

The City of Lake Forest
Historic Preservation Commission
Proceedings of the June 27, 2018 Meeting

A regular meeting of the Lake Forest Historic Preservation Commission was held on Wednesday, June 27, 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, Bill Redfield and Bob Alfe.

Commissioners absent: Carol Gayle

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 May 23, 2018 meeting of the Historic Preservation Commission.

The minutes of the May 23, 2018 meeting were approved as submitted.

3. Continued consideration of a request for a Certificate of Appropriateness authorizing demolition of an existing residence located at 770 Washington Road. No replacement structure is proposed.

Property Owner: Swift Washington/Michigan Management, LLC (Swift Siblings)

Representative: Michael Adelman, attorney

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

Mr. Adelman noted that he does not intend to repeat the information presented at the last meeting in support of the proposed demolition. He stated that at the end of the last meeting, the Commission continued the petition at the request of the Lake Forest Preservation Foundation to allow further time for the group to research the house and provide additional comments. He reiterated that as presented at the last meeting, his clients believe that the demolition criteria are fully satisfied.

Ms. Czerniak stated the City's preservation consultant, Susan Benjamin, spoke at the last meeting and summarized the report she prepared. She stated that Ms. Benjamin is prepared to offer further comment on the petition on behalf of the City.

Ms. Benjamin stated that since the last meeting, she walked the property again to understand it better, take a further look at the residence from the street and walk the

open space on the property. She stated that the small pond, the vegetation, and the overall character of the property needs to be preserved. She stated that the character of the property is the important aspect of the site. She stated that in her opinion, any future structures should be located generally on the portion of the site that is currently developed. She stated that it would be a tragedy to lose the historic garden features on the property. She presented and commented on photos of the site. She stated that she views the property as a park, within a community that has a historic district, and the historic district is viewed basically as a park in its entirety. She noted the various paths on the property which to the meadow-like lawn. She noted that the house is sited at a very imposing position on the lot. She showed views of the house from the streetscape on all sides. She noted that the surrounding homes are quite large and significant. She observed that the views of the property from the street are most extraordinary. She stated that the pond is unique and similar to ponds found in significant parks in the Chicago area. She noted that to date, she has not been able to identify a landscape architect involved in the overall design of the property and garden features. She suggested that there is more to the pond and surrounding area than is currently visible because the area is overgrown. She noted that in a report prepared by a consultant hired by the petitioner it was noted that the house is a wonderful example of the Italian Revival style. She stated that the house is not even close to that style. She stated that she is speaking to underscore her thoughts on what is important to be preserved on this unique site: the character of the open space, the key garden features, the topography and mature trees. She suggested that some research be conducted on the landscape elements to try to determine which trees and vegetation are original and to the extent possible, bring the site back to its original landscaped design.

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

Jim Opsitnick, President of the Preservation Foundation, stated that the Foundation's perspective on the property is a summary of the opinions of the 25 member Board. He read the letter that was submitted to the Commission by the Foundation into the record. He summarized that the Foundation opposes the demolition of the house noting concern that it may set a precedent for the demolition of significant homes in the community and because a replacement structure is not presented for consideration concurrently with the request for demolition.

Art Miller, 169 Wildwood Road, agreed with the comments of Ms. Benjamin. He made a plea for the preservation of the landscaping and open space on the south side of the residence noting that it is an historic part of the visual character of the Triangle Park area. He noted that Triangle Park was designed by a Lake Forest Garden Club member and commented on the importance of other properties in the area including the Library. He reiterated that the south lawn and major garden elements should be preserved and should be recommended for preservation in any action taken by the Commission to inform future Boards and Commissions that may be asked to consider future plans for the site. He noted the Southworth property which was subdivided to allow two homes to be constructed along the streetscape disassociating the house from the surroundings. He stated that although the Southworth house is in excellent

condition, views to and from it are blocked by the two new homes. He stated concern that history may be repeating itself if subdivision of the Warner property is approved to allow further development of the visual open space and landscaping that is part of the visual character of Triangle Park. He called out the importance of the small reflecting pool, in the style of Jens Jensen, which is located in the southeast corner of the property. He suggested that if subdivision is proposed, the Plan Commission should seek input from the Historic Preservation Commission. He suggested that if demolition of the house is approved, as requested, the Commission should attach conditions of approval to protect the character of the overall site.

