

MEMORANDUM

Date: October 15, 2018

From: David Lehman

To: Village of Oak Park Board of Trustees

RE: 224 S. Marion Street Certificate of Appropriateness

For the following reasons, the 224 S. Marion Street house should no longer be considered a structure that meaningfully contributes to the architectural character of the Ridgeland/Oak Park Historic District. Additionally, any remaining historic preservation benefits of the structure no longer outweigh the economic benefits of redeveloping this property with a new residential project.

- The 224 S. Marion house has been substantially altered physically and functionally over the years, and much of its original exterior character no longer remains. With these alterations, this house is a below average example of the more than 1,000 foursquares that currently exist in Oak Park.
- The Oak Park Historic Preservation Ordinance defines a historic district, in part, as an area "...possessing a significant concentration, linkage or continuity of properties..." However, the area surrounding 224 S. Marion consists of surface parking lots and just three other single family homes, none of which are used for residential purposes. Indeed, there is just one single family home used as a residence within 250 feet of 224 S. Marion, and it fronts on Home Avenue on the other side of Mills Park.
- The 2010 Village-wide Strategic Historic Preservation Plan states that balance must be achieved with new developments that do not sacrifice those buildings that would diminish Oak Park's identity, market position, and overall urban fabric. Given its physical and functional alterations, and its distance from any real single family neighborhood, redeveloping the 224 S. Marion property would elevate rather than diminish Oak Park's identity, market position and overall urban fabric.

The 2010 Village-wide Strategic Historic Preservation Plan clearly acknowledges that "Economic development in Oak Park over the next decade will be necessary to increase the local tax base to maintain the high level of municipal services expected by Oak Park's citizens and property owners." However, the economic development benefits of redeveloping 224 S. Marion were not considered by the Historic Preservation Commission. It is now up to the village board to balance the competing benefits of economic development (real estate and sales tax revenue) and historic preservation.

The village board, though, should also consider other benefits from redeveloping 224 S. Marion. A new residential project would provide much needed housing options for long-term Oak Park residents looking for single-level living in an elevator building. This project (at the southern gateway of the downtown commercial district) would also be consistent with the September 2014 Comprehensive Plan for Oak Park that promotes transit-oriented development, fosters more compact, walkable and vibrant neighborhoods, and promotes the redevelopment of underused and underdeveloped property.

The underlying issue in this certificate of appropriateness application is land value. The 224 S. Marion property is zoned DT-3 in the Pleasant Sub-District. According to the Oak Park Zoning Ordinance, this DT-3 zone allows for a 60 foot structure to be constructed virtually lot line to lot line. This means that a 40,000 square foot structure can be developed on the site, which is more than 13 times the density of the 3,000 square foot house now on the property.

This zoning classification is consistent with the 2005 Greater Downtown Master Plan, which encourages high density housing within a quarter mile (a five minute walk) of the train stations to promote transit and pedestrian development. Given its excellent location and intensive zoning, the pressure to redevelop this area will intensify as downtown Oak Park becomes a more desirable place to live. This also means that the value of the 224 S. Marion Street land as if vacant exceeds the value of the property as improved with the house.

Therefore, according to the Oak Park Historic Preservation Ordinance, this house qualifies for a demolition permit under the Procedures for Certificate of Economic Hardship (Article 7-9-14). A key factor for economic hardship in this ordinance is if there is "A substantial decrease in the fair market value of the property as a result of the denial of the certificate of appropriateness" (that would deny the demolition of the 224 S. Marion Street house and the subsequent redevelopment of the land).