

**Oak Park Historic Preservation Commission
January 18, 2024 at 7:30PM – Meeting Minutes**

Roll Call

Present: Chair Lou Garapolo and Commissioners Asha Andriana, David Bates, Monique Chase, Scot Mazur, Amy Peterson, and Mark Weiner
Absent: None
Staff: Susie Trexler, Historic Preservation Urban Planner
Attorney: Courtney Willits, Elrod Friedman LLP

Agenda Approval

Motion by Commissioner Peterson to approve the agenda. Second by Commissioner Mazur. Motion approved 7-0.

Non-Agenda Public Comment

None

Minutes

None

Regular Agenda

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

Chair Garapolo introduced the public hearing and Attorney Willits swore in the witnesses. Planner Trexler provided the staff report. She said the property is contributing within the Ridgeland-Oak Park Historic District and therefore approval is not recommended. However, the applicant may pursue a Certificate of Economic Hardship or appeal denials to the Village Board.

Present on behalf of the project were the applicant, Mark Risch, and his contractor, Jeff Ocic of Crunch Inc. Mr. Risch said he lives at the adjacent property. 125 S Lombard Ave has been rundown for years. He talked about the history at the last meeting. The gentleman who owned it had problems paying the bills. There were holes in the roof that caused water damage and rotting floors. He said he believes the owner was evicted around November 2019. The bank put on a roof very shoddily. He said he's been telling them for years about the porches and chimney, to not walk close to it. A few weeks ago, the storm blew the chimney over. It put a hole through the roof when that happened. The lot was overgrown. Neighbors have pitched in to care for the lawn.

Mr. Risch said the person that bought the house from the bank started to gut it and rehab without permits. There is no gas, water, hardly any plaster, and no heat. It is unlivable. He said he was able to buy it at a reasonable price and did so to tear it down because it is a nuisance. Kids get in there, people try to squat in it. He said he has no plans on rehabbing the house and doesn't want it to be a

public nuisance. He said he has his contractor here that is all set to tear it down. That will increase property values. It's going to be green space and will look a lot better when it does.

Jeff Ocic, the contractor, spoke on behalf of the owner. He said the house is in extreme disrepair. The front 10-12 feet are failing. It has foundation issues and is structurally unsafe. The cost to repair would be \$450,000-500,000. It's infeasible. That's why Mark wants to make it greenspace.

Chair Garapolo invited public comments.

Shannon Asaria thanked the HPC for notifying neighbors. She said she has lived at 202 Pleasant St for 27 years. She said she appreciates the thorough Guidelines that preserve what makes Oak Park so special. She said she hopes the Village will uphold these procedures and make sure homeowners submit the required information for an informed decision. She said there are no cost estimates that document repair vs. replacement. This information should come from a structural engineer or architect. She said the petition has 51 signatures but only 23 are immediate neighbors.

Leslie Sutphen said she lives at 126 S Harvey Ave, directly across the alley from the property. She said she has lived there since 2000, when Geraldine McCullough lived at the applicant's property. This is a nice neighborhood with nice family people and properties. She said she came before the HPC a few months ago for her garage. She provided independent evaluations from a structural engineer and contractor. She said regarding the petitions, no one on the Harvey side signed them. They have been disappointed with Mr. Risch's handling of his own property. He uses it as a parking lot and has loud concerts. She said he has not been respectful and they do not think a vacant lot would be beneficial to the neighborhood.

Madeline Milan said everyone just wants the neighborhood to be a good place. She agreed the signatures on the petition were exaggerated because some of the signers are not affected. She said she did sign it and thinks the neighborhood would be benefitted if the house was removed. She said she lives across the street. This house is unsafe and there were squatters prior to Mr. Risch's purchase. She said the issues about cost estimates are good issues. The neighborhood would be enhanced if the house is removed. She said tearing it down as a first step would be the best thing to do. It is a terrible eyesore and is upsetting to look at every day.

Bobbie Schaper Eastman introduced herself as a realtor for Baird and Warner and said she lives two doors over from the subject property. She said the block would be better without the house. There is nothing redeeming about it. She would like further conversation to occur about the property and has opinions about how it can best be used through a different developer. She said it's far worse than an eyesore, it's about safety. A police officer was injured at the property when clearing out squatters. An arm was broken. There is a tree in the backyard that looks like it's going to lean into her property and her neighbor's. She said if she was looking to sell the subject property right now, there's no way she could pitch it to anyone except a bottom-feeder developer. It's very said. She said she's been there 17 years.