In response to questions from the Commission, Ms. Czerniak confirmed that the owners have no plans to construct a replacement residence. She also confirmed that the Commission can add conditions and recommendations as part of any motion.

In response to questions from Commissioner Wheeler, Mr. Adelman confirmed that the owners intend to demolish the structure if the demolition request is approved. He stated that as is, the property has been unmarketable because the house itself is not significant, attractive or livable. He added that the family is paying high taxes and is faced with trying to maintain the eyesore.

Hearing no further requests to speak from the public, Chairman Grieve thanked all parties for the work and thought put into this petition. He stated that the review process is purposefully rigorous to assure that the Commission members and others have time to absorb comments and to consider all documents and testimony presented. He stated appreciation for the work that went in to both sides of the debate and acknowledged there at points during the process, there were some pointed responses back and forth. He stated that all opinions on the matter before the Commission are justified and respected and everyone is entitled to have an opinion in the debate. He thanked all parties for conducting themselves in a civil manner. He stated that the Commissioners are bound by the standards in the Code adding that to the degree that anything has ambiguity, careful thought and in depth evaluation is needed. He stated that the Commission must evaluate the demolition request based on the five standards in the Code. He stated that there have been comments on the condition of the house, interior and exterior, and clarified that neither the condition, nor the economics are directly addressed by the applicable standards. He noted that presently, the Code would allow a permit to be issued to gut the interior of an historically significant house without any review by the Commission. He acknowledged that the Commission's inclination and desire is not to see structures demolished. He explained the factors that will guide his vote including his observations as he visited the site and studied the residence. He noted that looking at the house, it is hard to identify original components and to understand what would or could be restored. He stated that much of the structure has changed over time as a result of additions, reconstruction after several fires and routine repairs. He stated that maybe 30 percent of what remains is original, and 70 percent is gone. He stated that if restoration was undertaken, the result would in the end be a modern day reconstruction of the house with very little of the original home remaining. He stated

that if restoration was undertaken, the result would be a replica, a newly made interpretation of what was. He questioned whether the house, reconstructed, would be considered a Contributing Structure to the district. He noted the comments that the site itself; the topography, the landscaping and garden elements are significant. He suggested that the Commission could offer recommendations on considerations that should be factored into any future plan for the property he noted however, that a plan for redevelopment is not before the Commission at this time and may not be in the Commission's jurisdiction. He stated that the Commission's discussion will be reflected in the minutes to serve as background information for any future discussion about the property. He stated his agreement that the features of the property itself are significant to the district.

Commissioner Wheeler agreed that the most significant features of the property are the grounds and the landscaping. He observed that although once loved, the house has evolved over time and it may be time to let it go. He stated reluctantly that the house has served its purpose. He stated that although an alternative use, other than a single family residence, could be considered for the house, the house does not have significant architectural features to support such an effort. He stated that the grounds should be preserved.

Commissioner Redfield stated that he has been an advocate for preservation for the last 50 years. He stated that the house was once beautiful as reflected in the postcard but noted that is not what the house is today. He stated that the house has been well used and today, does not look anything like it did originally. He stated support for the demolition noting that the house has seen its day. He stated that he will support the owners' desire to demolish it.

Commissioner Alfe stated agreement with the comments of the other Commissioners who spoke in support of demolition.

