

Oak Park Historic Preservation Commission
Proposed Expansion of the
Frank Lloyd Wright-Prairie School of Architecture Historic District
March 21, 2011 Meeting Minutes
Oak Park Public Library, Council Chambers – 7:00 pm

ROLL CALL

PRESENT: Chair Christina Morris, Joerg Albrecht, Garret Eakin, Frank Heitzman, Gary Palese, Michael Plummer

ABSENT: Bob Lempera, Rosanne McGrath, Regina Nally, Drew Niermann, Tony Quinn

STAFF: Douglas Kaarre, Urban Planner

A. Welcome – Ray Johnson, Trustee, Village of Oak Park

Ray Johnson, Village Trustee and Board liaison to the Historic Preservation Commission, welcomed those in attendance for coming to the meeting and participating in the public process.

B. Introduction – Christina Morris, Chair, Historic Preservation Commission

Chair Morris also thanked everyone for attending, provided an overview of the evening's agenda and introduced the speakers.

C. History of the Historic District – Frank Lipo, Executive Director, Historical Society of Oak Park & River Forest

Mr. Lipo provided an overview of the history and development of the historic district.

D. Overview of the Designation Process to Date – Douglas Kaarre, Urban Planner/Historic Preservation, Village of Oak Park

Planner Kaarre provided an overview of the process to date. The local historic district was designated in 1972, followed by listing on the National Register in 1973. An architectural survey of the district and adjacent areas was conducted in 2005-2007 and an updated National Register nomination with proposed expanded areas was prepared by Thomason & Associates. The survey prepared a property inventory of Contributing and Non-Contributing buildings, examined the local and national significance of the district, reviewed the existing boundaries and expanded the National Register district, which was officially listed on May 22, 2009.

He reviewed the definition of a historic district and discussed the benefits, including the maintenance and protection of the historic character of the neighborhood, the stabilization or improvement of property values, and eligibility for tax incentive programs. He also discussed the drawbacks for property owners, including additional review of exterior alterations visible from the street by the Historic Preservation Commission or its Staff, and Village control of the demolition of Contributing properties.

He discussed why the boundaries were expanded, including fixing irregular and in some cases arbitrary boundaries which cut through the middle of blocks, leaving out similar areas of the same neighborhood that included properties with the same character, dates of construction and architectural styles or types. Another reason is to match the local and National Register boundaries, and to protect the character of the neighborhood from demolition and inappropriate alteration over the long term.

E. Questions and Answers with the Historic Preservation Commission

Approximately 30 people were in attendance at the meeting in addition to commission members and Village staff. The make-up of those in attendance included those in support, those in opposition and many who came with questions and/or concerns.

Questions and comments from the attendees included the following:

- **Provide more information on how the expansion boundaries were chosen.** The boundaries were chosen based on the overall historic character, dates of construction and architectural styles and types of buildings. The Commission believes that the expanded boundaries make a more cohesive district. They will be happy to discuss this in more detail at the next public meeting.
- **Discuss the make-up of the Historic Preservation Commission.** The 11 members of the HPC are Village residents who either work in preservation, architecture or a related field, or have an interest in historic preservation. At least one member must be a property owner in a historic district.
- **Discuss how the boundary expansion will impact property taxes.** There is no documented evidence that historic district designation impacts property taxes, which are calculated based on numerous other factors. Most studies have shown that historic district designation has improved property values in some cases, or stabilized them in others.
- **Discuss how the boundary expansion will impact the vacant property at 808 Forest Avenue.** This property is listed as a Contributing Resource and the Commission would promote its retention, repair and reuse rather than demolition. The Commission does not like to see properties sit vacant any more than other neighbors.
- **Provide input from other property owners currently located in historic districts who have been through the review process.** The Commission will try to get current district property owners to attend the next public meeting.
- **Provide information on what types of projects have been reviewed.** Approximately 85% of all building permits in the historic districts are approved at the Commission Staff level without going through the Historic Preservation Commission. The Commission reviews only exterior changes visible from the street, such as additions, alterations, siding, windows, etc. They do not review interior changes, changes not visible from the street, or painting.
- There was some concern about adding another level of review to the building permit process. A number of residents indicated how difficult and time-consuming it can be to get a building permit.
- **One resident was concerned that he may not be able to construct a planned addition to his house. He noted that several of his neighbors have done something similar.** He was recommended to discuss this individually with Commission Staff after the meeting for more details on the Architectural Review Guidelines.

Meeting adjourned at 8:30 p.m. Minutes prepared by Douglas Kaarre, Urban Planner.

U:\CPD_Strategic\Planning\Historic Preservation\HPC Agendas and Minutes\2011\2011 Minutes\03-21-11 FLW Minutes.doc