

MINUTES OF A REGULAR MEETING

HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION

APPROVED

DATE: June 2, 2004

TIME: 7:00 p.m.

PLACE: Council Chambers, 400 South Vine Street, Urbana, Illinois 61801

MEMBERS PRESENT: Rich Cahill, Scott Dossett, Bill Rose, Trent Shepard, Art Zangerl

MEMBERS EXCUSED: Alice Novak

MEMBERS ABSENT: None

STAFF PRESENT: Rob Kowalski, Planning Manager; Michaela Oktay, Senior Planner

OTHERS PRESENT: G. D. Brighton, Lauren Kerestes, Rachel Leibowitz, Hugh Phillips, Marya Ryan, Nancy Wehling

1. CALL TO ORDER, ROLL CALL AND DECLARATION OF QUORUM

Urbana Historic Preservation Commission Acting Chair, Art Zangerl, called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. The roll call was taken, and a quorum was declared.

2. CHANGES TO THE AGENDA

There were none.

3. APPROVAL OF THE PREVIOUS MINUTES

Mr. Dossett moved to approve the minutes from March 3, 2004 as corrected. Mr. Cahill seconded the motion. The minutes were approved by unanimous vote as amended.

4. WRITTEN COMMUNICATIONS

Letter from Marya Ryan to Michaela Oktay and Lauren Kerestes
Notes from the Buena Vista Court Neighborhood Meeting

5. AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION

There was none.

6. CONTINUED PUBLIC HEARINGS

There were none.

7. OLD BUSINESS

There was none.

8. NEW PUBLIC HEARINGS

There were none.

9. NEW BUSINESS

Buena Vista Court Historic District Preliminary Determination

Michael Oktay, Senior Planner, presented the staff report for this item. She introduced the historic district preliminary determination to the Urbana Historic Preservation Commission by describing the proposed application and noting that four of the eight property owners have consented to the nomination by signing the application. She explained the process of the preliminary determination. She briefly described the contributing sites and objects included in the nomination.

Ms. Oktay reviewed the criteria from Section XII-4-C-1 and Section XII-5-C-1 of the Urbana Zoning Ordinance for considering a proposed historic district. She read the options of the Historic Preservation Commission and presented staff's recommendation, which was as follows:

Staff recommended that the Historic Preservation Commission make the preliminary determination that the proposed nomination meets the criteria for historic district consideration in its entirety and that the request should be further considered for designation through the public hearing process. Should the Historic Preservation Commission make the determination that the nomination is valid, a public hearing will be scheduled for July 7, 2004.

Mr. Cahill asked if the proposed sites were already listed on the National Register? Ms. Oktay answered by saying that was correct. Mr. Cahill inquired as to what part of the information presented was from the National Register and what part of the information was new. Lauren Kerestes, applicant, noted that she completely rewrote the nomination form. There was not any cutting and pasting from the National Register form. Although there was a bibliography, the author of the National Register form was cited for any information that she had obtained from the author. There were some changes made since the proposed sites were nominated for the National Register in 1999.

Mr. Zangerl suggested that it might be useful if Ms. Kerestes could reference the bibliography items for significant statements of fact. He also mentioned that prior to the meeting, he had gone out to Buena Vista Court and noticed that the entryway to the courtyard had an asphalt surface on the top.

Ms. Kerestes commented that she appreciated any observations that the Historic Preservation Commission had of the properties.

In the list of owners and applicants included in the application, Mr. Shepard questioned what the asterisk next to some of the names referred to? Ms. Kerestes replied that the asterisk indicated that the person was an owner and occupant. The list goes back to 1927.

Mr. Shepard inquired if the City ROW (Right-of-Way) shown on the overhead arterial photo belonged to someone else or did the City own it. Ms. Oktay stated that the City owned that lot, and it was never part of Buena Vista Court.

Mr. Cahill questioned if the Presbyterian Church owned Lot 510? Ms. Oktay said that was correct. It is used as a parking lot by the church. Mr. Cahill inquired if the garages were still standing when the original National Register Nomination was put together. Ms. Kerestes replied that the garages were taken down in September of 1999. They had either just been demolished or were in the process of being demolished at the time of the National Register nomination.

Mr. Rose commented that the maintenance and the maintainability of the structures was a concern of the Historic District Commission, in that if the proposed sites become a historic district, there would be an expectation that the properties would be maintained in the style as described in the nomination. He wondered if there was any sense of the maintainability of the structures or if there was anything about the structures in the eyes of the occupants that seemed to be burdensome in that regard? Ms. Kerestes responded by saying that none of the occupants had expressed that it would be burdensome to maintain their properties.

