

**Oak Park Historic Preservation Commission**  
**January 8, 2009 Meeting Minutes**  
**Oak Park Village Hall, Council Chambers – 7:30 pm**

**ROLL CALL**

PRESENT: Chair Nick Kalogeresis, Jeff Limberg, Bob Lempera, Tom Bassett-Dilley, Carmen Vitello, Kate Susmilch, Drew Niermann, Frank Heitzman, Kristen Diamond  
ABSENT: Kyle Hickman, Garret Eakin  
STAFF: Doug Kaarre, Urban Planner

**MINUTES**

*Motion by Bassett-Dilley to approve the December 11, 2008 meeting minutes as submitted. Second by Susmilch. Motion approved 9-0.*

**NON-AGENDA PUBLIC COMMENT**

None

**CONSENT AGENDA**

- A. **HPC 07-52: 644 Madison Street (Foley-Rice Cadillac)** – Preliminary determination of eligibility for Historic Landmark designation – Request to table consideration for 90 days: **Continued from October 9, 2008.**

*Motion by Susmilch to approve the Consent Agenda as presented. Second by Bassett-Dilley. Motion approved 9-0.*

**REGULAR AGENDA**

- B. **HPC 08-69: Mills Park/Pleasant Home (Park District of Oak Park)** – Review the Site Master Plan (*Historic Landmark/Ridgeland-Oak Park Historic District*): **Forwarded from the Architectural Review Committee.**  
Gary Balling and Marty Brocco, Park District of Oak Park; Laura Thompson, Pleasant Home Foundation; and John MacManus, Altamanu, were present.

Chair Kalogeresis stated that the Architectural Review Committee reviewed the master plan at their last meeting. Mills Park is the location of the Farson/Mills House (Pleasant Home), a National Historic Landmark and Oak Park Historic Landmark.

Gary Balling, Executive Director of the Park District of Oak Park, stated that they met with the Architectural Review Committee in December. He introduced Marty Brocco, a member of the Park District Board, John MacManus, of the consultant firm of Altamanu who prepared the plan, and Laura Thompson, Executive Director of the Pleasant Home Foundation. They worked closely with the Pleasant Home Foundation and the community. They had four community meetings which started in September.

John MacManus, Altamanu, stated that they are fortunate to be here and work with Gary Balling. They are extremely aware of the historic nature of Mills Park and took a lot of care. They had four community meetings. He noted the importance of Mills Park as a public open

space in a dense area of Oak Park. Views into the park are limited and the fences are tall and imposing, beautiful but unwelcoming. The current park layout has existing for 42 years and is popular. He reviewed the historic layout and site plan of the site between 1897-1966. There is a 200 year old oak on the southwest side of the park.

Laura Thompson, Executive Director of the Pleasant Home Foundation, handed out a book on the history of the estate to the commissioners. The site was smaller in 1892. In 1897 Mr. Farson asked architect George Washington Maher to design a home. Mr. Farson purchased other properties to the south and west through 1910, resulting in the current 4.5 acre estate. It originally had European gardens, a stable, fountain and other small out buildings. Mr. Farson died in 1910 and the property was sold to the Mills family, who built a conservatory. The estate sat vacant through the 1930s and was sold to the Park District in 1939 by the eight Mills children. The sale required that the estate be used by the community. It once housed a teen center and has been the home of the Historical Society of Oak Park & River Forest since the 1960s. In 1966 the grounds were leveled and the out buildings demolished. Pleasant Home Foundation incorporated as a non-profit organization in the 1980s and give tours of the home and provide educations programs.

Mr. MacManus stated that the site was once terraced but was flattened in 1969 into a meadow. He reviewed the site then and now. The current site paths are called desire lines because they are created where people desire to walk. The master plan calls for three zones east to west: Historic, Naturalistic, and Cultural. He proposed several concepts including reconstructing the fountain and new entryways into the park.

Ms. Thompson stated that the wrought-iron fence along Pleasant and Home was designed in 1901 by George Maher and is part of the landmark designation. The wrought-iron fence along Marion and Pleasant Place was installed by Mills in the teens and was not designed by Maher.

Mr. MacManus stated that the wrought-iron fence along Pleasant and Home has a heavy stone base and is very elegant. The southwest area of the park (Cultural Zone) is proposed a children's woodland, play area and labyrinth. Restoration of this fence would be expensive. Consensus was to save and restore the columns, remove the fence and store it or place elsewhere in the park, and to provide a new entrance along Marion with a more domestic scale. The east area (Historic Zone) plans are to restore the Farson fence, which is a major undertaking, provide a new opening along Home to join near the new fountain. The section of fence where the new opening is proposed is the section of fence in the worst condition. It is not the final design. The north area (part of the Naturalistic Zone) is where the driveway openings are along Pleasant, where garbage is stored and a new opening to the west is considered. He reviewed the proposed plan.

