

The City of Lake Forest  
Historic Preservation Commission  
Proceedings of the February 28, 2018 Meeting

A regular meeting of the Lake Forest Historic Preservation Commission was held on Wednesday, February 28, 2018, at 6:30 p.m., at the City of Lake Forest City Hall, 220 E. Deerpath, Lake Forest, Illinois.

Historic Preservation Commissioners present: Chairman Grieve and Commissioners Wells Wheeler, Elizabeth Sperry, Jan Gibson, Robert Alfe, Bill Redfield and Carol Gayle.

Commissioners absent: None

City staff present: Catherine Czerniak, Director of Community Development

**1. Introduction of Commissioners and staff, overview of meeting procedures.**

Chairman Grieve reviewed the meeting procedures followed by the Commission and asked the members of the Commission and staff to introduce themselves.

**2. Consideration of the minutes of the January 24, 2018 meeting of the Historic Preservation Commission.**

The minutes of the January 24, 2018 meeting were approved as submitted.

**3. Consideration of two requests related to residential property at 425 N. Sheridan Road. Property Owners and Representatives: Lisa Wolfe-DiGanci and Mark DiGanci**

Chairman Grieve asked the Commission for any conflicts of interest or Ex Parte contacts. Hearing none, he invited a presentation from the petitioner.

**a. Consideration of a request for Local Landmark Designation.**

Ms. Wolfe introduced the petition and explained that she shares a passion for history and architecture with her husband which led them to this property. She presented photos of the Gate House from 100 years ago and photos of its present condition. She stated a commitment to restoring the property to its earlier glory and to being stewards of the historic property to assure that it is preserved for another 100 years. She stated that they are committed to rebuilding, renovating, and recreating the property in a way that is consistent with the original design and materials. She noted that two requests are presented to the Commission; one requesting designation of the entrance gates, pillars and wall as a Local Landmark and the second, a request for a Certificate of Appropriateness to allow restoration and enhancement of the gates, pillars and walls. She explained that the Gate House is not included in the designation request because plans for the Gate House are not yet developed. She explained that a two phase project is planned with the first focused on the pillars, gate and walls because of their deteriorating condition. She noted that they reached out to the

Preservation Foundation, the Historical Society and the City of Lake Forest soon after buying the property. She stated the intent to be transparent and proceed in the most logical manner. She presented a site plan of the 1910 White Oaks Estate noting the location of the remaining Gate House and entrance gate. She reviewed the criteria for designation noting that staff identified that the request for local designation meets four of the criteria. She noted that the estate was originally built for Robert Thorne, the President of Montgomery Ward and son of the co-founder of that entity. She noted that the estate, including the elements presented for designation, are the work of a significant architect, John McKecknie. She noted that the architecture is representative of an old era County place prevalent in Lake Forest, as well as on the East Coast. She explained that it is a prime example of English Manor architecture and craftsmanship, design and quality from over 100 years ago. She presented photos of the original estate. She noted that John McKecknie is a significant architect who was quite famous architect in St. Louis, building much of the City and pioneering the use of concrete in his work. She stated that she has not discovered how Robert Thorne came to select John McKecknie as the architect for the project, but noted that Robert Thorne worked at the Montgomery Ward flagship store in St. Louis where Mr. McKecknie practiced and the association may have started there.

Ms. Czerniak stated that it is unclear why this property, on which the Gate House and entrance elements from the former estate are located, was not included within the Historic District boundaries. She added that the earlier decision was likely linked to the fact that the estate was subdivided in the 1940's and the main house demolished. She noted that inclusion of this parcel in the district would have created an appendage and the goal may have been to establish the District with generally regular boundaries. She suggested that if the District was being established today, the property likely would be included within the boundaries. She stated that based on staff's analysis, the Gate House and entrance features meet four of the criteria for designation as a Local Landmark. She noted that the structures proposed for designation create a prominent streetscape character and are distinctive elements along Sheridan Road. She noted that staff encouraged the petitioners to include the Gate House in the request for designation noting that plans for restoration need not be available in order to include the structure in the nomination. She added that restoration work, and any necessary approvals for work on the property, can proceed in phases, after designation. She noted that the Gate House is integrated with the wall that attaches to the entrance pillars and as a result, designation of the entire ensemble of structures; the Gate House, pillars, entrance gate and walls, is appropriate prior to the start of any restoration work. She stated that the ideal situation is that the property is designated before work occurs to allow for proper review. She noted that the project is before the Historic Preservation Commission only because a designation is requested otherwise, it would have been under the purview of the Building Review Board. She stated that from the staff point of view, there is no detriment that would result from designating all of the historic structures that remain on the property, at the same time. She stated that designation will assure that any work proposed is considered in the context of all of the historic structures. She stated that the staff report includes findings in support of designation adding that if the