Commissioner Gibson conceded that the additions made to the residence over the years were unsympathetic she noted however that the structure can be repaired over time. She noted the social significance of Warner Jr. citing his support of the hospital and his role in moving the community forward. She noted that his importance is evident when visiting the Cemetery commenting that the Warner family is there among the other founding families of the community. She stated that the house was a statement, a house on a hill, in a prominent location. She noted the use of stucco on the exterior of the residence and the handmade parquet floor in the living room. She commented on other aspects of the house that she noted when she visited: the large attic and rec room, the six over six windows, the brick foundation and other elements. She stated that any replacement house will be different. She stated that the house is iconic, designed by a famous architecture firm and located near a park. She stated that the construction materials used were expensive and the construction is different than what is found today. She suggested that the house could be a candidate for the Infant Welfare House which could show it off to potential buyers. She stated that in her opinion, the house has not been given a chance.

Commissioner Wheeler noted his disappointment in seeing the subdivision of some other historic properties in the community noting that in some cases, historic homes have been negatively impacted by subdivisions which save the historic residence, but allow other, non-compatible homes to be constructed in proximity to a significant structure. He stated that his preference would be to save this house but noted that if it were meant to be saved, someone would have purchased it to restore it.

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

Commissioner Wheeler made a motion to grant a Certificate of Appropriateness to allow the demolition of the residence and attached garage at 770 Washington Road based on findings detailed in the staff report, information presented by the City's preservation consultant, information submitted by the petitioner, the testimony presented to the Commission and the Commission's deliberations. He stated that the Certificate of Appropriateness is granted subject to the following conditions of approval.

1. Until demolition occurs, the structure must remain secure, all windows and doors closed and locked to prevent unauthorized entry. General maintenance of the structure shall continue in compliance with all Code requirements.
2. During demolition activity, all trees and vegetation, unless otherwise approved by the City's Certified Arborist, shall be protected from damage. If determined to be necessary by the City's Certified Arborist, trees close to the areas of demolition activity shall be treated with pre and post construction measures to increase the chances of long term survival.
3. The residence shall be removed in its entirety, including the basement, and the site cleared of all debris. The area of the basement shall be filled with material approved by the City and graded even with existing grades on the site. The fill shall be compacted as directed by the City.
4. Beyond the footprint of the house, grades shall not be altered during demolition activity and existing landscape features shall remain undisturbed and protected.
5. On an ongoing basis, before, during and after demolition, the property must be maintained. All grass, including in the parkways, along Walnut and Washington Roads, shall be mowed on a regular basis and trees, shrubs and other vegetation shall be regularly maintained to avoid the appearance of an unkempt or overgrown property.
6. Any new structures proposed for the property shall require review and approval by the Historic Preservation Commission based on the applicable standards in the

Code to assure compatibility with and a positive contribution to, the Historic District.

7. In considering any future redevelopment proposed for the site, the Plan Commission is encouraged to assure that the unique characteristics of the property which contribute significantly to the Historic District, are protected, preserved and incorporated into any site plan. The unique aspects of the site that should be considered for preservation include, but are not limited to: the topography of the site, the landscaped streetscapes, landscape features on the site, the reflecting pool and its surroundings, the mature trees, the south open lawn which is visually connected with Triangle Park, and views to and from Triangle Park.
8. The opportunity for input from the Historic Preservation Commission is encouraged, at the front end of the process, if redevelopment of the site is proposed in a manner that would require subdivision or any other zoning approvals.
9. The full record of the Historic Preservation Commission's deliberations on this petition shall be provided to the Plan Commission and any other decision-making body at the time any redevelopment plans are presented for consideration for this property.

The motion was seconded by Commissioner Sperry and was approved by a vote of 5 to 1.

Mr. Adelman thanked all parties who participated in the consideration of this petition. He stated that the intent is that someone will bring forward a project that will present the optimum development. He acknowledged that any future plan for the property will require review by the appropriate Boards and Commissions. He stated that ultimately, the process works for the betterment of the City. He stated that he respects all of the opinions presented during the process.

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 7:46 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Catherine J. Czerniak
Director of Community Development