

**Oak Park Historic Preservation Commission
March 14, 2024 at 7:30PM – Meeting Minutes**

Roll Call

Present: Chair Lou Garapolo and Commissioners Asha Andriana, David Bates, Monique Chase, Jessica Paul, Amy Peterson, Ron Roman and Mark Weiner
Absent: Commissioner Scot Mazur
Staff: Susie Trexler, Historic Preservation Urban Planner
Attorney: Courtney Willits, Elrod Friedman LLP

Agenda Approval

Motion by Commissioner Roman to approve the agenda. Second by Commissioner Chase. Motion approved 8-0.

Non-Agenda Public Comment

None

Minutes

Motion by Commissioner Andriana to approve the minutes from February 8, 2024. Second by Commissioner Weiner. Motion approved 8-0.

Regular Agenda

A. Public Hearing: HPC2023-45: 125 S Lombard Ave (Mark Risch): Certificate of Economic Hardship to demolish contributing building within the Ridgeland-Oak Park Historic District.

Chair Garapolo opened the public hearing.

Present for the project were Mark Risch, the homeowner, and Jeff Osic, the contractor. Mr. Osic said they provided a cost analysis to renovate the property and pictures. He said they had a structural engineer analyze the front and rear porches. The rear porch is part of the living space. The porches are on sagging concrete piers and do not have foundations.

Mr. Risch described the history of the house's deterioration. He said the previous owner did not keep up the house and was evicted just after Covid. Someone purchased the house at public auction and gutted it without a permit, then put the project on hold when they got caught. Mr. Risch said he's been living with this adjacent to his home and bought it because he wanted to make it better. He said market analysis values it at \$350,000-400,000, but that's not even the cost of repair. He walked the Commission through photos of the property. He said right now he would make it greenspace as he doesn't have the funds to rebuild it. He asked that the Commission allow him to demolish the house so no one else gets hurt and to improve the neighborhood. He said he is passionate about it because he lives next door.

Two public comments were provided. Tom Murtha said he is a 30-year resident of Oak Park and lives at the corner of Lombard and Pleasant. He said he supports Mark's effort. The house is no longer a benefit to the neighborhood, it's a nuisance. John Bergen said he lives at 128 S Lombard Ave. He said he watched the video of the previous meeting and understands it's contributing because of its age. He said Mr. Risch did not let this property get to the state it is in. He described the property and previous issues including raccoons, inappropriately used space heaters, and roof leaks. He said he was hoping to hear if the house can be removed as a contributing structure. He encouraged the Commission to review the pictures and said this won't become a parking lot.

The Commission asked questions of the applicant. Commissioner Chase asked if they will demolish the garage and Mr. Risch said they will not. Commissioner Roman asked if Mr. Risch was aware of the land's value when he purchased the property. Mr. Risch said he was not. He bought the property because he was frustrated with its condition. Commissioner Roman asked if he knows the land value and Mr. Risch said no, but it's less than he paid.

Commissioner Weiner asked how long Mr. Risch has lived in Oak Park, and Mr. Risch said since 1999.

Chair Garapolo asked if Mr. Risch bought the property to demolish it. Mr. Risch said no, he looked into the cost of remodeling. He bought it because it is an eyesore. He said he has been rehabbing his own historic house at 117 S Lombard since 2010. He said he knows when there's something that's not worth repairing. He repeated some of the concerns about the interior and said hopefully he'll find someone in 5-10 years who can build something that's appropriate.

Chair Garapolo said there's a letter from a structural engineer and asked the applicant to describe what he found. Mr. Osic said the structural engineer found the porch structures have no footing or foundation and that's why they're sagging. He described what would be needed to correct that.

The Commission entered deliberation.

Commissioner Chase said it's sad someone in the neighborhood had to take this on. It shouldn't get to this point. She said they can't save everything. This isn't the structure they should focus on. They need to look at this in the future and not let other structures get to this point. This meets the guideline about the cost of repair.

Commissioner Andriana agreed with Commissioner Chase and said the evidence seems self-explanatory. It wouldn't make financial sense to keep the building. It has been a nuisance for too long.

Commissioner Weiner said he asked how long the applicant has lived here. Oak Park is so onerous, he said he was surprised the applicant didn't look into what it would take to demolish the house. He said supports the demolition.

Commissioner Andriana said there are lots of comments on the process. Having a well-developed packet like we do tonight is what the standard should be. It was noted that it's only contributing because of the year. There's some disconnect in the public understanding of the value of smaller houses like this. This is the type of report that should be received when it comes to demolition.

Commissioner Roman said the culprit is the previous owner, who did a major disservice. Mr. Risch bought this emotionally and likely overpaid. He says he questions the restoration cost, but it is probably still beyond what is feasible. Chair Garapolo said part of what they're looking at is the hardship of this owner, not the previous one. Has the applicant suffered a hardship? He knew what

he was buying. He suggested this does not meet the hardship criteria. Commissioner Chase indicated that if someone else bought it they would come back with all the same issues.

