

Oak Park Historic Preservation Commission
April 13, 2023 – Meeting Minutes
Remote Participation Meeting, 7:30 pm

The Historic Preservation Commission hosted speaker Mark Nussbaum on April 13 at 6:30PM to speak about geothermal heating in historic buildings. Nussbaum’s talk included local case studies of Unity Temple, Pleasant Home and the Balch House. The talk was attended by commissioners and members of the public and was followed by a question and answer session. The event was held in collaboration with the Environment & Energy Commission for Earth Month. A recording of the talk is available at www.oak-park.us/commissiontv.

Roll Call

Present: Chair Lou Garapolo and Commissioners Asha Andriana, David Bates, Sarah Doherty, Andrew Elders, Scot Mazur, Nicole Napper, and Amy Peterson
Absent: Commissioners Monique Chase and Mark Weiner
Staff: Susie Trexler, Historic Preservation Urban Planner

Agenda Approval

Motion by Commissioner Elders to approve the agenda. Second by Commissioner Napper. Motion approved 8-0.

Non-Agenda Public Comment

None

Minutes

Motion by Commissioner Doherty to approve the minutes for March 15, 2023. Second by Commissioner Doherty. Motion approved 8-0.

Regular Agenda

- A. HPC2023-17: 921 Chicago Ave (Sarah & Michael Wittenborn):** Certificate of Appropriateness for two one-story additions at the side and rear of the house (Frank Lloyd Wright-Prairie School of Architecture Historic District).

Chair Garapolo introduced the item and Planner Trexler provided an overview.

Present on behalf of the project were: Chris Bremer and Tracey Brewer, the architects; and Sarah and Michael Wittenborn, the homeowners. Mr. Bremer said the porch they’re removing is not believed to be historic. The side addition will go in this location and will project less than the porch. There is also a rear addition but it’s not visible from the street. He said the roof profile will delineate the addition as not original.

Motion by Commissioner Doherty to open for discussion. Second by Commissioner Mazur.

Chair Garapolo said the rendering implies the new addition will go beyond the bay but the floorplans show it lines up. Mr. Bremer said the addition will be in line with the bay and will not project past it. Commissioner Elders said sheet A2.2 has a head-on elevation and all you can see is the eave. He said he would prefer a cross-gable, but he understands the eave would be too low. Mr. Bremer confirmed.

Commissioner Elders asked why they aren't using wood siding. Mr. Bremer said they haven't decided so they wanted to get the manmade material approved too. Ms. Brewer said she understands wood clapboard was historically used, but when people don't maintain their paint, it's the first thing to rot. She said from the sidewalk, she doesn't think you can tell the difference. The new product is sustainable and more durable. Commissioner Elders said he asked because the rest of the house is wood, so they'll have to paint it anyway. It makes sense to keep it in kind. They try not to let synthetic materials take over the historic materials if possible.

Chair Garapolo asked for more information about the proposed siding material. Ms. Brewer said it's created from fly-ash. It's very environmentally friendly because they're using something otherwise discarded. It's approved in historic districts like Chautauqua that care about historic preservation. She referenced a Queen Anne house they worked on and said it was deteriorating. This material might make these places last longer. Chair Garapolo asked if the material can be cut to match the historic profile and Ms. Brewer confirmed. She said it's used in historic markets and they've tailored it to that use. Mr. Bremer said they would be happy to get a sample. Chair Garapolo said that would be helpful. Commissioner Elders cautioned against anything stamped with a wood grain and said they should use a flat surface.

Commissioner Napper said she likes the proposal, it cleans up the profile and the house and looks really nice. Commissioner Doherty agreed. Chair Garapolo said when he walked by, the porch was not obtrusive but was obvious. But with the addition lined up with the bay, he doesn't see any issues.

Commissioner Napper made a motion to approve the Certificate of Appropriateness for the project as proposed with a note about the comments of the material (wood preferred, poly-ash with no wood grain second). Second by Commissioner Mazur. Motion approved 8-0.

AYE: Commissioner Andriana, Commissioner Bates, Commissioner Doherty, Commissioner Elders, Commissioner Mazur, Commissioner Napper, Commissioner Peterson, and Chair Garapolo

NAY: None

Commissioner Elders said a front porch would be an interesting addition. The homeowners agreed. Commissioner Elders said you can see the original porch on the Sanborn, it was the width of the tower.

