

MINUTES OF A REGULAR MEETING

URBANA HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION

DATE: December 3, 2014

APPROVED

TIME: 7:00 p.m.

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

MEMBERS PRESENT: Scott Dossett, Matt Metcalf, Alice Novak, Gina Pagliuso, David Seyler, Trent Shepard, Kim Smith

MEMBERS EXCUSED: None

STAFF PRESENT: Jeff Engstrom, Interim Planning Manager; Kevin Garcia, Planner II;

OTHERS PRESENT: Kollin Armstrong, Chris Berti, Andy Brantner, Mary Ann Bunyan, Richard Cahill, Matt Deering, Yuchen Ding, Nancy Edwards, Tony Herhold, Marcia Klopf, Pui Yi Man, Robert Nemeth, Caleb Orozco, Dennis Roberts, Francesca Sallinger, Connor Smith, Chris Szmurlo, Nathan Upson, Angela Urban, Kelly Valiin, Roman Yanke

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

Alice Novak, Urbana Historic Preservation Commission Chair, called the meeting to order at 7:04 p.m. The roll call was taken, and a quorum was declared with all members present.

2. CHANGES TO THE AGENDA

There were none.

3. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The minutes of the November 5, 2014 Historic Preservation Commission Meeting were presented for approval. Mr. Shepard proposed to change “Advice Chair” to “Vice Chair” on Page 2 under Item 8 in the last sentence. Mr. Shepard, then, made a motion to approve the minutes as corrected. Mr. Dossett seconded the motion. The minutes were approved unanimously as corrected.

4. WRITTEN COMMUNICATIONS

Regarding Case No. HP-2014-L-01:

- Objection to Nomination from Matt Deering

- Letters in Support of Nomination
 - Letter from Christopher Enck
 - Letter from T.J and Louise Marie Kuhny
 - Letter from Frank Butterfield
 - Email from Douglas Armstrong
 - Email from Willard Broom
 - Email from Deborah Katz-Downie
 - Email from Rick Larimore
 - Email from Linda Lorenz
 - Email from Esther Patt
 - Email from Dennis Roberts
 - Email from Alice Patterson Vernon

5. AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION

There was none.

6. CONTINUED PUBLIC HEARINGS

Case No. HP-2014-L-01 – Request by Robert Nemeth for a Historic Landmark Nomination of the Zeta Tau Alpha Sorority House located at 1404 South Lincoln Avenue

Chair Novak recused herself due to a conflict of interest with this case. She turned the Chair position over to Kim Smith. Vice Chair Smith re-opened the public hearing for this case. She reviewed the process for a public hearing.

Jeff Engstrom, Interim Planning Manager, listed the written communications that were received with regards to the case.

Kevin Garcia, Planner II, presented a summary of the proposed landmark nomination. He began by explaining the application process and what it means for the property owner if the proposed landmark nomination is approved. He talked about Joseph W. Royer and Hubert Smith. He gave a brief background on the history of the house. He reviewed the criteria for a landmark designation according to Section XI-5.C of the Urbana Zoning Ordinance. He read the options of the Historic Preservation Commission and presented City staff's recommendation for approval.

Vice Chair Smith opened the hearing up for public input.

Robert Nemeth, petitioner, approached the Historic Preservation Commission to speak. He mentioned that he grew up living near to the proposed house and knows it well. He described the existing house noting the French Eclectic style architecture. He responded to the objection of the 2013 landmark designation nomination. He talked about the controversy over whether Joseph Royer or Hubert Smith designed the house and about the historical significance of the Zeta Tau Alpha (ZTA) Sorority House. He talked about the benefits of a property having a historic landmark status and about false claims of a historic landmark status creating economic difficulties on property owners. He presented statistics with regards to previous Certificates of Appropriateness, which proved that they are not difficult to obtain or are restraining on a property owner to maintain a historic landmark.

Matt Deering, attorney for the ZTA Fraternity Housing Corporation, approached to question the petitioner. He stated that Mr. Nemeth ran through several potential economic benefits of historic preservation designation, specifically including federal tax credit and tax assessment freeze program. Is it Mr. Nemeth's contention that these benefits are available to ZTA in the manner for which the property is used? Mr. Nemeth replied that it is a good question that they should ask their attorneys about. Mr. Deering explained that the federal tax credit is only available to owner-occupied properties and the tax assessment freeze program is only available to income producing properties, which the proposed property is neither.

Vice Chair Smith asked if there were any proponents of the request wishing to speak. She limited comments to three minutes.

