

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

Roll Call

Present: Chair Lou Garapolo and Commissioners Asha Andriana, David Bates, Monique Chase, Scot Mazur, Amy Peterson, and Mark Weiner

Absent: None

Staff: Susie Trexler, Historic Preservation Urban Planner

Attorney: Courtney Willits, Elrod Friedman LLP

Agenda Approval

Motion by Commissioner Peterson to approve the agenda. Second by Commissioner Weiner. Motion approved 7-0.

Non-Agenda Public Comment

None

Minutes

Motion by Commissioner Weiner to approve the minutes for October 12, 2023. Second by Commissioner Bates. Motion approved 7-0.

Regular Agenda

- A. HPC2023-43: 237 S East Ave (Steven Shihao Huang):** Certificate of Appropriateness for renovation including a two-story rear addition, a dormer addition on the north elevation, and three skylights (Ridgeland-Oak Park Historic District).

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

Present on behalf of the project was Steven Shihao Huang, the owner and architect. Mr. Huang showed a video “walk-by” simulation with the planned changes and noted that the dormer and addition are minimally visible. The dormer is hidden behind an existing gable. The house is one of the oldest of the block and has been almost abandoned for two or three years. They don’t want to do a gut renovation because the interior has good qualities. The addition should blend with existing. They will keep the existing vinyl siding on the house.

Motion by Commissioner Peterson to open for discussion. Second by Commissioner Chase.

Commissioner Peterson said she doesn’t have an issue with the dormer as it is minimally visible. She asked about the roof and Mr. Huang confirmed said they will carry back the existing roof for the addition and will match. Commissioner Peterson asked why they are using the painted wood lattice on the foundation. Mr. Huang said the rear addition foundation will match the pier and beam

construction of the front porch. This will emphasize the existing structure between them. They are also proposing this foundation type due to cost. They are adding a fence so it will be barely visible. Commissioner Chase said she's interested in the siding, when the vinyl was added, and if they should do a different width. She asked staff for more information. Planner Trexler said there is an old photo in the packet that may show the original siding. The house had narrow siding on the first floor and a wider shingle-type siding on the second floor. The second-floor siding may be why they used the wider width vinyl.

Chair Garapolo discussed the foundation. He said it wouldn't be much harder to create a crawl space and there may be insulation concerns. He said it's not that visible, so it won't be a requirement, but he urged considering a solid foundation. Mr. Huang explained their insulation plans and said a crawl space is their plan B. He asked for recommendations on the wall type and Chair Garapolo said the Commission has seen CMU walls. You can find a CMU that matches the house foundation. You can't see it with the fence, but someone could move the fence.

Chair Garapolo said there's a few new windows. He said if they aren't double-hung sash windows, they should have an applied muntin to simulate a sash. He said the Commission has approved shed roof dormers like this one. He said he personally doesn't like it, but it will be hard to see, so he doesn't have a problem with this one.

Commissioner Peterson made a motion to approve the Certificate of Appropriateness for the project with the condition that horizontal muntins be added to new windows to simulate a sash and the recommendation of a CMU foundation. Second by Commissioner Mazur. Motion approved 7-0.

AYE: Commissioner Andriana, Commissioner Bates, Commissioner Chase, Commissioner Mazur, Commissioner Peterson, Commissioner Weiner, and Chair Garapolo

NAY: None

B. HPC2023-44: 430 S Taylor Ave (Janelli Barrow): Certificate of Appropriateness to demolish contributing building within the Ridgeland-Oak Park Historic District.

Chair Garapolo introduced the item and Planner Trexler provided an overview. Planner Trexler explained the review process and that the State Historic Preservation Office confirmed this building is still contributing within the historic district.

Present on behalf of the project was Anthony Garland, the project applicant and husband of the homeowner. Mr. Garland said he purchased the property in April. Shortly after that, there was a fire that severely damaged the interior and exterior. He showed photos of the damage. He said there were previously nice historical features like lighting fixtures and trim. Once the fire happened, they decided to rebuild and got designs from an architect. He said they didn't know that there was a process to demolish within the historic district. He said they had assessments of the property by the architect and a structural engineer. The architect did a very detailed assessment. There is a hole from the basement to the roof that has received a lot of rain that has deteriorated the inside. The house already had issues with temporary beams throughout the basement. The fire has impacted it in a way that they can't rebuild.