Mr. Zangerl stated that there was some discrepancy between what was characterized in the nomination as buildings having tile roofs versus what some of the residents thought was actually the case. It would be useful for that information to be accurate. Somewhere down the road, it would be a consideration in terms of replacement. Ms. Kerestes commented that some of it would be a judgment call in that some of the tiles have been replaced and other tiles have been left.

Mr. Rose urged Ms. Kerestes during her rewrite of the description of each property to keep in mind that the burden would be upon the Historic Preservation Commission to use the information in the nomination papers to identify the distinguishing characteristics of the properties and to use those characteristics in judgments that would be made about the appropriateness or not of changes to each property. Mr. Armstrong mentioned that the Commission would want to have a thorough photo inventory of all the structures in addition to their descriptions.

Mr. Dossett commended Ms. Kerestes for doing an outstanding job of reviewing the history and the style of the architecture of the proposed properties. He felt the information had been well put together.

Mr. Shepard inquired about the originality of the birdbath. He wondered if just the top part of the birdbath might be original. Ms. Kerestes understood that the entire birdbath was original. She commented that the entire birdbath was worn, and there was not a lot of detail left. Despite this, it still had integrity, and one could see its original purpose. Mr. Dossett suggested that it looked like

someone had poured in place a single piece. He mentioned that it did need some maintenance and some of the supporting structure was exposed now. Mr. Dossett went on to comment on the maintainability of the structures. He walked around the area for about an hour and a half and found the structures to be in delightfully good shape. Ms. Kerestes commended the owners on the improvements, the enhancements and the maintenance of the properties. They are old properties and have seen many people come and go.

Nancy Wehling, of 2 Buena Vista Court, voiced her concern about the maintainability of the properties. Much of the brick trim has deteriorated. She believed that all of the structures at one time had brick trim around the parapets and some brick headers as well. In the past, she had masons come out and look at repairing the brick trim. The masons did not want to address the issue. At some point in time, something will have to be done. She was afraid that the cost might be prohibitive for her to have her bricks torn out and redone. She commented that the proposed structures were used as rental properties for a number of years and were not maintained as impeccably as they might have been if they had been owner occupied all the time.

Mr. Shepard inquired about the hardship provision. Ms. Oktay explained that one would fill out a Certificate of Appropriateness for something considered significant. In the case where a Certificate of Appropriateness may be denied, then one could file for a Certificate of Economic Hardship. Mr. Kowalski added that it would not be based solely on how much money one has or on how much they earn, rather it would be based mostly on the cost of the improvement compared to the value of the home.

Mr. Rose expressed appreciation towards Ms. Wehling's remarks. There might be a presumption in historic preservation that when buildings were constructed back then, that all of the techniques and materials were of the highest quality and assured the longest life. When in fact, this was not true of any age of any building. In as much as the Historic Preservation Commission was trying to ensure continuity of the look and feel of the existing structures, it was important for them to have recognition of exactly what she was describing.

Ms. Wehling added that porches were not adequately footed. On several of the homes, it looked like the porches were cracking along the point where it is joined to the wall. Also, the way the window openings were formed, raindrops run backward towards the window openings.

Marya Ryan, of 1 Buena Vista Court, stated that she was in favor of seeing the proposed designation go through. She agreed that Ms. Wehling had some very legitimate concerns. She had some fairly extensive repair done just a few years ago, and she did not use historically correct materials, largely because the problem was that this was not a good climate for stucco.

Ms. Ryan noted that there was a portion of the Zoning Ordinance that talked about special emergency and life safety circumstances for getting repairs done more quickly than some repairs that the review process would normally allow. Would that also cover a situation where a high wind comes along and rips off of the roof? Although no one's life would be in danger, the rain could pour in while a proposed repair was being reviewed and could cause more structural damage over time. Mr. Kowalski stated that would be covered under a special emergency.

Ms. Ryan mentioned that she had some additional information that could be added to the list of owners and occupants.

Mr. Shepard felt that it was an exciting property and was unique in the City of Urbana. Although the proposed nominated properties did not have the finest craftsmanship on the inside of each house, but the unique style and nice features convey a sense of time.

Mr. Cahill noted that he lived about a block away from Buena Vista Court, and over the last 16 years, it was one area that had remained constant while other homes around it have been moved or torn down. It provides an anchor for what had been a neighborhood. He would like to see Buena Vista Court become a historic district to slow down the potential growth of some of the things that have happened around the area.

