

**Oak Park Historic Preservation Commission**  
**Proposed Expansion of the**  
**Frank Lloyd Wright-Prairie School of Architecture Historic District**  
**July 18, 2011 Meeting Minutes**  
**Oak Park Public Library, Council Chambers – 7:00 pm**

**ROLL CALL**

**PRESENT:** Chair Christina Morris, Garret Eakin, Frank Heitzman, Michael Plummer, Bob Lempera, Regina Nally, Drew Niermann, Gary Palese  
**ABSENT:** Joerg Albrecht, Rosanne McGrath, Tony Quinn  
**STAFF:** Douglas Kaarre, Urban Planner

Three property owners were present at this third public meeting held by the Commission to discuss expanding the boundaries of the local historic district. They were Christopher Payne from the 800 block of N. Ridgeland, Lori Dawson of the 700 block of Forest, and Sam Roe of the 600 block of Belleforte.

Mr. Payne stated that he is an architect and volunteers with many historic organizations. He looked for a home that was not in a historic district. He is okay with the National Register because it doesn't place any restrictions on him. He is concerned about constraints with no benefits that he can see. This is about potential future work. He wants to do an addition which would likely be scrutinized. He referenced the project at 241 Home which he recently worked on.

Chair Morris stated that is a common concern – review time and restrictions. Additions to historic homes are okay if they meet the Architectural Review Guidelines. Their purpose is to get a project approved under the Guidelines, not to say no to a project.

Mr. Roe stated that he supports the district expansion and hopes it passes. When you buy a historic house you're also buying into a neighborhood. They live close together and don't have the luxury to make decisions that affect the street. The house on the 700 block of N. Marion is built right up to the street and affects everyone. You shouldn't be able to just do anything. The historic of Oak Park is important.

Chair Morris agreed that its not just about each house but also the context of the neighborhood.

Mr. Roe asked about the district expansion approval process.

Chair Morris stated that following the three public meetings they have held, the HPC will hold a public hearing, take an official vote, and forward their recommendation to the Village Board who has to approve it by ordinance. They are looking at potentially October.

Mr. Payne stated that it's a different experience for an owner who lives on a major street than a more residential street.

Commissioner Lempera asked how many properties would be affected.

Planner Kaarre stated that just over 400 buildings in five sections are in the expansion area.

Commissioner Lempera suggested they are missing hearing from many people.

Chair Morris reviewed the outreach process they have gone through. They have done press releases, email blasts, news articles, posted notices and educational information on the Village website, posted notices on the Village cable channel, and done two direct mailings to every property. They have still had a low turnout overall.

Ms. Dawson stated that she is concerned about their process. They are assuming people support this if they don't hear otherwise, which is flawed. Being in a historic district is onerous. The current zoning and code process are sufficient. She doesn't want a worse burden.

Chair Morris noted that those are common misperceptions. 85% of all permits are approved at the Staff level. Very few projects are delayed for a review process.

Ms. Dawson asked who the authority was, and if owners are surrendering their rights to a small group of people. It will affect selling their property and their value.

Chair Morris stated that all commissioners are Oak Park citizen volunteers who are appointed. Their role is to maintain the character of the community as desired by the Village.

Ms. Dawson referred to a bungalow addition, and noted that many of her neighbors would oppose this.

Mr. Roe stated that many neighbors are also supportive. There are some regulations which no one wants. It's better to get it right. It's a good idea to have a second set of eyes on a major project. You buy into a neighborhood. It's a necessary evil to have a great community like Oak Park.

Chair Morris noted that there is plenty of research on historic district designation and property values. Historic districts tend to hold their value better and are generally more stable neighborhoods, partly through predictability through regulations.

Commissioner Nally stated that it provides some level of certainty in uncertain economic times. People are less likely to spend. The Guidelines help people feel their neighborhood won't change drastically. People like the idea of knowing.

Ms. Dawson stated that she doesn't want these laws placed on her.

Commissioner Nally stated that she is surprised they haven't heard from more people because they have done a lot to reach out.

Ms. Dawson suggested that each property owner should be able to vote.

Chair Morris stated that there are many avenues of outreach. A referendum is a complicated and expensive process.

Ms. Dawson suggested viewing owners as not in support unless you hear otherwise.

Chair Morris stated that the proposed boundaries have been thoroughly researched and reasoned and they are fixing irregularities in the current boundaries. Even the State has asked us to look into this because the district was done so long ago.

Mr. Roe stated that he wishes they'd expanded years ago. Teardowns ruin the block. He asked Ms. Dawson if she could better explain her position.

Ms. Dawson stated that there is too much government and she doesn't want another law imposed on her. This will prevent people from doing what they want to do.

Mr. Payne stated that he's been through the building permit process many times. Adding 30-60 days to the process is stressful for owners.

Commissioner Heitzman stated that many projects are approved by the HPC. It's always difficult when someone tells you that you can't do something. It can be intimidating, especially as an architect. Many ARC members understand and help to put it in context. They try to find solutions rather than just saying no. They also want the community to continue to be beautiful.

Chair Morris stated that they understand it is an additional layer. They are looking to streamline the process.

Mr. Payne stated that he understands they are looking to update the Guidelines.

Commissioner Lempera stated that they are rewriting the Guidelines. They hired an experienced consultant to work with them. Hopefully they will be clearer with better explanations and illustrations. They will hold public meetings.

Chair Morris noted that the current Guidelines can be vague, have no photos and can be hard to understand. They want to address the document's user-friendliness. The goal of the HPC is to be consistent, which is why they have Guidelines.

Ms. Dawson suggested additional outreach, such as a survey.

Commissioner Nally stated that they could consider other ways to reach out. Maybe create an online survey and provide a link to it.

Ms. Dawson stated that she would email her neighbors and ask them to submit their comments.

Chair Morris stated that they could look into trying a survey in the next several months and see if it gets results. They will wait and see if they get many additional comments.

Meeting adjourned at 8:00 p.m. Minutes prepared by Douglas Kaarre, Urban Planner.

U:\CPD\_Strategic\Planning\Historic Preservation\HPC Agendas and Minutes\2011\2011 Minutes\07-18-11 FLW Minutes.doc