

**Oak Park Historic Preservation  
Commission April 11, 2019 - Meeting Minutes  
Oak Park Village Hall, Council Chambers, 7:30 pm**

**Roll Call**

Present: Chair Christopher Payne and Commissioners Tom Abrahamson, Jennifer Bridge, Lou Garapolo, Darrick Gurski, Rebecca Houze, Laura Jordahl, David Sokol, and Noel Weidner  
Absent: Commissioners Sandra Carr and Aleksandra Tadic  
Staff: Susie Trexler, Historic Preservation Urban Planner  
Attorney: Gregory Smith, Klein, Thorpe & Jenkins

**Agenda Approval**

*Motion by Commissioner Garapolo to approve the agenda; Second by Commissioner Jordahl; Motion approved 9-0.*

**Minutes**

*Motion by Commissioner Houze to approve draft minutes for March 14, 2019; Second by Commissioner Garapolo; Motion approved 9-0.*

**Regular Agenda**

- A. HPC 2019-12: 27 Washington Blvd (Archdiocese of Chicago):** Certificate of Appropriateness for the demolition of the top 15 feet of a chimney located on a secondary building behind Saint Catherine of Siena Roman Catholic Church School. Chimney to be recapped and original wire top to be reinstalled (Ridgeland-Oak Park Historic District).

Chair Payne introduced the application. Planner Trexler gave an overview.

Frank Pond, a member of the congregation, was present on behalf of the church. Mr. Pond had no additional information and stated he was available for questions from the Commission.

*Motion by Commissioner Houze to open the discussion; Second by Commissioner Garapolo.*

Commissioner Garapolo asked for the cost of chimney restoration and said cost should have been included with the cost of current work for comparison. Commissioner Sokol agreed it is hard to determine if it would have been cost prohibitive if not costs are provided.

Commissioner Houze asked for clarification on why a portion of the chimney has already been demolished. Mr. Pond explained that a permit should have been obtained but they did not realize it was needed. He emphasized that the chimney was becoming a safety issue for the children that attend school in the adjacent building.

Commissioner Jordahl discussed the location of the chimney with Mr. Pond. Mr. Pond said the chimney would only have been minimally visible from Humphrey Ave. He confirmed that the chimney is located at the rear of the property and is attached to a boiler building located behind the school. Chair Payne said that the only reason the chimney is visible from Austin Blvd is that there is a parking lot there.

Chair Payne said he does not believe that the chimney is a character defining feature. Several Commissioners expressed their agreement with the exception of Commissioner Houze. Chair Payne said demolition is allowed for many residential chimneys and a similar discussion happened when demolition was proposed for the Oak Park and River Forest High School chimney.

Commissioner Weidner expressed concern that the work was done without a permit and this should not affect the Commission's decision. Mr. Pond said due to the difference in cost, the applicant would have requested the same project scope.

*Motion by Commissioner Weidner to approve the Certificate of Appropriateness for the demolition of the top 15 feet of the chimney and recapping to match original. Second by Commissioner Jordahl. Motion approved 7-2.*

*AYE: Commissioner Abrahamson, Commissioner Bridge, Commissioner Gurski, Commissioner Houze, Commissioner Jordahl, Commissioner Weidner, and Chair Payne*

*NAY: Commissioner Garapolo and Commissioner Sokol*

- B. HPC 2019-13: 1033 Augusta St (Martha Strom):** Certificate of Appropriateness to remove and replace two paired doors on the west side elevation with doors of the same appearance but alternate material (Frank Lloyd Wright-Prairie School of Architecture Historic District).

Chair Payne introduced the application. Planner Trexler gave an overview of the project.

Martha Strom, the homeowner, was present. She said that she did not have a statement but would answer questions from the Commission.

*Motion by Commissioner Sokol to open the discussion; Second by Commissioner Weidner.*

The Commission asked Ms. Strom if repair was a viable option. Ms. Strom explained that the doors are very thin and deteriorated, and the glass panes break every winter. The contractor tried to fix the latch but it still doesn't work. The contractor also told Ms. Strom they cannot just remove the inner door because they have to remove the jamb.