Commission recommends designation, City Council action on the recommendation will be required to finalize the designation. She stated that if the Commission supports designation, it would be appropriate for the Commission to consider the second request presented by the petitioners which is a request for approval of the proposed restoration and enhancement work.

In response to question from Chairman Grieve, Ms. Czerniak explained that properties that are not included in the Local Historic Districts can be brought under the purview of the Commission and afforded the same protection as properties in the Districts through individual designation as Local Landmarks.

Chairman Grieve invited questions and comments from the Commission.

Commissioner Redfield stated full support for Local Landmark designation.

Commissioner Gayle observed that the entry element resembles the entrance to the College, across the ravine. She stated support for including the Gate House in the designation.

In response to questions from Commissioner Gayle, Mr. DiGanci explained that designation is requested for the pillars, gate and wall because those elements are in dire condition and need immediate attention noting concern that the gate could collapse. He noted that they have also purchased the newer house located back from Sheridan Road, to the east of the Gate House so they control the entire property and intend to properly restore the elements from the original estate. He confirmed that a small addition to the Gate House is being considered and restoration of the windows, roof and masonry are planned. He noted that the addition is intended to connect the house and garage. He stated that they have spent hundreds of hours documenting the Gate House and the gates. He stated that after receiving permission the original gates will be restored which will likely be an eight month project. He stated concern that if the Gate House is designated as Local Landmark, the proposed work may not be allowed. He stated the intent to document the entire house.

In response to Chairman Grieve, Ms. Wolfe reiterated the concern that once the Gate House is designated, no changes would be possible. She stated that the plans for the Gate House are very simple.

In response to questions from Chairman Grieve, Ms. Czerniak explained that designation does not prohibit restoration or modifications. She noted that the Commission exists specifically to consider changes, updates, restoration and modifications to properties that are in the historic districts or designated as Local Landmarked. She explained that the City has a long history of working with owners of historic properties to facilitate modifications and upgrades to assure that historic structures remain viable for the next 100 years.

Chairman Grieve stated that as described, the petitioners' intentions seem very

consistent with the goals of the Commission. He noted the benefit in assuring that the entrance gates and future modifications to the Gate House are considered under the same standards. He explained that the Commission's role is to consider and facilitate all sorts of updates, modifications and adjustments to historic properties.

Commissioner Gayle agreed that the Commission's role is to make renovations and modifications to historic buildings possible in ways that may not otherwise be considered.

Commissioner Wheeler noted once a property and structures are designated, they are fully within the purview of the Historic Preservation Commission and there is no question about jurisdiction. He noted that it is possible that the Building Review Board could perceive the project differently than the Commission. He noted that having all of the historic structures on the property under the purview of the Commission will be a benefit. He observed that it is unfortunate that the property was omitted from the Historic District originally. He stated that in his opinion, the property meets the criteria for designation.

Chairman Grieve noted that since the wall is integrated with the Gate House it is appropriate that modifications to the structures be considered based on the same standards. Hearing no further questions from the Commission, he invited public testimony.

Roger Mohr, 927 Barclay Circle, and Lake Forest Preservation Board member, stated that the Foundation supports the staff recommendations and enthusiastically support the nomination. He stated that it would be welcome if other developers and homeowners paid the same attention to restoration as shown by the owners of this property.