Richard Cahill approached the Historic Preservation Commission to speak. He is a member of the Preservation and Conservation Association (PACA) and serves on their board of directors. PACA supports the nomination wholly. He mentioned that in 2010 he found blueprints of Joseph Royer's including one for the proposed property. He talked about how Joseph Royer was a prominent architect in Urbana.

Chris Berti approached the Historic Preservation Commission to speak. He is a professor of art at Parkland College. He supports the historic preservation of the ZTA House. As a professor, he spends most of his life sharing with the students the importance of experiencing things firsthand. There is a big difference between looking at something in a book or seeing it on the internet and seeing it firsthand. We have an opportunity to preserve something that people can experience firsthand. People have spoken very eloquently about the historic significance of the proposed building. It acts as a record from a significant period in American architecture. However, buildings like this also enhance the beauty and the cultural identity of a community in the same way that a beautiful sculpture or garden does. There is just no replacement for it if it disappears. There are students present at the meeting, and they would be the first to tell the Commission that there is a big difference between experience and living with things of beauty firsthand as opposed to digitally.

Dennis Roberts approached the Historic Preservation Commission to speak. He helped to write and create the ordinances that provide for landmark status nominations and helped to write ordinance that provides a demolition delay period to work out historic preservation issues with property owners. Some of the issues that were presented in the arguments to the City Council that had an effect on the vote of the City Council in 2013 had nothing to do with the actual criteria by which the City Council was supposedly required to make its decision and by which the Historic Preservation Commission is required to judge the property. So, any issue that has to do with alleged economic difficulty or inconvenience that may or may not occur to the property owner relating to historic preservation designation is not one of the criteria for selecting and approving a building. It is supposed to be based entirely on the historic quality, the integrity of the building, how it meets the standards of period design and architectural detail, and the significance of the architect.

There was also a misconception that Historic Preservation Commission members could not come to the City Council meeting to clarify the vote of the Historic Preservation Commission. We have learned since then that having completed your judicial process by holding the public hearing and having taken a final vote, the members of the Historic Preservation no longer has an obligation to remain silent. If the members feel as individuals that they want to support a nomination and you

want to come to the City Council meeting and explain how the nomination was either granted or denied, then you have a right to do so because you are no longer in the position of making the judgment.

With no further proponents to speak regarding the case, Vice Chair Smith opened the hearing up for opponents to speak.

Mr. Deering re-approached the Historic Preservation Commission. He mentioned that he had submitted a written report to the Commission prior to the start of the meeting. ZTA felt that they were being asked to prove a negative, and they did not feel that they could do that so they were focusing on the application.

ZTA did not feel that the applicant provided enough evidence to satisfy the criteria for a historic landmark. The application consists primarily of blanket assertions and very little actual relevant evidence. For example, with regards to the statements made regarding the significant value as part of the architectural, cultural, educational and social heritage of the community as an outstanding example of the role Greek life has played on the University of Illinois (U of I) campus, ZTA did not understand how this particular house satisfies that criteria any more than any other fraternity or sorority on the U of I campus specifically in the City of Urbana. In fact, the blanket statements that the applicant made about the ZTA property could be made about many, if not all the other fraternities and sororities on the U of I campus, not just those listed or mentioned in the discussions regarding the National Register. He noted that the ZTA property was not listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Surely, the Urbana Historic Preservation Commission would not find that every Greek house on the Urbana side of the U of I campus would be suitable for historic landmark designation.

The applicant also asserted that the ZTA house retains a high degree of integrity in another criterion. ZTA disagreed with this statement. The applicant laid out the significant structural additions to the building that quite simply greatly increase the size, general appearance and disrupt the consistency and visibility of the original house.

Another statement claims that the largest addition had itself gained significance. ZTA believed this statement was based on the age of the house, but there is no true evidence that suggests why the large addition is significant.

Therefore, ZTA Fraternity Housing Corporation felt that it was not reasonable to conclude that the house, as it stands today, retains the original integrity of the house.

Mr. Deering went on to talk about whether the house was really designed by Joseph Royer. ZTA believed that the evidence proves it was not designed by Royer. Criterion D, *"Notable work of a master builder, designer, architect or artist whose individual genius has influenced an area"*, clearly does not authorize the substitution of an entire firm for the individual architect identified by the applicant. There is no evidence presented by anyone that Joseph Royer designed the proposed house.

The applicant and City staff contend that the location of the proposed house at the intersection of Lincoln Avenue across from resident's halls and at the entry of a residential area mark the transition away from campus, and are therefore, are identifiable as an established and familiar location or

physical characteristic. ZTA does not dispute the location of the house or of what is around it. These same statements could be made about the string of other Greek houses and other buildings along and nearby Lincoln Avenue as well as other streets around the U of I campus. The evidence did not support that the location is unique to this particular property. The house sits almost a full lot off of Lincoln Avenue on Vermont Avenue. Since completion of the large addition in 1963, the original house built in 1928 has almost no exposure to Lincoln Avenue. Clearly from the Lincoln Avenue Corridor, which the applicant and City staff had suggested was important to this particular criterion, there is nothing especially identifiable of the west wall of the ZTA house.