Ms. Strom confirmed that the new doors will be the same size and color. They will not be true divided lights but will feature a grill on the outside so will be the same in appearance. She said the right door has been non-functional as long as she has lived there (approximately 20 years) and the intent is that it will continue to be decorative only.

Chair Payne stated that given the location and that the proposed doors are the same size and appearance as existing, he supports the project.

*Motion by Commissioner Jordahl to approve the Certificate of Appropriateness for the door replacement as proposed. Second by Commissioner Abrahamson. Motion approved 9-0.*

*AYE: Commissioner Abrahamson, Commissioner Bridge, Commissioner Garapolo, Commissioner Gurski, Commissioner Houze, Commissioner Jordahl, Commissioner Sokol, Commissioner Weidner, and Chair Payne*

*NAY: None*

- C. HPC 2019-14: 418 N Cuyler Ave (Mark Wallace):** Certificate of Appropriateness to raise the porch ceiling height. Removal of the soffit revealed that the top of the bay window had been concealed

by the porch addition; the applicant would like to expose the original bay window trim (Ridgeland-Oak Park Historic District).

Chair Payne introduced the application. Planner Trexler gave an overview of the project.

Mark Wallace, homeowner, was present. He stated that he does not believe the change will be visible from the sidewalk. He said that the project began last fall when he started to restore the porch ceiling and found the top of the front bay window hidden by the existing ceiling. He said that the cathedral ceiling proposed departs from local tradition but would fit well with the house as the interior features several rooms with cathedral ceilings.

*Motion by Commissioner Sokol to open the discussion; Second by Commissioner Garapolo.*

Commissioner Garapolo said that he has walked by the house and agrees that the porch ceiling change would not be visible.

Commissioner Houze said that she approves of the project and a similar raised porch ceiling has been approved by the Commission previously. The Commissioners expressed approval of the project.

*Motion by Commissioner Sokol to approve the Certificate of Appropriateness for replacement of the porch ceiling as a cathedral ceiling to expose original front bay window. Second by Commissioner Weidner. Motion approved 9-0.*

*AYE: Commissioner Abrahamson, Commissioner Bridge, Commissioner Garapolo, Commissioner Gurski, Commissioner Houze, Commissioner Jordahl, Commissioner Sokol, Commissioner Weidner, and Chair Payne*

*NAY: None*

- D. HPC 2019-15: 470 N Austin Ave (Oak Park Residence Corporation):** Certificate of Appropriateness to demolish exterior entrance door to garden level unit and fill the gap with brick to match existing (Ridgeland-Oak Park Historic District).

Chair Payne introduced the application. Planner Trexler gave an overview of the project.

Jerry Gawlik and Derek Darter, of Oak Park Residence Corporation, were in attendance. They said that they would be available for questions from the Commission.

*Motion by Commissioner Garapolo to open the discussion; second by Commissioner Sokol.*

Commissioner Garapolo asked for clarification on how the lower portion doorway, below the brick, would be filled. Mr. Gawlik said that the stairwell would be brought up to grade and filled with landscaping to match the surrounding area. He said that they are rehabbing the unit and removal of the door will improve security and heating costs. Landscaping will also provide better drainage as water will not pool at the base of the stairs.

Commissioner Weidner expressed concern about egress. Derek Darter and Mr. Gawlik confirmed that there are two other doors existing and the unit meets egress requirements.

The Commission requested that the removal of the stairs and filling to grade be included Certificate of Appropriateness.

*Motion by Commissioner Abrahamson to approve the Certificate of Appropriateness to demolish the garden level door and stairwell, fill doorway with brick to match, and fill stairwell to grade. Second by Commissioner Garapolo. Motion approved 9-0.*

*AYE: Commissioner Abrahamson, Commissioner Bridge, Commissioner Garapolo, Commissioner Gurski, Commissioner Houze, Commissioner Jordahl, Commissioner Sokol, Commissioner Weidner, and Chair Payne*

*NAY: None*

- E. HPC2019-16: 416 N Oak Park Ave (Julia Skubin and Seth Weber):** Certificate of Appropriateness for window alterations to accommodate interior remodel, including the removal of one window and additional of two windows on the north side elevation (Frank Lloyd Wright-Prairie School of Architecture Historic District).

