

**The City of Lake Forest**  
**Historic Preservation Commission**  
**Proceedings of the June 21, 2023 Work Session**

The Lake Forest Historic Preservation Commission held a work session on the topic of the use of synthetic/composite materials on the exterior of structures within the Historic Districts and on Locally Landmarked properties. The work session was held on Wednesday, June 21, 2023, at 6:30 p.m., in the Training Room of the Municipal Services Building, 800 Field Drive, Lake Forest, Illinois.

Historic Preservation Commissioners present: Chairman Maureen Grinnell and Commissioners Lloyd Culbertson, Elizabeth Daliere, Tina Dann-Fenwick, Geoffrey Hanson, Robin Petit and Leif Soderberg.

Commissioners absent: None

City staff present: Catherine Czerniak, Director of Community Development  
Jennifer Baehr, Planner

Panelists present: Edward Deegan, architect  
Nate Lielasus, architect  
Keith Labutta, architect  
John Krasnodebski, architect  
Scott Streightiff, architect  
Erica Weeder, architect

Chairman Grinnell opened the work session and stated that on an ongoing basis, the Commission considers new materials and methods and evaluates them against the 17 Standards the Commission must use in determining whether or not to grant a Certificate of Appropriateness.

Commissioners and panelists introduced themselves.

The panelists were each asked to speak to the following questions.

1. What do you consider in selecting exterior materials for projects? Visual appearance, durability, character of the visibility from the streetscape, architectural style, historic precedent, neighborhood context, sustainability, budget, other?
2. In your professional opinion, in general, how do natural materials compare to synthetic/composite materials? What are the pros and cons of each?
3. Are there particular architectural elements for which the use of composite or synthetic materials are appropriate?

4. In your opinion, how do synthetic/composite materials age, or not age. Does this affect the character of a building or neighborhood overtime?
5. In your opinion, should the City more strictly regulate the use of synthetic and composite materials in the Historic Districts and for Locally Landmarked properties than in areas that are outside the purview of the Historic Preservation Commission?
6. What role does proper installation play in the appearance or appropriateness (or lack thereof) in using synthetic/composite materials?
7. In evaluating synthetic/composite materials, what characteristics and qualities do you consider important?
8. If synthetic/composite materials are allowed, are there specific limitations that should be established? How they can be used? Qualities they must have. (If approved for use, the City cannot specify a manufacturer, but can require that the product has specific characteristics.)
9. What experience do you have with the use of synthetic/composite materials in other communities?

The panelists offered various opinions and the following comments based on their own experiences and expertise.

- Authenticity of building materials is important and especially so in Lake Forest which is a special place with an architectural legacy.
- The goal in Historic Districts is to make each project look as if it has always been there.
- Authentic materials are selected and materials that try to imitate another material are avoided.
- The goal is to match the materials that were historically used.
- There has been a decline in the quality and durability in some traditional materials.
- When selecting exterior materials, the existing conditions of the property and the visual qualities of the streetscape and surrounding homes should be considered.
- Durable materials are important.
- Many clients have concerns about long term maintenance.

- Acknowledgement that some of the natural and traditional materials available today are not the same as those used historically.
- Acknowledgement that synthetic and composite materials are advancing with the goal of filling the need for materials that are acceptable in Historic Districts.
- Some synthetic/composite materials have advanced to the point where they have a character and qualities that are compatible with historic structures.
- Boral was cited as a product that has advanced and is used for siding and trim and qualities of Boral were noted: It does not attempt to imitate wood with a fake grain, it can be painted, it does not expand or contract.
- Azek was noted as a product that is used for decorative purposes, trim and molding, with the draw back that it has more expansion and contraction qualities making it problematic in some applications.
- Synthetic roof products have a manufactured glossy finish and, in some cases, an imitation wood grain texture which call attention as a non-traditional product in contrast to historic materials.
- Manufactured products have a repetitive, non-random appearance in comparison to natural and traditional products.
- There is a difference in the thickness, depth, shadowing, and texture of synthetic/composite materials and natural and traditional products.
- The sheen and reflective finish of manufactured products is perceptible and seen as undesirable qualities in the Historic District.
- Some panelists expressed hesitation and urged caution with respect to allowing the use of the currently available synthetic/composite roof materials.
- Synthetic or composite products are appropriate for some elements because the materials have advanced to the point of having a visual character and qualities that are compatible with historic and traditional materials: trim, cornices, columns, garage doors and shutters.
- Some synthetic and composite siding products are aesthetically appropriate in historic districts if installed in a traditional way and have a smooth, painted finish.
- There is a clear aesthetic distinction between synthetic/composite roofing and traditional roofing materials.
- Building materials are continuously evolving and new products become available and warrant continued scrutiny and consideration.

- Using durable materials that do not require short term replacement is important as is regular maintenance of all types of materials.
- Synthetic and composite materials raise environmental impact concerns; how are they made and how are they disposed of.
- Getting input from quality, experienced builders who work in historic districts and with various types of materials would be informative to understand the positive and negative qualities.
- Research exterior materials that are permitted in other Historic Districts across the Country.
- There are resources available to provide information on how various building materials perform and appear over time.
- New growth wood is not as durable as old growth and is more absorbent.
- New products behave differently than traditional materials.
- Synthetic and composite products that are most compatible with historic districts can be painted such as fiberglass columns and composite shutters.
- Products that are visually different from traditional materials such as appearing chunky, rounded corners, or added elements should be avoided.
- Synthetic and composite materials that are installed in the same or a very similar manner as traditional materials may be more compatible with traditional materials on an historic structure.
- Synthetic/composite roofing has to be cut at the corners and valleys differently than natural cedar and slate shingle.

Chairman Grinnell invited public testimony.

George Sperzel, 774 Washington Road, stated that they received approval for the use of Boral siding on their home in the Historic District and they are very happy with the appearance and quality of the Boral product. He noted that Boral is a recycled product.

Rommy Lopat, 410 Woodland Road, questioned the sustainability of natural versus synthetic and composite materials. She stated that there are some non-natural materials that have been traditionally used in the Historic District and it is difficult to know where to draw the line on which materials are appropriate for historic properties.

Jan Gibson, 59 Franklin Place, stated that the Commission should consider how other communities review synthetic and composite materials.

Mary Terese Williams, 333 Woodland Road, stated that she needs to replace the cedar roof on her home in the Historic District and has concerns about the use of cedar shingle versus synthetic roofing.

Natalie Reinkemeyer stated that she lives in a home designed by Walter Frazier that has a cedar roof that needs to be replaced and wants to make the right decision about the type of roofing material. She asked about the data available on synthetic roofing.

The Commission acknowledged that there is more research and work to be done to review new products.

The work session was adjourned at 8:30 p.m.