ZTA urged the Commission to consider the lack of evidence presented on the various alleged criteria, and to deny the request to designate the ZTA house as a historic landmark.

Mr. Nemeth argued that the additions are very sympathetic to the structure, and they are well integrated into the existing architecture. The additions are old enough to be historic themselves. So it is an irrelevant point that because the building was not pristine back then, that it should be disqualified as a historic landmark now.

Regarding the economic benefits, he asked Mr. Deering if the economic benefits would be available to a potential buyer. Mr. Deering replied that it depends on how the property is used.

Mr. Nemeth stated that the most important fact to him was that the title blocks on the building plans were that of Joseph Royer's firm. This proves that the plans were designed by the Royer, Danley, Smith architectural firm. Usually when designing a building, it is a collaborative effort, so it is very rare that one architect designs it all. When looking at other designs by Joseph Royer, it is clear to him that Joseph Royer designed the ZTA house. Mr. Deering responded that the Ordinance does not allow the Historic Preservation Commission to attribute the design of a building to a firm. The language is specific.

Vice Chair Smith asked if there was anyone in the audience wishing to speak in favor or against the proposed nomination.

Nancy Edwards, Graduate student in architecture at the U of I, stated that there is no evidence that Joseph Royer did not design the existing house. Mr. Deering replied that the burden of proof is on the applicant.

Andy Brantner, neighbor, approached the Historic Preservation Commission. He asked what the future goals or plans of the property owner for the existing structure. Vice Chair Smith stated that they would ask the property owner's representative, Mr. Deering and allow him to answer the question if he desired to do so.

There were no further comments from members of the audience.

Mr. Engstrom talked about the economic benefits and explained that the Property Tax Freeze incentive only applies to owner-occupied structures. However, building permit fee waivers apply to any landmark. Also, the 20% rehab incentive tax credit is available for income generating properties, so if in the future the property becomes a rental property, the owner would qualify for this incentive.

Mr. Engstrom stated City staff wanted to show pictures that were not presented during the City staff report to the Commission. Mr. Garcia presented the pictures at this time.

Mr. Engstrom pointed out that for a landmark nomination, it must meet one or more of the criteria that was discussed. So, if the Commission finds that the ZTA house was not the work of a notable master builder or designer, then there are the other criteria that they can consider.

Mr. Nemeth summarized by saying that it is such a beautiful property and is important to the urban fabric. The additions are exceptionally well done. It would be a shame to not landmark the property. He believed that if the property is sold, then it would probably become an income producing property, so the new owner would be able to receive incentives for its landmark status.

Ms. Pagliuso asked Mr. Deering if ZTA had the structure built, do they have the plans and know who designed it. Mr. Deering replied that they have researched to try to find plans and all they have is what everyone else has.

Mr. Metcalf wondered if ZTA Fraternity Housing Corporation was a profit organization. Mr. Deering replied that they are a not-for-profit organization.

Mr. Metcalf asked if ZTA owned any other historically significant or designated properties. Mr. Deering said that they own one other historical property, which is why they are objecting to the proposed historic landmark nomination.

Mr. Metcalf questioned what ZTA's future plans are for the property. What is the likelihood of it returning to a sorority or fraternity? Mr. Deering stated that although ZTA desires to, it is not likely to be used as a sorority or fraternity because statistics show participation in these organizations is decreasing.

Ms. Pagliuso stated that she was surprised that ZTA does not find the house to be historically significant when Exhibit B of the information that was submitted by Mr. Deering talks about it being a palatial home and how the location is such a fortunate setting for an imposing house. Now, the Corporation wants the Historic Preservation Commission to disregard the article. She doesn't understand how the petitioner could not say it is significant when they have supported the significance in their own documentation. She hoped that someday it would become an income producing property so that the owners can use the 20% tax credit incentive. She stated that the applicant showed in his documentation how historic preservation is economically viable.

Mr. Metcalf stated that the 1963 addition is in harmony with the original structure. There is enough evidence clearly seen in the gable, Oriel window, trim around the windows, the stone work, and the stone coining.

Mr. Shepard stated that the proposed historic landmark application meets criterion A. It is the first fraternity/sorority house a person sees as they head north on Lincoln Avenue. Mr. Metcalf stated that it is part of the increasing trend of sorority houses at the time.