Chair Payne introduced the application. Planner Trexler gave an overview of the project.

Tom Bassett-Dilley, the architect, was present on behalf of the homeowner. He said that he would be available for Commission questions.

*Motion by Commissioner Sokol to open the discussion; second by Commissioner Jordahl.*

Commissioner Garapolo asked about the location of the added window with respect to the interior stairwell. Mr. Bassett-Dilley explained it will be approximately four feet above the landing and that the objective with the high window was to bring sunlight deeper into the house.

Commissioner Garapolo asked if a safety rail will be added to the window well, due to its location near the driveway. Mr. Bassett-Dilley said that a safety rail is not required if the depth is less than 30 inches and the homeowners do not intend to add a safety rail. Landscaping will be used around the window well.

Commissioner Weidner asked if the chimney would also be removed. Mr. Bassett-Dilley confirmed that it would be. The Commission noted that this is not part of the Certificate of Appropriateness. Attorney Smith said that the chimney could not be added at the time of the meeting and an additional Certificate of Appropriateness would be needed. Planner Trexler said that she would follow up with Mr. Bassett-Dilley.

*Motion by Commissioner Jordahl to approve the Certificate of Appropriateness for the window alterations as proposed. Second by Commissioner Bridge. Motion approved 9-0.*

*AYE: Commissioner Abrahamson, Commissioner Bridge, Commissioner Garapolo, Commissioner Gurski, Commissioner Houze, Commissioner Jordahl, Commissioner Sokol, Commissioner Weidner, and Chair Payne*

*NAY: None*

- F. HPC2019-17: 200 S Grove Ave (Woodworth):** Certificate of Appropriateness for the demolition of a historic coach house and to build a new coach house (Ridgeland-Oak Park Historic District). The applicant attended the Architectural Review Committee meeting March 27, 2019.

Chair Payne introduced the application and said that the applicant attended the Architectural Review Committee meeting on March 27, 2019. Planner Trexler gave an overview of the project.

Denny Burke, the architect, was present on behalf of the homeowner. He presented sample materials to the Commission.

*Motion by Commissioner Sokol to open the discussion; second by Commissioner Jordahl.*

Commissioner Garapolo said that the Architectural Review Committee suggested that information about the proposed materials be provided, which they have. Mr. Burke followed up with material information and that the coach house will be painted to match the house. The proposed faux slate shingle is also the same material used on the house.

The Commission asked if the issues outlined in the engineer's report could be resolved. Mr. Burke outlined the issues and said that it would not be cost effective and demolition of portions of the coach house wall would be required in order to excavate and replace the foundation.

The Commission asked about the dormer size and Mr. Burke explained that the dormer will be four inches longer but the same width as the existing dormer. The height of the ridge will be the same as existing. He said that the idea of the dormers on both sides came from the original coach house. Commissioner Jordahl agreed that the proposed coach house keeps the essence of the original coach house.

*Motion by Commissioner Bridge to approve the Certificate of Appropriateness to demolish the historic coach house and build a new coach house. Second by Commissioner Gurski. Motion approved 9-0.*

*AYE: Commissioner Abrahamson, Commissioner Bridge, Commissioner Garapolo, Commissioner Gurski, Commissioner Houze, Commissioner Jordahl, Commissioner Sokol, Commissioner Weidner, and Chair Payne*

*NAY: None*

- G. HPC2019-18: 300 N East Ave (Karl and Karen Emanuel):** Certificate of Appropriateness to demolish the existing garage and construct a new garage of a similar size and in the same location (Frank Lloyd Wright-Prairie School of Architecture Historic District).

Chair Payne introduced the application and Planner Trexler gave an overview of the project.

Brett Williams, contractor from Element Worx, was present on behalf of the homeowner. He explained the state of the existing garage including that the foundation sank three inches at one corner and the bottom plates are almost non-existent. The proposed new garage will be taller to accommodate an attic space. To give a sense of scale, the windows shown are sitting on the deck of the attic floor. The dormer facing the house will have a gable roof reflecting the roof of the house. Other dormers will be hipped.