Hearing no further public comments, Chairman Grieve invited final comments and a motion from the Commission.

Commissioner Wheeler made a motion to recommendation approval of designation of the Gate House, pillars, entrance gate and wall on property located at 425 N. Sheridan Road as a Local Landmark.

The motion was seconded by Commissioner Gibson and approved by a vote of 7 to 0.

**b. Consideration of a request for a Certificate of Appropriateness to allow repair, restoration, replication and new construction of entrance pillars, walls and gate.**

Ms. Wolfe noted that the gates have been neglected for years and are in danger of collapse. She noted that the pillars are cracked, crumbling, and leaning. She stated that because of the condition of the metal gates, they were taken down and unfortunately during the removal, some chunks fell off. She reviewed the proposed scope of work noting that it includes both restoration and new construction. She

noted that the original materials will be restored and preserved to the extent possible. She noted that if replacement is needed, the replacement materials will match the original materials as closely as possible. She stated the intention to re-create the original appearance of 100 years ago. She stated that the existing pillars will be taken down and the hope is to be able to reuse at least 30 percent of the original bricks, reuse the acorn finials and restore and repair the caps of the pillars. She noted that in the event that the existing caps crumble, a very good match has been identified. She stated the intention to add a plaque identifying the entrance elements as part of the former estate. She stated the intent to replace the electric sconces with gas lanterns more appropriate to the era in which the estate was originally constructed. She described the proposal to extend the wall to the south, along property line. She noted that there is a foundation in that area, evidence that the wall at one time, extended south along the property line likely to provide privacy for the grand estate. She stated that they have contacted many salvage, antique and new brick dealers in an effort to find bricks that provide an appropriate match to the existing bricks. She noted that the proposed new gate in the extended wall mimics an existing garden door that exists on the property. She noted that the scale of the columns at the new gate was reduced. She noted that a good match to the original acorn finials was found for the new columns. She stated that the new finials will be limestone and the cross hatching will match the original finials. She provided a conceptual rendering of the finished project. She reviewed a proposed timeline noting that the restored gates will likely be installed by the end of summer.

Ms. Czerniak noted that there is no question that the existing pillars, walls, and gates need some attention. She noted that as the project moves forward to submitting plans for permit, it will be important that the plans are clearly detailed and that as-built drawings are submitted to assure a true restoration or replication of the various components. She stated that information on any new materials will also be important prior to the issuance of permits or prior to reconstruction. She suggested that limestone, rather than a cast stone is appropriate for the columns. She asked for Commission input on the scale of the opening in the proposed extended wall noting that it is wider than a pedestrian gate. She cautioned that the original gated entrance should remain visually dominant. She noted that the staff report offers findings in support of the petition subject to conditions of approval.

In response to questions from Commissioner Gibson, Mr. DiGanci, stated that a landscape designer will be engaged to design English gardens in front of the wall, along the streetscape. He stated that the overgrown evergreens will be removed. He confirmed that the entire length of the wall will be landscaped.

In response to questions from Commissioner Gibson, Ms. Wolfe stated that they are aware of the importance of using the proper mortar. She stated that aspect of the project is still under study.

In response to questions from Commissioner Gibson, Mr. DiGanci confirmed that he will follow accepted standards for reconstructing the pillars and the brick wall including

attention to how the elements are joined together. He stated that the caps will be sealed every year to prevent water infiltration. He confirmed that gas, rather than electric lanterns are proposed. He stated that the width of the opening in the extended wall is based on study of the existing foundation noting it appears that there was an opening of the same width at some point in the past. He stated that the gate will be strictly decorative. He stated that the acorn finials at the main entrance are larger than the finials located on the pillars located away from the main gate adding that consistent proportions will be maintained.

Commissioner Alfe stated that he is reassured to hear that the replacement acorn finials can be modified to replicate the existing finials. He noted that it is difficult, but important, to match the existing brick. He pointed out the drawing in the packet of the wall reflects a grade change resulting in the wall diminishing in height. He stated support for the overall project.