Commissioner Roman asked staff if we know what a vacant property in this neighborhood would be worth. Staff said we do not.

Commissioner Andriana said because it was so neglected, she agrees with the Chair regarding the hardship criteria. However, because so many people have seen it as a nuisance and an issue, that overrides the financial part. Commissioner Peterson said the financial piece is a significant amount regardless of the owner. It's twice the value to fix it. That's a lot to put on the owner. Commissioner Weiner said if they don't allow demolition, then what happens. Commissioner Roman said someone else might buy it and they would also want to tear it down.

Commissioner Paul said quoted the economic hardship requirements that, "if the owner/applicant makes the purchase without first getting HPC approvals, the applicant is responsible for their own hardship." She said she is, however, moved but the testimony of the other commissioners.

The Commission asked Attorney Willits for guidance on the requirements. Attorney Willits said economic hardship requires they must consider these six factors, but states "shall include but not limited to." She said it's up to the Commission to determine if there are other exceptions.

Chair Garapolo said two items jump out to him: the cost of rebuilding, which far exceeds the value of the house, and the structural soundness. He said the letter doesn't say it's impossible to rebuild the house. The structural engineer said the front and back porch need to be supported. So, he's not convinced on structural soundness.

Commissioner Andriana said they've run into this issue multiple times with structural engineer reports. Sometimes they're structured more to determine what would need to be done than what's possible.

Chair Garapolo reminded the Commission that the previous COEH review had a structural engineer's report that was much more thorough and convincing about structural problems. Commissioner Peterson said they should revisit what they ask for in a structural engineer's letter. There's a balance between what is possible and what is practical.

Commissioner Weiner made a motion to approve the Certificate of Economic Hardship for the project as proposed. Second by Commissioner Peterson. Motion approved 7-1.

AYE: Commissioner Andriana, Commissioner Bates, Commissioner Chase, Commissioner Paul, Commissioner Peterson, Commissioner Roman, and Commissioner Weiner

NAY: Chair Garapolo

Commissioner Peterson made a motion to approve the draft resolution with the condition that staff and the Chair make edits to reflect what occurred at the meeting. Second by Commissioner Roman. Motion approved 8-0.

AYE: Commissioner Andriana, Commissioner Bates, Commissioner Chase, Commissioner Paul, Commissioner Peterson, Commissioner Roman, Commissioner Weiner, and Chair Garapolo

NAY: None

B. Advisory Review: 430 S Taylor Ave (Janelli Barrow): Advisory Review for proposed new building at 430 S Taylor Ave (Ridgeland-Oak Park Historic District).

Chair Garapolo introduced the project and Planner Trexler provided a summary.

Brian Hungerford, the architect, was present for the project. He described the proposed building and adjacent buildings. He walked through some of the design decisions, such as stepping down the building towards the single-family residence on the south side. He said that the most forward volume of the house is aligned with the front setback and everything else is set back. The fenestration and massing turn and soften towards the single-family residence. The first unit is accessible and there are entries from the front and the back. There will be an open rooftop terrace.

Chair Garapolo thanked Mr. Hungerford for the elaborate studies. He said he was expecting a single-family home in light of what was there. He said some of the detail discussions would be better held at an Architectural Review Committee meeting and invited the applicant to attend.

Commissioner Chase said she appreciates that these are 4-bedroom units and that there will be families moving to this area. She said she's sorry about the loss of greenspace but appreciates the use of the roof. She said she's concerned about how big this is but appreciates the larger units encourage families.

Commissioner Roman said he was expecting a single-family home and this is very large. He said he feels badly for the house next door, as it is completely overwhelmed.

Commissioner Peterson said she appreciates the effort put into the massing on the south side, but it's still a dramatic change from this building to that house. She said she doesn't know if every floor needs to be as large of a footprint. Chair Garapolo said there could be some kind of setback. Commissioner Peterson said there's still not enough coming down on the south side.

Commission Paul said she was not here for the previous hearing, but she likes that this is multi-family housing. There's a precedent for multi-family buildings on this block. She said her only concern is whether it fits the look of the neighborhood. They could have taken more inspiration from the other multi-family buildings on the block and how they are balanced. Commissioner Andriana agreed and said it's jarring, especially with the single-family house next door. She said she likes the thought that went into the design, but it's bigger and it looks like nothing else on the block. Walking down the street, it will seem out of place.

Commissioner Weiner said it's sad there's no backyard. He asked if this will be a rental. Mr. Hungerford said the applicant and their family will live here. The single-family rebuild cost didn't make sense, so they're pooling money to create a building they can all live in. He said the single-family was not optimizing the density allowed by the Village. This is a long-term investment in the community.

Chair Garapolo said it's difficult to know how to get into the building, there's no sense of entrance. The U-shaped apartment buildings have an entry court and the doors are obvious. Mr. Hungerford said they pushed the entry back so the elevator shaft wasn't as noticeable. Chair Garapolo urged them to reconsider. He said he appreciates the checklist but noted this is the first time they have met with the HPC regarding the new design.

Commissioner Chase said she likes the Moderne look of the individual divided window option.

