

Oak Park Historic Preservation Commission
August 13, 2009 Meeting Minutes
Oak Park Village Hall, Council Chambers – 7:30 pm

ROLL CALL

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

MINUTES

Motion by Susmilch to approve the July 9, 2009 meeting minutes as submitted. Second by Niermann. Motion approved 8-0.

NON-AGENDA PUBLIC COMMENT

Ray Johnson, 344 N. Austin Blvd. and Trustee Liaison to the Commission, stated that he wanted to check in with the Commission and see if there were any issues or concerns.

Chair Bassett-Dilley stated that there was one outstanding issue regarding a fine for a COA violation on S. Euclid that needs follow-up. There was also a letter in the Wednesday Journal regarding the Foley-Rice building on Madison Street.

Mr. Johnson stated that he and the author of the letter have had a dialogue.

Chair Bassett-Dilley noted that the consultant is on board for the long-range preservation plan and will be starting in September. They are also continuing discussions on updating the Architectural Review Guidelines.

Mr. Johnson suggested they reiterate at the public meetings the need for hiring a consultant and the fact that most of the cost is covered by a grant. There is a perception about the lack of need to hire a consultant. He would also like to congratulate Kate Susmilch on serving two full terms on the Commission. She has provided many hours of service to the Village and he thanked her for serving on the Commission.

CONSENT AGENDA

None

REGULAR AGENDA

- A. **Preliminary Determination of Eligibility for Historic Landmark Designation** – 175-181 Linden Avenue/643-645 Ontario Street (Linden Apartments).

Chair Bassett-Dilley noted that the building is a 1916 brick apartment building designed in the Prairie style by architect John Van Bergen. He is very pleased to see the nomination. He

is intrigued by the historic rendering from the Oak Leaves which shows the building as a hip roof and not a flat roof. He wondered if there are any historic photos of the building.

Commissioner Morris stated that the nomination noted that no historic photos could be found.

Commissioner Eakin stated that the building does have a hip roof. It has a very low pitch and so cannot be seen directly in front of the building.

Mary Rose Lambke, 643 Ontario, stated that she is a property owner in the building. The roof originally had clay tiles but they were removed in the 1970s when the building was converted to condominiums.

Commissioner Eakin stated that the interior is very consistent with nice plans. The unit he was in had a fire place, art glass windows and the kitchens all face the interior courtyard. The windows have all been replaced.

Ms. Lambke stated that the original casement windows were replaced with sliders, also in the 1970s. Eight of the units so far have put back the original French casement design, which adds to the beauty of the building. The air flow with the casements is wonderful.

Planner Kaarre stated that the Commission reviewed and approved the window replacement plan from the sliders back to casements in 2007-2008.

Chair Bassett-Dilley stated that Prairie style apartment buildings are rare. He agrees that it meets the criteria for designation as listed in the nomination – including the architectural heritage of the Village, an important architectural style, and detail and craftsmanship that makes the building unique.

Motion by Eakin to approve a Preliminary Determination of Eligibility for the Historic Landmark nomination for 175-181 Linden Avenue/643-645 Ontario Street under the four Criteria for Designation as outlined in the nomination. Second by Susmilch. Motion approved 8-0.

Commissioner Morris noted that if the condo owners are interested in the Property Tax Assessment Freeze program, preparing the application would make a good condo model to be used by others. The Commission could assist in preparing it.

Planner Kaarre stated that he would contact Brian De Vinck, property owner and author of the nomination, to see if they are planning any major systems upgrades or other improvements to the building which may qualify under the program.

Commissioner Susmilch stated that she could help on that as she works with condominium boards and knows the associated documents. Each unit's assessed value may be as low as \$30,000, and they are only required to spend 25% of that.

B. **Architectural Review Guidelines** – Discussion of Potential Updates Continued from the July 9, 2009 meeting.

Accessibility

Commissioner Susmilch discussed the Accessibility guidelines. There are only two sentences in the current guidelines outlining two philosophies – 1) integrating accessibility provisions in the historic design of a building; and 2) making accessibility provisions reversible and removable to prevent permanent damage to the historic fabric of a building. She has two questions the Commission should ask: 1) should they distinguish between public buildings and single-family homes in the guidelines; and 2) should the context and “experience” of the building be included when discussing permanent changes to the building. With single-family homes, the need for accessibility may go away as owners change, thus they could encourage more temporary changes. With public buildings more permanent changes are often considered. They should encourage reversibility. Is their goal to preserve each element of a building or the overall experience? An example is the Maze Branch Library: rather than preserve the transom window above the front entrance door, they allowed the door to be raised so that the front entrance would be accessible to everyone. With the chair lift at Pilgrim Church, the frequency of use was also a factor.

Commissioner Heitzman stated that the Illinois Accessibility Code has a chapter on historic buildings. They do make allowances for the experience of a building. They take into account both accessibility and character of historic buildings. It requires a skilled architect. Each building should be studied on a case by case basis. He was formerly the chair of Oak Park’s Universal Access Commission. They provide awards for good examples. He understands the need to expand the section, but they should reference the code.

Commissioner Susmilch stated that short sentences are a brilliant way to look at it as each project will be different. The guidelines ask that everyone has the same experience without damaging historic materials. It’s a challenging problem.

Chair Bassett-Dilley stated that the law is involved here. Maybe they should just reference the Preservation Brief #32 and the International Accessibility Code.

Commissioner Heitzman stated that he wrote a brochure for the State as well.