In response to Commissioner Alfe, Mr. DiGanci stated that he will explore opportunities to integrate the stone wall with a metal element but noted that a solid wall will offer privacy.

Commissioner Wheeler complimented the project and stated his support.

In response to questions from Commissioner Wheeler, Mr. DiGanci confirmed that he investigated the foundation and that led to the width of opening as now proposed. He stated that the opening will provide relief from a long, unbroken wall. He stated that he found no evidence of pillars at the secondary entrance but noted that he would like to add the pillars for detail.

In response to Commissioner Wheeler, Ms. Wolfe confirmed that the existing acorn finials are original. She confirmed that the new finials will be limestone consistent with the existing finials. She stated that the caps are not solid limestone and appear as though they were painted at some time.

Commissioner Wheeler warned that they should use caution in selecting the fixtures noting that the top of the gate is very ornate and should remain an area of focus.

In response to comments from the Commission, Ms. Wolfe noted some of the detailing that is planned, such as repeating the scrolling to add more drama given that the columns are large brick structures. She noted that there is not an address plaque on the columns, only numbers affixed to the columns. She stated that a plaque paying tribute to the original White Oaks Estate on one column and a plaque with the address on the other column are proposed. She stated that rather than limestone, a durable material is proposed for the plaques.

Commissioner Gayle stated support for restoring the elements that based on available information, might have been there. She commended the project.

Chairman Grieve stated that what is being proposed is an interpretation of what might

have originally been constructed and reviewed that the Commission's responsibility is to determine whether the proposed project meets the applicable standards. He observed that the original owners would have wanted people to know that this is the Gate House to their Estate home and to meet that goal, the Gate House was diminished in size in comparison to the main residence. He stated appreciation for the ornamentation on the gates and expressed concern about the gas tubing needed for the proposed lanterns possibly compromising the structure of the columns. He stated appreciation for the research that was done to confirm that the acorn caps were original. He observed that the gates create their own symmetry by having the main acorn, secondary acorn, and high and low pillars. He noted that moving to the Gate House itself, there is asymmetry and as a result, Gate House is a central feature. He questioned whether the new gate that is proposed needs to be functional and questioned whether a simple opening, rather than a gate, could work. He acknowledged that the smaller acorn caps are creative, but noted that the concept may not be consistent with the original intent. He stated that the original intent may have been to allow the wall to drop off quietly and allow the focus to be on the main gate and Gate House.

In response to Chairman Grieve, Mr. DiGanci stated that the apparent break in the wall, based on the foundation, is the only reason smaller pillars with acorn finials are proposed at the second location.

Hearing no further questions from the Commission, Chairman Grieve invited public comment.

Pauline Mohr, 927 Barclay Circle, commended the project. She noted that if a plaque is affixed to the pillar, it may appear as though it was part of the original estate. She suggested that an historical marker of some type might be more appropriate to identify the property.

Hearing no further requests to speak from the public, Chairman Grieve invited final comments from the petitioner.

Ms. Wolfe agreed that a bronze plaque on the column with historical information would be appropriate.

Hearing no further comments from the petitioner or the Commission, Chairman Grieve invited a motion.

Commissioner Wheeler made a motion to approve a Certificate of Appropriateness for restoration and reconstruction as necessary for the fence, pillars and wall, and construction of a new wall extending south along the property line subject to the following conditions. He noted that the motion is based on the findings presented in the staff report and incorporates the information presented by the petitioner and the Commission's deliberations.

1. A mock-up of the brick shall be installed and will be subject to staff review and

approval in consultation with the Chairman as appropriate.

2. The light fixtures and the intensity of the lighting on the pillars shall be subject to staff review and approval in consultation with the Chairman as appropriate.

The motion was seconded by Commissioner Gayle and approved by a vote of 7 to 0.

#### **OTHER ITEMS**

4. **Opportunity for the public to address the Historic Preservation Commission on non-agenda items.**

No testimony on non-agenda items was presented to the Commission.

5. **Additional information from staff.**

No additional items from staff were presented to the Commission.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:32 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Catherine J. Czerniak  
Director of Community Development