118 Home Ave (118 Home Corp.):** Certificate of Appropriateness to add a rear, four-story addition and restore the front porch as part of a larger renovation and expansion project (Ridgeland-Oak Park Historic District).

Chair Garapolo introduced the item and Planner Trexler provided an overview. She said the applicant attended the June and July ARC meetings, as well as the September HPC meeting. The HPC asked the applicant to complete some revisions and return, and they have done so.

Present on behalf of the project was architect John Schiess.

Motion by Commissioner Doherty to open for discussion. Second by Commissioner Mazur.

Mr. Schiess explained the changes made since the last HPC meeting. He said the shrunk the floor plate by two feet and aligned the bays. This reduces the massing of the addition. The changed the window on the cupola to a double window. The height has been reduced but the new roof design added a bit. The top floor will be truncated on the interior. He said the stairwell is a “palate cleanser.” Somewhere in the future, the back piece could be removed. He said he doesn’t think this is likely, but that’s the idea. They are also removing some non-historic additions.

Commissioner Doherty said she appreciates the attention to detail on the restoration. Looking at the Sanborn maps, it was a stoop, went to a full porch, and went back to a stoop. She said she thinks this is the best moment to restore to. She asked if they found any evidence of the cupola. Mr. Shiess said you can see old 2x6s that frame out something about that size, then there is new plywood and new horizontal members. He said he agrees there are no other cupolas in Oak Park. McAlester (*Field Guide to American Houses*) shows cupolas on similar houses. It also helps bring the eye forward. Commissioner Doherty said he concern before was that we don’t want to add it just to draw the eye.

Commissioner Doherty asked the Commissioners if what was previously discussed as been addressed. The Commissioners agreed. Commissioner Bates said it is immediately apparent that the change in roof shape reduces the visual. Chair Garapolo said he appreciates the numerous studies they’ve done. There were a lot of comments, and they have been responsive. Chair Garapolo said the sloped roof makes a big difference. With the double window on the cupola, the full porch, the restoration of the building, and the effort to decrease the addition’s massing, this resolves the concerns he had.

Commissioner Doherty made a motion to approve the Certificate of Appropriateness for the project as proposed, with the condition that the cupola have a double window as discussed (this detail was missing from some of the drawings). Second by Commissioner Mazur. Motion approved 6-0.

AYE: Commissioner Bates, Commissioner Doherty, Commissioner Mazur, Commissioner Peterson, Commissioner Weiner, and Chair Garapolo

NAY: None

OTHER BUSINESS

- **2024 Work Plan:** Vote to approve the Historic Preservation Commission Work Plan for 2024.

Planner Trexler gave a summary of the Work Plan for 2024. The Commission had no comments.

Commissioner Doherty made a motion to approve the Certificate of Appropriateness for the project as proposed, with the condition that the cupola have a double window as discussed (this detail was missing from some of the drawings). Second by Commissioner Mazur. Motion approved 6-0.

AYE: Commissioner Bates, Commissioner Doherty, Commissioner Mazur, Commissioner Peterson, Commissioner Weiner, and Chair Garapolo

NAY: None

- **Unvarnished:** Virtual exhibit and curriculum guide on housing discrimination created in part by Commissioner Doherty received national award from the American Association for State and Local History in September. Unvarnished can be viewed at: unvarnishedhistory.org

Planner Trexler said that Commissioner Doherty was part of a project looking at housing discrimination that has received a national award. Commissioner Doherty explained that the project looked at exclusionary housing practices. She said they got additional funding to expand the curriculum guide. She said she's been teaching teachers throughout Illinois on how to use the curriculum guide. The expanded part will be live soon.

- **Racial Equity Needs Assessment.**

The Commission watched the video and responded to the questions.

- **Discussion.**

Commissioner Doherty said the Commission needs to have a broader, future discussion on knee walls. The answer cannot be to remove them. Commissioner Peterson asked if they have resources for architects who know knee walls. Planner Trexler said they have a list of architects with experience in Oak Park's historic districts.

Commissioner Bates asked how precedents should be used. Commissioner Doherty said it's a case-by-case basis. They don't have to only look at precedents, because each case is unique. Chair Garapolo said this is an important topic. The age of porches and houses, water damage. How do we solve those problems and preserve what history is telling us? Commissioner Doherty said water damage isn't the only reason porches sink. We have aging housing stock. Commissioner Mazur said his porch is sagging on both sides, it's 100 years old. It's not going to stay like it was on day one. He said regarding precedents, they don't have the context unless it was very recent. There may have been a hardship. Every case is unique.

ADJOURN

Motion by Commissioner Peterson to adjourn; Second by Commissioner Weiner.

The meeting adjourned at 9:20PM.

Minutes prepared by Susie Trexler, Historic Preservation Urban Planner.