Commissioner Roman said the building looks way too modern for the historic district. Commission Chase said it sets it apart and says it's new. Chair Garapolo said he agrees that sets it apart and he's less concerned about that.

Commissioner Roman asked about the zoning. Mr. Hungerford said it's R-7 and explained the required setbacks.

Chair Garapolo encouraged the applicant to attend the next Architectural Review Committee meeting to discuss some of the smaller design details.

C. Advisory Review: 929 Chicago Ave (Frank Lloyd Wright Trust): Advisory Review for proposed new building between 925 and 931 Chicago Ave (Frank Lloyd Wright-Prairie School of Architecture Historic District).

Chair Garapolo introduced the project and Planner Trexler provided a summary. She said the Commission received 18 positive comment letters, including 10 from Trust Board members. No comments were received against the project.

Present for the project were Celeste Adams, President of the Frank Lloyd Wright Trust, and John Ronan, the architect. Ms. Adams said she provided a letter explaining the process. They will be opening up their site and offering more educational options. The Trust's Board decided this would be a unique building. They did not want to copy Frank Lloyd Wright. It will be a building of its time. The unanimous choice for the architect was John Ronan.

John Ronan said it's an honor to do a project in Oak Park, particularly at this site, which is the birthplace of modern architecture in America. He described the new building, how the spaces will be used, and some of the design decisions. He said the education studio will have obscured glass so it receives daylight but people can't look inside the classroom. The south elevation has clerestory glass with a sunshade of perforated metal. Each room will get daylight from two directions, so the building is primarily lit by daylight. It will have water-saving features and etched glass to deter bird collisions. The porch will serve as a shading element. The materials are very permanent and long-lasting.

Mr. Ronan provided material samples to the Commission and explained that the zinc will age to a duller gray.

The Commission invited public comments. There was one public comment. Patrick Loughran said he is a resident of Oak Park and lives just east of the building. He said he grew up in Oak Park and became an architect. He said there was a Helmut Jahn project recently on South Blvd that wasn't realized. That was a missed opportunity. He said John Ronan was one of the seven candidates selected for the Obama library. Oak Park should be striving for great architecture and he applauds the Trust for selecting this caliber of architect. It's a great thing for the community.

Commissioner Roman disclosed that he is a longtime volunteer and member of the Trust. He said he is concerned the entryway is stark, but the more he looks at it, the more he gets used to it. He quoted Daley regarding the Picasso statue that "what seems strange today will be familiar to us tomorrow." He said he thinks it will fit in.

Commissioner Paul said she lives in the neighborhood and is excited about this. When you are waiting for a tour, there is not a lot of space. She said she also loves the idea of a learning space for

kids. The design is unexpected but integrates well. It's mostly outdoor space and it's set back. The zinc is neutral and more apt to blend into the surroundings.

Commissioner Peterson said it is a thoughtful design and the massing is appropriate. She said she was hoping some of the white oak would be on the outside, maybe one of the doors. All the houses on that side of the street have that warmth to them. That said, there's so much light and openness to this design, maybe that addresses this concern.

Commissioner Chase disclosed that she is also a volunteer of the Trust. She said she was very excited to live where Frank Lloyd Wright is from. This building bridges the perfect balance with modern architecture and you have full visibility of the campus around. It works really well on the property and she's excited to see it.

Commissioner Bates said it's a gorgeous building. He said the Darwin Martin House has a very similar visitor center that is intentionally not Frank Lloyd Wright. Visiting there, it made the experience much more meaningful to have an introduction in a space that was beautiful but clearly separate from the home. He said he is impressed by this.

Commissioner Andriana said this is an amazing design. She said the letter referenced preservation being an aging audience. She said she is young and has a problem with her peers understanding the importance of preservation. This would pull them in and help them understand.

Chair Garapolo thanked Mr. Ronan. He said they are excited about the Trust bringing someone like Mr. Ronan. The proposal checks off all the Guidelines. The modern approach makes sense. It plays off the other buildings by Frank Lloyd Wright. He said he was a concerned about the street façade being all zinc and was worried it would be a deterrent. He said the aging of the zinc may help. Mr. Ronan explained the design is to draw them to the front door and there will be an ornamental tree in front of this façade, as well as signage.

Commissioner Roman asked about the green space at the back of the adjacent property. Ms. Adams said it will be a garden to allow for outdoor classes.

Chair Garapolo asked about the timeline and Ms. Adams said they could break ground as early as June and open in 2025.

OTHER BUSINESS

- **Speaker Series:** Staff said the HPC speaker series will continue with a talk about historic tax credit programs on April 11 at 6:30PM by Andrew Elders and Susan Benjamin.
- Commissioner Introductions: The Commission welcomed Commissioner Paul and introduced themselves.
- Commissioner Peterson asked that the Commission discuss structural engineer letters at a future meeting.

ADJOURN

Motion by Commissioner Peterson to adjourn; Second by Commissioner Chase

The meeting adjourned at 9:45PM.

Minutes prepared by Susie Trexler, Historic Preservation Urban Planner.