Mr. Risch addressed the petition. He said certain pages say "I live in Oak Park" and "I live on Lombard Ave." He said he wants to tear down the house for safety reasons, he doesn't want anyone to get hurt. He said he doesn't have money to rehab it, but he can afford to make it a yard. As some point he can sell it to a developer, but he wants it to be a yard. He said he's constantly trying to improve his place and the yard.

Chair Garapolo said they heard a \$400,000-500,000 estimate to repair and asked if there is anything in writing related to that number. He asked where it came from. Mr. Risch said that was from

contractors who looked at it, he doesn't have it in writing That was also the quote Jeff Ocic gave. He said he doesn't want it to sit there vacant for another 10-20 years until he has enough money.

Chair Garapolo said the first intent is to repair and restore. The State says it still has historical value. Under the Guidelines, we're looking for the applicant to come up with a way to restore the building. He said they need something in writing from a contractor who is trying to help you restore the building. He asked if the owner has any intention of restoration and Mr. Risch said he can't afford it.

Ms. Milan asked if she could provide a second comment and Chair Garapolo agreed. Ms. Milan said she lives in Oak Park, she loves Oak Park, it's beautiful and it's historic. The Commission needs to keep in mind that Oak Park moves very slowly. This has been deteriorating for many years. Reports were made and nobody would do anything. Last fall, there was a gaping hole in the side of the building and someone had put in space heaters. She said she called the police and they couldn't do anything, it was a three-day weekend and the Village couldn't do anything. She said they have someone who wants to do something. Someone could buy it from mark tomorrow and not do anything for years and the Village would do nothing. In the meantime, the safety of the neighborhood is being damaged. She said the Village wants it restored but the Village isn't helping. If someone buys it to restore it, it will just sit there for another four years. She said it's disingenuous of the Village to say this property should be restored. It's an eyesore.

Ms. Schaper Eastman said someone already bought it and didn't fix it up.

Chair Garapolo closed the public comment portion of the meeting and opened Commission deliberation.

Commissioner Peterson asked staff if the chimney falling down affects the report on the building. Planner Trexler said the report recommended the chimney be removed and this could have been approved by staff. It does not affect the contributing status.

Commissioner Peterson said they have to consider whether the property is still contributing, and the State confirmed it is. The Village review says it potentially could be restored. So according to the Guidelines, we cannot approve demolition. But there are alternative paths mentioned by staff around economic hardship and appeal. She said it has come up in public comment and from Commissioners that there's an absence of cost to repair vs. demolishing and evidence of economic hardship.

Chair Garapolo said his biggest concern is that he hasn't seen any cost estimates written out. He said a month ago the Village recommended the chimney and rear deck be removed immediately, but nothing was done until Mother nature took down the chimney. He said he doesn't see anything being done to try to preserve the building. The statement is that it will become a park, but we don't know if that's true. He said the historic district has Guidelines and he doesn't see any acknowledgement of those Guidelines.

Commissioner Weiner asked for the definition of a contributing resource. Planner Trexler directed the Commission to the Ordinance, which states that a contributing resource is a property and/or improvement within a historic district that represents the significant historical and/or aesthetic characteristics which qualified that district as a historic district under this Article. Commissioner Peterson said in the survey of the historic district, every property has already been documented and listed as contributing or non-contributing.

Commissioner Weiner made a motion to approve the Certificate of Appropriateness for the project as proposed. Second by Commissioner Peterson. Motion denied 5-1.

AYE: Commissioner Andriana, Commissioner Bates, Commissioner Mazur, Commissioner Peterson, and Chair Garapolo

NAY: Commissioner Weiner

Commissioner Peterson made a motion to approve the drafted Resolution with final edits to be made by staff and the Chair. Second by Commissioner Mazur. Motion approved 6-0.

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

NAY: None

OTHER BUSINESS

- **Stewardship Awards:** Staff said the Stewardship Awards ceremony will occur next Wednesday, January 24, at 7:00PM in Village Hall Council Chambers. All are invited to attend. The presentation will be shared with the Commission after the ceremony.

Commissioner Peterson said they should start talking about materials they can have available for Day in Our Village. Chair Garapolo said it would be helpful to have some written materials. Commissioner Peterson said it is a common request how to tell if someone's house is in a historic district. Chair Garapolo said everyone should look at their availability and try to attend.

ADJOURN

Motion by Commissioner Peterson to adjourn; Second by Commissioner Weiner

The meeting adjourned at 8:20PM.

Minutes prepared by Susie Trexler, Historic Preservation Urban Planner.