Ms. Thompson stated that the Pleasant Home Foundation is also proposing the addition of a pavilion on the west side of the house. Rental income is crucial for operating and to bring people to the house. The Foundation has been studying other sites around the U.S. Many built adjacent structures for events and to reduce wear and tear on the historic house. Classic Party Rentals approached them and proposed a permanent tent structure to be donated to the Foundation. The size is about 38 feet by 48-65 feet. It would maintain the museum and allow its use for special events. The National Trust encouraged this type of use, which benefits the house and community. They are testing the idea with the

community. Only the footprint is shown as part of the master plan. A separate future vote will be required for design approval.

Mr. MacManus stated that they had overall tremendous community support for the plan, though not 100 percent. They would heavily landscape on the west adjacent to the apartment building.

Mr. Balling stated that the Park District plans to spend \$300,000 on the restoration of the Farson fence in 2010 and \$650,000 for Phase I park improvements in 2011. They would get Certificate of Appropriateness approval from the Commission in the future for these improvements. The Park Board approved the master plan on December 18, 2008 as a blueprint for future development. They are here to get the Commission's feedback. Pleasant Home Foundation is working on grant applications as well.

Commissioner Bassett-Dilley stated that there was consensus at the Architectural Review Committee that this is a great way to bring more vitality to a landmark and increase the appreciation and availability of the park. There was no consensus on the pavilion, but several questions. He reviewed the preservation ordinance regarding the issue of the pavilion. He read from Section 7-9-1 under Purpose of Article:

*The purpose of this Article is to promote the economic, educational, cultural and general welfare of Oak Park by:*

- A. Providing a Municipal process to identify, preserve, protect and enhance the distinctive historic and architectural heritage of Oak Park representing elements of the Village's cultural, social, economic, political and architectural history;*
- B. Conserving and improving the value of properties designated as historic landmarks or located within historic districts;*
- C. Enhancing the attractiveness of the Village to homeowners, visitors, tourists, and shoppers and, thereby, supporting business, commerce and industry in the Village and providing economic benefits to the Village;*
- D. Fostering civic pride in the accomplishments of the past as manifested in properties, structures, improvements and areas of historical and architectural significance within the Village;*
- E. Fostering and encouraging the preservation, restoration and rehabilitation of properties, structures, improvements and areas and, thereby, preventing deterioration, dilapidation and blight.*

These seem to act in support of this type of project. A sensitive connection is important and he will want to see that.

Commissioner Limberg asked what the Certificate of Appropriateness review would cover.

Planner Kaarre stated that it would depend on the Landmark nomination. Definitely the Farson fence and the house and any connection to it would be covered. It's unclear if changes to the site would be covered.

Chair Kalogeresis asked what National Trust or other properties have erected a similar type of pavilion.

Ms. Thompson stated that Danada in Wheaton has a tent structure; the Cuneo Mansion in Vernon Hills has a permanent structure; the Elwood House in DeKalb has a structure that is up for six months. The proposed tent structure uses the fabric used on the Denver airport and the Milwaukee Art Museum. There is no concrete foundation but is on a raised base. It would be heated and cooled year-round. There is no precedent in Oak Park.

Commissioner Bassett-Dilley stated that it needs to be attached to the house.

Chair Kalogeresis stated that he agrees the new entrances make the park more accessible. The Marion fence is not inviting and you don't realize it's a park. He is concerned about removing a historic fence. Maybe they can keep a remnant of it in place.

Mr. MacManus stated that they can create several options on the fence design and costs. They could keep more of the fence in place with a wider opening.

Commissioner Heitzman noted that it cost \$20,000 to restore the entrance fence on Home.

Planner Kaarre asked if there was a positive overall acceptance of the site master plan among the commissioners.

There was a positive consensus in support of the site master plan for Mills Park.

### **OTHER BUSINESS**

**Architectural Review Committee:** Report on December 17, 2008 meeting. The meeting notes were provided to the Commission.

**Education Committee:** Planner Kaarre stated that he sent out an email looking to schedule another meeting date recently and reminded committee members to respond with their availability.

**1125-35 Lake Street (Colt Building):** Chair Kalogeresis noted that the National Trust is looking to discuss the impending demolition of the building and the new TIF money law with the Village Board. There is a loophole in the law that may allow the use of TIF funds to demolish the Colt Building. He is looking to schedule a meeting with President Pope, Trustee Johnson, some from the National Trust and himself in the near future.  
**Certified Local Government (CLG) Grant Application:** Chair Kalogeresis stated that a CLG grant application has been submitted seeking money to hire a consultant to create a new Historic Preservation Plan for the Village. They should hear something in the next few weeks.

**217 S. Euclid Avenue:** Planner Kaarre updated the Commission on progress with this project. The mock-up of the wood siding is not yet in place. He will be meeting with the Village Attorney to discuss the Commission's recommendations and seek direction on responsibility and penalties.

**Certificate of Appropriateness Follow-Up Committee:** Commissioners Heitzman and Lempera volunteered to participate in monitoring COA's during construction.

### **ADJOURN**

*Motion by Susmilch to adjourn. Second by Diamond. Motion approved: 9-0.*

Meeting adjourned at 8:33 pm. Minutes prepared by Doug Kaarre, Urban Planner.

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