Mr. Shepard believed that the craftsmanship on the ZTA house is amazing. The integrity is still there. Therefore, it met criterion C.

With regards to criterion D, Mr. Shepard believed that the house was designed by Joseph Royer, himself. When you compare it to the Alpha Rho Chi House that Royer designed, it is very similar.

Again, the location meets criterion E. It is the first fraternity/sorority a person sees when going north on Lincoln Avenue.

He stated that he believed it is worthy of being landmarked.

Mr. Dossett thanked everyone for their time and contribution. He read the Ordinance with regards to criterion D. He noted that the Ordinance does not talk about an individual or a singular builder, designer or architect. So, it is inconsequential to him whether Joseph Royer or his firm designed the ZTA house.

He stated that it would have been nice to get the property owner's objections sooner so that he could have read it. Mr. Metcalf agreed with this comment.

He went on to talk about the Greek experience and the cultural experience to be in a sorority or fraternity house. It is a significant and impactful part of going to the U of I for a great number of students. The U of I has the most number of Greek houses in the country. If designating the house as a landmark helps to recognize the role and the influence that sororities and fraternities have had in our town, then he would applaud moving it forward.

Ms. Smith agreed with the City staff's analysis, findings and recommendations. It is an excellent example of the French Eclectic architectural style. The original building has an asymmetrical façade, the Norman tower with the high conical roof, the tall, steeply hip roofs, big massive, brick chimneys, the stucco wall cladding and half timbering, the decorative, skinteled brick, brick coins and multi-pane casement paned windows grouped in pairs. It has "picturesque details".

Mr. Dossett moved that the Historic Preservation Commission forward Case No. HP-2014-L-01 to the City Council with a recommendation for approval because the ZTA house conforms to criteria a, c, d and e of Section XII-5.C of the Urbana Zoning Ordinance in the following way:

Criteria a: The ZTA has significant values to the cultural and civic history of the U of I campus area. This is a unique Greek letter house in an especially visible area.

Criteria c: The property is an inherently valuable architectural style being a superior local example of the French Eclectic style with high integrity.

Criteria d: The house is a notable work of local notable architect, Joseph Royer.

Criteria e: The ZTA house is identifiable as an established and familiar visible feature of the Southeast campus area.

Mr. Metcalf seconded the motion.

Mr. Shepard moved a friendly amendment to include the application submittal date and public hearing dates in the motion. The motion will now read as such:

The Historic Preservation Commission forward the historic landmark application submitted on October 13, 2014 and assigned Case No. HP-2014-L-01 to the City Council with a recommendation for approval. After reviewing and discussion the case at the November 5, 2014 and December 3,

2014 meetings, the Commission believed the ZTA house conforms to criteria a, c, d and e of Section XII-5.C of the Urbana Zoning Ordinance in the following way:

Criteria a: The ZTA has significant values to the cultural and civic history of the U of I campus area. This is a unique Greek letter house in an especially visible area.

Criteria c: The property is an inherently valuable architectural style being a superior local example of the French Eclectic style with high integrity.

Criteria d: The house is a notable work of local notable architect, Joseph Royer.

Criteria e: The ZTA house is identifiable as an established and familiar visible feature of the Southeast campus area.

Roll call on the motion was as follows:

Mr. Dossett	-	Yes	Mr. Metcalf	-	Yes
Ms. Pagliuso	-	Yes	Mr. Seyler	-	Yes
Mr. Shepard	-	Yes	Mr. Smith	-	Yes
Ms. Novak	-	Abstain			

The motion carried by a vote of 6 ayes to 1 abstention. The case will be forwarded to City Council on December 15, 2014.

Ms. Smith closed the public hearing and relinquished the Chair to Alice Novak.

7. OLD BUSINESS

There was none.

8. NEW PUBLIC HEARINGS

There were none.

9. NEW BUSINESS

There was none.

10. MONITORING OF HISTORIC PROPERTIES

Ms. Pagliuso reported on the Joseph Royer house. It had been sold, and the new owners have been doing some landscaping. You can see the porch on the east side of the property.

11. STAFF REPORT

Mr. Garcia announced that City staff had applied for a Certified Local Government (CLG) Grant through the Illinois Historic Preservation Association to develop some interactive online maps of historic properties, districts, etc. City staff will keep the Commission updated.

12. STUDY SESSION

There was none.

13. ANNOUNCEMENTS

There were none.

14. ADJOURNMENT

With no further business, Ms. Smith moved that the meeting be adjourned. Mr. Shepard seconded the motion. With all Commission members in favor, the meeting adjourned at 8:46 p.m.

Submitted,

Jeff Engstrom, Interim Planning Manager
Historic Preservation Commission Recording Secretary