Commissioner Susmilch provided an overview of the Pilgrim Church project which resulted in a lift but no ramp.

Chair Bassett-Dilley stated that one concern about ramps is that they can deface a façade if they are not sensitively done. Ramps are suggested in point number 2 in the guidelines.

Commissioner Susmilch discussed lifts versus ramps – some small, some large. She also had a concern with point number 2 in the guidelines.

Chair Bassett-Dilley stated that point number 1 is straight-forward; they should keep it and then reference other documents.

Commissioner Susmilch stated that they reinforce basic historic preservation tenets.

Commissioner Heitzman stated that they should give examples of good solutions and reference cost.

Commissioner Morris stated that there are at least two programs for grants to churches for accessibility, plus others for non-religious properties.

Planner Kaarre stated that the Pilgrim Church entrance was technically a secondary entrance set back from Lake Street; the main entrance faces Scoville.

The Commission discussed the Maze Branch library solution of a front yard ramp.

Chair Bassett-Dilley stated that entrances are a big part of the character of a building.

Commissioner Susmilch stated that less is more, they should eliminate point number 2 from the guidelines and reference other resources.

Commissioner Heitzman stated that they should provide examples, costs and incentives.

Planner Kaarre stated that they could put together a packet of incentives and reference that they should ask Village staff about it, since incentive programs often change.

Commissioner Morris asked if they were going to do a hard-copy version and an on-line version, which could provide direct links.

Chair Bassett-Dilley stated that they will likely start with a hard copy and then edit it for the web with hyper-links.

Signs Guidelines/Awning Guidelines

Commissioner Morris prepared the revisions for signs and awnings. She is concerned about the requirement in the sign code to remove obsolete or abandoned signs if they historic signs.

Commissioner Heitzman stated that classic signs are identified to remain.

Commissioner Morris stated that they should do a survey of all historic signs to identify them. Each section in her review begins with general questions. She also reviewed 12 ordinances from other communities. Her first question is how their guidelines interact with the new sign code. Second, they should conduct a historic sign inventory for the Village.

Commissioner Heitzman stated that the sign code allow for the replication of historic signs, and is not specific on what may or may not be replicated. A historic sign could be replicated even if it does not meet the current sign code.

Commissioner Morris stated that there are pretty good signs in Oak Park overall.

Commissioner Heitzman stated that Downtown Oak Park has a grant program.

Commissioner Morris asked what incentives are out there. Should they should consider other incentives to encourage the preservation of signs?

Chair Bassett-Dilley stated that the guidelines should be general overall so people can refer to it anywhere in the Village. A sign inventory is a great idea.

Commissioner Heitzman stated that the sign ordinance refers to historic signs as 25-years old. They should preserve digital signs, which are part of today's culture.

Commissioner Morris stated that they could change the guidelines to be 25 years, but 50 years is the general rule for the National Park Service. They could add digital signs.

Chair Bassett-Dilley stated that he is concerned about going to 25 years as there is no historic precedent for using that date.

Commissioner Morris stated that ghost signs are hard to preserve.

Commissioner Morris stated that the awnings section should focus on materials, shape, location and character of the building. She tried not to be too restrictive.

Commissioner Eakin stated that loud garish signs don't have a positive impact.

Commissioner Morris stated that they could run the guidelines past awning companies who work in Oak Park.

Chair Bassett-Dilley stated that less is more regarding size, etc. Keep the guidelines general, such as don't obscure the building. It would work to our advantage.

Commissioner Heitzman stated that he likes the comments about requiring the preservation of historic signs. There is a historic "hotel" sign on the Write Inn on Oak Park Avenue.

Chair Bassett-Dilley suggested that they email additional thoughts and comments to Commissioner Morris.

Planner Kaarre asked about abandoned roof structures.

The consensus was to leave that issue open-ended and do more research to see if they could be re-used.

Commissioner Eakin suggested they do a historic sign brochure.

Commissioner Morris stated they should identify where historic signs used to be and encourage their replication. They should also preserve historic awning elements and respect the character of the building through awning placement.

Commissioner Susmilch recommended continuity on the same building that has multiple storefronts.

Planner Kaarre noted the building at the northeast corner of Oak Park and Lake as an example. There are multiple storefronts that have the same type of awning, with the same material, but different colors. The Commission doesn't currently review signs, awnings or fences. If the Commission wishes to resume these reviews with approval of the new guidelines, it can be done through a resolution.

Chair Bassett-Dilley stated that documentation will be the key.

OTHER BUSINESS

Architectural Review Committee: Report on July 22, 2009 meeting. The meeting notes were provided to the Commission. The next meeting will be on Wednesday, August 26.

Education Committee: Report on July 23, 2009 meeting. The meeting notes were provided to the Commission. The next meeting will be on September 24, 2009.

Commissioner Susmilch's last meeting: Chair Bassett-Dilley stated that tonight is Kate's last meeting. Working with her has been great. She has always provided an even, unbiased review of projects and it will be tough to see her go. He thanked her for her six years of service. Her legacy will be making sure that the notes are on the drawings.

Commissioner Susmilch thanked everyone and stated that it was one of the best experiences she's had. She has learned so much and it's made her better at her job. She will miss working for the community. They have had some great conversations.

ADJOURN

Motion by Susmilch to adjourn. Second by Diamond. Motion approved: 8-0.

Meeting adjourned at 9:30 pm. Minutes prepared by Doug Kaarre, Urban Planner.

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