*Motion by Commissioner Weidner to open the discussion; second by Commissioner Houze.*

Commissioner Weidner asked for an exact amount of height increase and Mr. Williams stated seven feet. The Commission complimented the submission materials and agreed that the proposed new garage is appropriate in scale and appearance. Commissioner Sokol said that the size of the garage is appropriate in particular due to the size of the house and Commissioner Houze said that the proposed garage blends nicely with the house.

*Motion by Commissioner Jordahl to approve the Certificate of Appropriateness to demolish the historic garage and build a new garage. Second by Commissioner Garapolo.*

*AYE: Commissioner Abrahamson, Commissioner Bridge, Commissioner Garapolo, Commissioner Gurski, Commissioner Houze, Commissioner Jordahl, Commissioner Sokol, Commissioner Weidner, and Chair Payne*

*NAY: None*

- H. HPC2019-19: 509 N Oak Park Ave (International Society LLC):** Certificate of Appropriateness for the installation of a ramp at the north side entrance for accessibility and an egress window (Frank Lloyd Wright-Prairie School of Architecture Historic District).

Chair Payne introduced the application. Planner Trexler gave an overview of the project.

Maria Fermi and Brando Fermi-Crawford, the prospective building owners, were present. They explained that they are moving forward with purchasing the building. It will be used by The Language and Music School. Mr. Fermi-Crawford said that the project has changed slightly and instead of a wood ramp, they now propose to install an aluminum ramp that will be removable.

*Motion by Commissioner Sokol to open the discussion; second by Commissioner Houze.*

Commissioner Sokol asked if the new proposed ramp will be anchored to the house and Mr. Fermi-Crawford verified that it would be. The primary modification made to install the ramp will be the removal of the existing metal railing on the north porch.

Commissioner Garapolo noted that there are two landing measurements. While this does not affect the Commission's vote, he recommended making sure that the dimensions will work for accessing the door and the parking area.

*Motion by Commissioner Houze to approve the installation of a ramp at the north side entrance to meet accessibility requirements. Motion amended to include that the ramp will be aluminum and portable. Second by Commissioner Weidner. Motion approved 9-0.*

*AYE: Commissioner Abrahamson, Commissioner Bridge, Commissioner Garapolo, Commissioner Gurski, Commissioner Houze, Commissioner Jordahl, Commissioner Sokol, Commissioner Weidner, and Chair Payne*

*NAY: None*

- I. Certificate of Economic Hardship Hearing, 1014 and 1018 Pleasant St (Alan Rossell):** Public hearing on the Certificate of Economic Hardship application to demolish 1014 and 1018 Pleasant Street (Ridgeland-Oak Park Historic District). The applicant previously applied for a Certificate of Appropriateness, which was denied following the associated hearing on February 14, 2019.

Chair Payne opened the public hearing. Attorney Smith swore in the speakers.

Al Rossell, the applicant, was present. Mr. Rossell said he has been in front of the Commission twice and been denied. The situation is unique and not precedent-setting. He explained he has been active in Oak Park, appraised conservation easements, and appreciates historic buildings. Mr. Rossell said the 1000-block of Pleasant Street does not match the description of the Ridgeland-Oak Park Historic District and the houses were not included in the original nomination. He cited the letter from Amy Hathaway at the State Historic Preservation Office and stated she was not a

witness at the Certificate of Appropriateness hearing. Mr. Rossell said there is an economic difference in value between the appraisal and the offer. He said hardship would result because of the district and that the district has taken his property rights. He said the Commission will get to approve new construction and should reconsider their previous finding.

Chair Payne opened for questions.

Commissioner Jordahl asked if Mr. Rossell plans to sell the properties if the Certificate of Economic Hardship is denied and Mr. Rossell confirmed he would but the sale would be \$250,000 less. Commissioner Jordahl said there would still be a profit from the original purchase and Mr. Rossell responded that the issue is the difference in values. He said the houses have been maintained, the issue isn't profit, and he may have invested a million dollars into the properties. Commissioner Jordahl said the \$250,000 will be a loss in profit. Mr. Rossell responded it is a loss in value that was created by the historic district.

Mr. Rossell said he recommended architects and the Commission will approve the plans. Chair Payne said the Commission does not approve new construction.