Motion by Commissioner Weiner to open for discussion. Second by Commissioner Chase.

Commissioner Weidner asked where insurance is in this process. Mr. Garland said property insurance was not able to cover the fire. Commissioner Weiner asked if they will be covering the expense without insurance and Mr. Garland confirmed.

Commissioner Peterson asked if the State Historic Preservation Office considered the current state of the house when evaluating its status. Planner Trexler confirmed that they were aware of the fire and received photos. Commissioner Peterson asked if they will reuse materials in the new house. Mr. Garland said they are looking at using elements like brick and stone as seen elsewhere in the historic district. Elements like horizontals and verticals. They are open to discussion to create something that will align with everything else. Commissioner Peterson said there are some beautiful roof tiles. She recommended reusing as many of the materials as possible. Mr. Garland said thank you for the suggestion and that they are looking at using reused bricks, as well.

Chair Garapolo said he's sorry they're here with this problem. It's pretty devastating. He said the roof remains uncovered and asked if there is a reason for that. Mr. Garland said they were planning to just do a new construction, so they didn't think too much to cover the roof. Chair Garapolo said Mr. Garland said the report was detailed, but the language in the report says it's a visual inspection. That is not a detailed report. What was their conclusion? Can the house be rebuilt? Repaired? Mr. Garland said the architect and the structural engineer said it was structurally compromised. It's not just the fire. There were temporary structural supports in the basement. Chair Garapolo asked if there were temporary structural supports when they purchased the house and Mr. Garland confirmed and said their plan was to renovate and put in new posts.

Chair Garapolo said it's not clear in the report that it addresses remodeling, other than the structure is compromised. He said he's concerned they were not given a fair assessment of what they have. Commissioner Weiner pointed out the structural engineer's letter and Chair Garapolo said it doesn't say much. Mr. Garland asked if they should get another report done. Chair Garapolo said the Guidelines say it should be remodeled instead of demolished. They should be aware of the cost to remodel and the cost to repair. He said he's not in favor of demolishing based on what he's heard. The reports are very superficial.

Commissioner Chase said if they come back for economic hardship, it would be important to get the costs of remodeling vs. rebuilding. That's something they would want to do anyway.

Commissioner Chase said they have to take no action because it's a contributing building. Planner Trexler confirmed and said the applicant may request a Certificate of Economic Hardship following the denial of a Certificate of Appropriateness at a public hearing. The Ordinance details what the Commission would consider and what an applicant should submit if requesting a Certificate of Economic Hardship. She said this has been supplied to the applicant.

The Commission took no action.

- C. **HPC2023-45: 125 S Lombard Ave (Mark Risch):** Certificate of Appropriateness to demolish contributing building within the Ridgeland-Oak Park Historic District.

Chair Garapolo introduced the item and Planner Trexler provided an overview. Planner Trexler explained the review process and that the State Historic Preservation Office confirmed this building is still contributing within the historic district.

Present on behalf of the project were: owner Mark Risch, demolition contractor Jeff Perez, and Jen Rutkowski. Mr. Risch said he lives next door at 117 S Lombard Ave in what used to be the substation

of the CTA. He said he appreciates what the Commission does. On the north side of his house, the city put in a garden that is beautiful. On the south side is a deteriorating home. It was remodeled in the 1960s or 1970s. All the windows were replaced. The stucco was falling off and they put aluminum siding on it. The house was recently owned by a man whose wife died from cancer. He did not care for the house and it took 10 years for the owner to be evicted. He lived there with no heat or electric. He wouldn't accept help from the neighbors. At the end of 2019 he was evicted by the bank. There were holes in the roof. The chimney is falling. Someone bought it and gutted the entire house. The electric and gas lines are gone. There are holes in the floor. The bank, before they flipped it, put a cheap roof on. There are animals living in the house.

Mr. Risch said he bought the house because it was affecting the value of his own house. He said he loves fixing up old homes and he wishes there is something he could do, but it needs to be gone. There have been numerous calls due to squatters and a police officer was injured by falling through the floor. He said he wishes he could save it. He doesn't have money to do anything with it except tear it down, use it as a yard, and maybe in ten years he'll return to the Commission to build a new house on the lot. He introduced Jeff Perez from Crunch.