He mentioned that this proposed nominated historic district would be twice the size of the City's current historic districts in terms of number of parcels. At least half of the owners were in favor of this process. He believed that it met the three criteria outlined by City staff, and it should move to public hearing.

Mr. Rose liked the "community" within the community. He believed that this was a unique feature of Buena Vista Court. This feature was very much worth keeping, and probably one where the role of the Historic Preservation Commission and the Historic District could play a very big part. He found that it met the criteria, so he supported it.

He felt awkward about raising the issue of the maintainability of the buildings. We know that it imports a style that was not indigenous to the area; therefore, it was a fair question to ask how it would maintain in the future, how it currently maintains, and how it has been maintained historically in the past. As the nomination goes forward, he would want to make sure somehow that the Historic Preservation Commission's decision to support this nomination would be done with an eye to assist rather than burden the occupants with maintenance of these structures.

Mr. Dossett remarked that the sense of place that Buena Vista Court exhibits was really unique in the community. So, he moved that the Historic Preservation Commission make the determination that they move forward with the nomination process, and that the petition as put together by Ms. Kerestes was significant and sufficient documentation. Mr. Rose seconded the motion.

Mr. Zangerl added that this was a very unique collection of properties. There was no other area in the City of Urbana even close to it. This would also be unique for the Historic Preservation Commission in that there would be few districts that they would consider in the future that would have such cohesiveness of contributing structures and the absence of any non-conforming structures. It was already listed on the National Register for historic places.

The roll call was as follows:

Mr. Cahill	-	Yes	Mr. Dossett	-	Yes
Mr. Rose	-	Yes	Mr. Shepard	-	Yes
Mr. Zangerl	-	Yes			

The motion was passed by unanimous vote.

Mr. Kowalski noted that the public hearing for the nomination would be held on July 7, 2004 at 7:00 p.m. in the City Council Chambers. City staff would send out notice for that public hearing and updated information would be sent out prior to the meeting.

10. MONITORING OF HISTORIC PROPERTIES

Mr. Dossett mentioned that he happened to be going down Race Street when the Lincoln Statute was being recovered. He stopped to talk with the people working on the statute and they reported to him that the bronze was in really good shape. He also talked to them about the techniques that they were using for the preservation of the bronze. It appeared that "Abe" was in good shape in Carle Park.

Mr. Cahill noted that PACA, Preservation and Conservation Association, had given a Heritage Grant to help defray the cost of new landscaping around "Abe".

Mr. Rose inquired if Mr. Dossett was convinced that the preservation techniques being used were safe. Mr. Dossett stated that it seemed they were using the same techniques that he had learned from how the National Park Service repairs and protects bronze at Gettysburg and other places like that. The care of the application, the attention to detail in terms of the application of the wax, the reconstruction of the patina seemed to him to be good.

11. STAFF REPORT

Ms. Oktay reported on the following:

- ❖ Open House for the M.O.R. Design Guidelines would be held on June 3, 2004 at Lincoln Square Mall from 5:30 p.m. to 6:30 p.m. City staff will present the Draft Design Guidelines to the Plan Commission on June 10, 2004.

12. STUDY SESSION

There was none.

13. ANNOUNCEMENTS

- Mr. Dossett invited everyone to the Historic East Urbana Neighborhood Association (HEUNA) Annual Potluck and Street Closing Party. Maple Street, between California and Oregon Streets, will be closed off for the event. The party will be held on Saturday, June 5, 2004 between 6:30 p.m. and 8:30 p.m.

Mr. Zangerl inquired as to how much of the brick sidewalk reconstruction had been completed in East Urbana. Mr. Dossett answered by saying the area around California and over to Anderson and Oregon Streets has received some attention. The City had not begun working on the project again

this year that he knows of. The little section that HEUNA did received an award from PACA last year. Maple Street had received considerable improvement.

Mr. Shepard mentioned that the City had done some sidewalk improvements in West Urbana as well this spring.

Mr. Cahill remarked that the Ricker went on the market and sold within two weeks to a new family. They will be moving in the first part of July. He thanked Matthew and Adriana Taylor for being the first couple to take on the Ricker House and for being the first occupants in the first historic house in the City of Urbana. He wished the new owners well. He mentioned that the new owners wanted to build a garage/carriage house type of structure in the northeast corner of the lot.

14. ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Rose moved to adjourn the meeting at 8:00 p.m. Mr. Shepard seconded the motion. The meeting was adjourned.

Submitted,

Michaela Oktay, Senior Planner