Chair Garapolo asked that a sample of the siding material be provided to staff for future reference. Mr. Bremer agreed.

- B. HPC2023-18: 610 N East Ave (Marcella Douce):** Certificate of Appropriateness to demolish a garage (Frank Lloyd Wright-Prairie School of Architecture Historic District).

Chair Garapolo introduced the item and Planner Trexler provided an overview.

Marcella and Brian Douce, the homeowners, were present on behalf of the project. Mr. Douce said they purchased the house about a year ago and the garage was in poor shape. The garage door doesn't work because the garage is leaning. There has been an extensive fire in the garage and about a quarter of the southwest corner of the garage is charred. There is a loft, but they don't use it as it is charred and unsafe. He said they believe the garage was built on dirt and the concrete floor was poured inside. The concrete pad is cracked throughout and when it rains, they get seepage through the concrete. As there is no foundation, there is extensive rot on all three sides. There is an extensive leak and the walls are bowed, compromising the structure. He said they had a few contractors look at refurbishing; one said he wouldn't take on work of this nature. Matt Jacknow just came out and he said the cost to repair would far outweigh the cost of a new structure. The structural engineer did not think it was repairable. He said they are working on new designs, hoping to better align the garage with the existing house.

Ms. Douce provided paper copies of the recent letter from Jacknow Construction. She said some people said they didn't know how to restore it or didn't want to take it on. At least Matt Jacknow in his letter made some bullet-pointed reasons. She said they did not have final architect plans for the submission but they do now. Chair Garapolo asked if Mr. Jacknow provided a cost estimate when it said it would be more expensive. Ms. Douce said they asked for a cost estimate but are struggling to get one. She asked about the plans for the new garage and Planner Trexler said these would have to be submitted for review at the next meeting.

Commissioner Andriana said from what is presented, demolition makes the most sense. We don't have cost estimates, but we can see the lean. Commissioner Napper said the structural engineer's report was helpful, it was more thorough than some we've seen. This garage is in worse shape than others that have been approved. Commissioner Elders agreed and said it is unfortunate because this is one of the most visually appealing garages they've looked at. He said from a historic perspective, he loves the garages with bump-outs. Between the 1920s and 1950s/60s, they had to bump them out to fit larger cars. He said the pictures showing walls out-of-plumb are very compelling.

Chair Garapolo asked if the fire damage was present when purchased and Mr. Douce confirmed. Commissioner Elders said the doors on the second floor are interesting. Mr. Douce said they were told this was a hay loft. There are historic materials that are in good shape that they would like to repurpose. Commissioner Doherty said that would be great.

Commissioner Elders said before demolition, he recommends measuring things like the fascia and eave depth. That detail of the softened edge where it widens at the bottom is a nice detail. Take what information you can from this and apply it to what you're going to do.

Commissioner Napper made a motion to approve the Certificate of Appropriateness for the project as proposed. Second by Commissioner Andriana. Motion approved 8-0.

AYE: Commissioner Andriana, Commissioner Bates, Commissioner Doherty, Commissioner Elders, Commissioner Mazur, Commissioner Napper, Commissioner Peterson, and Chair Garapolo

NAY: None

OTHER BUSINESS

- **Day in Our Village:** Chair Garapolo said Day in Our Village is in June and they need volunteers. Planner Trexler agreed to send out an email reminder.

- **Pleasant Home:** Commissioner Elders asked for thoughts about Pleasant Home removing their historic flooring. He said he lives nextdoor to Pleasant Home and heard they were turning the kitchen into a catering kitchen. He said he knows they don't have purview over interiors but maybe for National Historic Landmarks, they should have oversight. Planner Trexler said there are some interior landmarks in Oak Park but Pleasant Home is not one. She said the Guidelines do not have specifics for interiors, but the projects would have to meet the Secretary of the Interior's Standards, which are part of the Guidelines. She said the Commission might consider adding to the Guidelines regarding this in the future. Commissioner Elders noted that Village Hall is also owned by the Village. Planner Trexler said it will also be 50 years old next year.
- **Introductions:** The Commission had a round of introductions to welcome new member Amy Peterson.

ADJOURN

Motion by Commissioner Doherty to adjourn; Second by Commissioner Andriana.

The meeting adjourned at 9:15PM.

Minutes prepared by Susie Trexler, Historic Preservation Urban Planner.