Mr. Perez explained some of the issues with the house. He said it is gutted down to the studs. The front 15 feet are sunk and would need to be underpinned. You'd have to rebuild a house from the inside-out. The aluminum siding would not have been approved today. Everything has been replaced. It would be upwards of \$400,000-\$550,000 to repair the house. It's not feasible to do.

Mr. Risch said in the report, there is a petition signed by over 50 of his neighbors, that the house is a nuisance. One neighbor was in attendance and Chair Garapolo invited him to speak.

Tom Mertha said he owns 128 Pleasant St at the end of the block. It's a tragedy what happened to the family at this house. His kids were friends with their kids. At this point, the house is basically destroyed through the inability to maintain it. It is a nuisance for the neighbors. He said there was someone squatting in it for four years. The property really needs to come down. It's a detriment to the neighbors. It's a tragedy.

Commissioner Chase asked if there is a demolition ordinance. Planner Trexler said there is a section in the Historic Preservation Ordinance regarding demolition by neglect and staff will review. Commissioner Weiner said he supports demolition as quickly as possible.

Chair Garapolo said he understands Mr. Risch purchased the house to demolish it. Mr. Risch confirmed. Chair Garapolo asked if he owns the entire adjacent building. Mr. Risch said he does and he has been working with the city on it for several years. He said he put in an entire second floor in the warehouse space and he is passionate about old structures.

Chair Garapolo said the State Historic Preservation Office confirmed it's still contributing to the district, but maybe demolition is the best option. Commissioner Weiner restated the need for demolition as quickly as possible.

Commissioner Chase asked if the application would come to the Commission if the building was not contributing and Planner Trexler said it would not.

Commissioner Peterson said the Commission is in favor of taking no action. She asked if they can schedule a special meeting to have both demolitions considered. Planner Trexler said she would evaluate this option.

The Commission took no action.

- D. Public Hearing: HPC2023-41: 631 Forest Ave (Anthony & Candice Drew):** Certificate of Appropriateness to add a second floor and side addition (Frank Lloyd Wright-Prairie School of Architecture Historic District).

Chair Garapolo introduced the public hearing and Attorney Willits swore in the witnesses. Planner Trexler the staff report and explained that the Commission previously voted four in favor and two against, but six votes are needed in favor to approve the project.

Present on behalf of the project were Jim Vanderheyden, the architect, and Candice and Anthony Drew, the homeowners. Ms. Drew said she currently lives at 611 Forest Ave and this is a few houses away. She said they are working with the homeowners, who have been supportive of the process. She said they attended two Architectural Review Committee meetings and based on that feedback made a number of changes including the roofline, pushing back the addition, and the siding material. They want to make the house functional for their family. She said they were surprised this wasn't approved, especially based on other projects that have been approved. There was concern about the side addition and whether it should be pushed back further, but there are other examples of side additions in the front third of the house. She said they have done their best to comply with the Guidelines and are hoping the HPC will approve their design.

Mr. Vanderheyden, the architect, explained his background with architecture in Oak Park. He said his goal is always to preserve as much of the house as he can, but he has to balance this with the client's need for more space. He provided an overview of the Guidelines and how they were met. He said the addition is set back 16 feet from the front door façade, and the porch is another 9 feet. They are preserving the entire front façade. The eave line goes around the house to define the original bungalow. He explained that the renderings are the view from across the street, but you'll see even less if you're closer to the house. The most prominent feature will be the original front porch.

Mr. Drew said his wife and Mr. Vanderheyden have worked immensely hard to find a design solution. He said their kids have grown up on this block and the block has watched their kids grow up. He said he knows they're looking at this from an architecture standpoint, but it also is about community. He said they sought out this architect because of his passion for preservation.

The Chair invited public comments.

Sue Mitra of 536 Forest Ave spoke in support of the project. She said they bought their house 10 years ago and realized every house in Oak Park needs major remodeling. She encouraged young families to go through this process and said if we want young families, we need to allow second floor additions.

Anne Schmidt and Randall Albers said they are their current neighbors. Ms. Schmidt said it's odd there are so many houses on the block that are 3-stories high and this one is so modest. She said some bigger projects have been approved recently. Mr. Albers said when they moved in, they weren't in the historic district and now they are. Things were done differently. The rendering is beautiful. The house would be the same height as the one on the right but smaller than the one on the left. With the addition, it will blend in better with the street. Stacy and Andy took good care of this house and this will make it even better. We need to do everything we can to encourage younger citizens.