Commissioner Weidner said the highest and best use according to the appraisal is continuing the current use of the properties. Mr. Rossell said the highest and best use of the properties would be eight units, as this is what they are allowed by zoning.

In response to questions from Chair Payne, Mr. Rossell said the developer has built buildings in the Chicago area and he has appraised some of their completed projects. He confirmed the Letter of Intent requires that the buildings are demolished and he will add to the contract to allow for more Commission control of the new construction. Mr. Rossell said others are interested and the demolition would be done by the developer. He verified that the appraiser is local, condominiums were not included in the comparisons, and the houses have not been tested on the market. Mr. Rossell said he cannot put the houses on the market because the developer would offer less.

Chair Payne said this would set a precedent of property owners bringing an appraisal and a letter of intent in order to demolish their buildings and maximize the building size on the lot. Mr. Rossell said he has owned the buildings since before the historic district was created and most of the district is single-family, so his situation unique. Commissioner Sokol said the same thing could occur with single family houses.

Chair Payne asked if the properties are generating profit. Mr. Rossell responded one unit is currently empty and one is rented to a family member.

Attorney Smith asked if Mr. Rossell agreed the buildings are being put to reasonably beneficial use and Mr. Rossell responded they are being used but could be put to a higher use. Attorney Smith said that, in summary, the Certificate of Economic Hardship loss is differential and asked if Mr. Rossell claims this is value, not profit. Mr. Rossell said he would have to add up money put into the houses to determine if there is any profit. To additional questions, Mr. Rossell confirmed that he purchased the houses for approximately \$70,000, the letter of intent if still in effect. He confirmed there are documents that are more binding than a letter of intent but he used the letter because it is binding. He confirmed that he received \$1,500 in payment for the Letter of Intent. He said he does not know if the developer had the properties appraised.

In response to questions from Attorney Smith, Mr. Rossell confirmed he has not worked with appraiser Barbara Novak and has not referred clients to her. He said her appraisal was based on the

exterior only but her seeing the interior wouldn't change the appraisal as it is similar to an appraisal he obtained five years ago.

Chair Payne asked if there were any comments from interested citizens. Philip Grossman was present on behalf of Cushner Management, owner of 1033-1045 Pleasant Street. He said Cushner Management did not think the houses should be demolished and furthermore, did not think sufficient evidence was presented to meet economic hardship.

Commissioner Abrahamson said the Letter of Intent is minimal and there are no plans. Mr. Rossell said plans are expensive and it is the contractor's job to get the plans.

Chair Payne asked if there was any written testimony. Planner Trexler said there was not. Chair Payne closed the evidence in consideration and began deliberation.

The Commission discussed the highest and best use of the properties. Commissioner Jordahl said the buildings are well-maintained and have been under stable ownership so there is no economic hardship currently as relates to the buildings, themselves. She said this sets a dangerous precedent for property owners demolishing other two-flats to build eight-unit buildings. Multiple Commissioners expressed their agreement and Commissioner Gurski said the hardship has been created by the property owner.

Chair Payne said the Ordinance reads "substantial decrease in value." He said in this case it is a created value as the fair market value hasn't been tried. There is no proposal to improve or change the properties, so it is unclear how the historic district affects the value. Economic hardship affects livelihood; if these properties were sold or used in a different manner, it would result in a profit.

*Commissioner Weidner motioned to have staff draft a resolution denying the Certificate of Economic Hardship. Second by Commissioner Garapolo. Motion approved 9-0.*

*AYE: Commissioner Abrahamson, Commissioner Bridge, Commissioner Garapolo, Commissioner Gurski, Commissioner Houze, Commissioner Jordahl, Commissioner Sokol, Commissioner Weidner, and Chair Payne*

*NAY: None*

The Commission agreed to have a special meeting on April 24, 2019 to vote on the resolution.

## **OTHER BUSINESS**

## **ADJOURN**

*Motion by Commissioner Sokol to adjourn. Second by Commissioner Garapolo. Motion approved 9-0.*

The meeting adjourned at 10:00PM.

Minutes prepared by Susie Trexler, Urban Planner Historic Preservation.