Mark Fredisdork said he lives at 539 Forest Ave and went to the Commission to get his addition approved. He thanked the Commission for their service. He said when he first saw the rendering, he didn't think they were doing anything different to the house. He said he thinks the entire block supports this project.

Brian Burkle said he owns 634 Forest Ave and they have a second-floor addition and a side addition, and are located directly across the street. The houses to the south of them also have second floor and side additions. This house will fit in better. He said they want people to invest in this community long-term and this is a no-brainer.

Arlene Miller said she lives at 635 Forest Ave, adjacent to this house. They need more little kids on the block. She said you can see on the rendering, but she won't be able to see the addition from her porch, she would have to go out into the street.

Stacy and Andy Kowalczyk introduced themselves as the current owners of 631 Forest Ave. Ms. Kowalczyk said they are retiring to Indiana where their children live. She said she is grateful the Commission is caring for Oak Park's housing stock, but they also have users of these properties. This is a tiny house, almost exactly 1000 square feet. It's not really usable. She said she is thrilled with the design and is not concerned with people driving by. The house needs to be useful so people can live here. There were only two owners previously. Mr. Kowalczyk said this will replace an existing addition on the back on the house that was probably from 1900. There is no lathing in this house, it is all drywall. The electrical is upgraded. Someone really loved this house in the 1920s. He said he and Ms. Kowalczyk brought up the electrical and added air conditioning. It still has the 1920s windows and storm windows.

Commissioner Peterson thanked staff for providing additional examples of side additions.

Commissioner Chase said she has no fault with the design, but she has an issue with how many structures in Oak Park are getting these massive additions. Hearing this great family story is hard for her. She said she can't stay in Oak Park if she moves out of her condo. We are fundamentally changing the housing stock of Oak Park.

Chair Garapolo said at the previous meetings, the architect and owner came back with a number of modifications that responded to the ARC. He said one of the comments was about the side addition and asked if they evaluated any alternatives. Mr. Vanderheyden said he was trying to maintain the current size of the dining room, but he turned it 90 degrees. The three windows facing south are a mirror the windows currently in the dining room. The living room is exactly where it was. The proportions haven't changed, except the 7-foot bedrooms that don't work anymore will go away. The second-floor addition is actually in proportion to the width of the adjacent houses. The dining room bump-out brings the eye down to the bungalow scale. He said they can make it smaller, but he doesn't think it improves the design. Chair Garapolo agreed.

Commissioner Weiner said he voted for it the first time and won't change anything this time.

Commissioner Andriana made a motion to approve the Certificate of Appropriateness for the project as proposed. Second by Commissioner Weiner. Motion approved 7-0.

AYE: Commissioner Andriana, Commissioner Bates, Commissioner Chase, Commissioner Mazur, Commissioner Peterson, Commissioner Weiner, and Chair Garapolo

NAY: None

Commissioner Peterson made a motion to approve the drafted Resolution with final edits to be made by staff and the Chair. Second by Commissioner Weiner. Motion approved 7-0.

AYE: Commissioner Andriana, Commissioner Bates, Commissioner Chase, Commissioner Mazur, Commissioner Peterson, Commissioner Weiner, and Chair Garapolo

NAY: None

OTHER BUSINESS

- **Education:** Discuss education portion of Work Plan and possible work group.

Chair Garapolo said Commissioners Chase, Peterson, and Andriana have formed a work group to focus on education.

- **Stewardship Awards:**

Planner Trexler said the Stewardship Awards Ceremony will occur on Wednesday, January 17, 2024. Time and location TBA. This will include a presentation of the 2023 Historic Preservation Commission Awards.

- **Acting Chair.**

Chair Garapolo said the Commission is down four Commissioners. Commissioner Elders resigned last month, and he was previously the Acting Chair. They will appoint a new Acting Chair at the next HPC meeting. He asked the Committee for nominations or to let him know if they are interested.

ADJOURN

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

The meeting adjourned at 9:20PM.

Minutes prepared by Susie Trexler, Historic Preservation Urban Planner.