

**Oak Park Historic Preservation Commission  
September 10, 2020 – DRAFT Meeting Minutes  
Remote Participation Meeting, 7:00 pm**

**Roll Call**

Present: Interim Chair Rebecca Houze and Commissioners Jennifer Bridge, Monique Chase, Lou Garapolo, David Sokol, and Noel Weidner  
Absent: Commissioner Carr  
Staff: Susie Trexler, Historic Preservation Urban Planner  
Attorney: Greg Smith, Klein, Thorpe & Jenkins

**Agenda Approval**

*Motion by Commissioner Sokol to approve the agenda. Second by Commissioner Weidner.  
Motion approved 6-0.*

**Non-Agenda Public Comment**

None

**Minutes**

*Motion by Commissioner Garapolo to approve the minutes for August 19, 2020, with the edits mentioned. Second by Commissioner Sokol. Motion approved 6-0.*

**Regular Agenda**

- A. HPC2020-31: 1024 Ontario St (Fun House Trust/Brita Pagels):** Certificates of Appropriateness to demolish chimney (Frank Lloyd Wright-Prairie School of Architecture Historic District).

Interim Chair Houze introduced the application. Planner Trexler gave an overview.

The applicant, Brita Pagels, was present. She said she is available for any questions.

*Motion by Commissioner Garapolo to open for discussion; Second by Commissioner Bridge.*

Commissioner Garapolo said repair is costly, the chimney doesn't have decorative elements, and it looks to be in poor repair, so he does not have any concerns with the proposal. Commissioner Sokol said it is not particularly visible from the street. He agreed it is not a major design element of the building and is in poor repair. Chair Houze agreed.

*Motion by Commissioner Bridge to approve the Certificate of Appropriateness for the removal of the chimney as described. Second by Commissioner Sokol. Motion approved 6-0.*

*AYE: Commissioner Bridge, Commissioner Chase, Commissioner Garapolo, Commissioner Sokol, Commissioner Weidner, and Interim Chair Houze*

*NAY: None*

- B. HPC2020-32: 819 Forest Ave (Meg and Jake Cappel):** Certificate of Appropriateness to build a second story addition (Frank Lloyd Wright-Prairie School of Architecture Historic District).

Interim Chair Houze introduced the application. Planner Trexler gave an overview.

Steve Ryniewicz, the architect, was present. He gave a summary of the project, explaining the location and design of the addition.

*Motion by Commissioner Sokol to open for discussion; Second by Commissioner Garapolo.*

Commissioner Garapolo said the ARC reviewed this project and the applicant responded to their recommendations. He said he has no further comments. Commissioner Weidner clarified the height of the addition in respect to the height of the existing dormer and said the east elevation looks tall on flat paper, but the height is less concerning with the 3D rendering. He said it looks great.

Chair Houze asked if an additional dormer mirroring the existing dormer would solve the space concern. Mr. Ryniewicz said the homeowners were looking for more additional space than dormers would provide. Chair Houze said they have approved bungalow additions in the past, particularly if there have been alterations. She expressed concern that an addition of this type makes it no longer a bungalow. She said she is worried about losing this housing type in the community.

*Motion by Commissioner Bridge to approve the Certificate of Appropriateness for the removal of the chimney as described. Second by Commissioner Sokol. Motion approved 6-0.*

*AYE: Commissioner Bridge, Commissioner Chase, Commissioner Garapolo, Commissioner Sokol, and Commissioner Weidner*

*NAY: Interim Chair Houze*

- C. HPC2020-17: 203 S Marion St (203 S. Marion Street Corporation):** Public Hearing on the Certificate of Appropriateness to demolish historic building and garage (Ridgeland-Oak Park Historic District).

Chair Houze opened the public hearing. Attorney Smith swore in those present who are not Commissioners and will be speaking on this item. Planner Trexler provided the staff report. She recommended that in addition to voting on the proposed demolition that the Commission discuss the historic integrity of the building and whether they agree with the listing of the building as contributing within the historic district.

Courtney Brower of Focus, David Mann of Booth Hansen, and Justin Pelej of Focus were present on behalf of the applicant. Ms. Brower introduced Focus and David Mann introduced Booth Hansen. Ms. Brower noted that the building is listed as contributing within the historic district but is not included in the list of "significant" buildings in the historic district report. She provided a brief history of the building, highlighting the non-historic additions added in 1957. Mr. Mann gave additional details about the architectural history of the building. He said that the architectural character of the 1957 additions is not in-keeping with the style of the original house and wrap around much of the historic building. He said the entrance on the north also appears to have been added at some point as it is not visible in the 1908 Sanborn map. Mr. Mann described some of the interiors. Mr. Pelej said the building was modified and functionally altered at the interior to

accommodate the funeral home use. Mr. Pelej said the amount of money to incorporate the building into a new development or new use would not be feasible. He gave the example of renovating it into an office space and said the potential rents would not cover the renovations required. He addressed the stigma of the building as a funeral home and said they bring negative connotations. Mr. Mann addressed some of the Secretary of the Interior's Guidelines as they apply to this project. He noted that not a lot of the historic features remain and their conclusion is that due to the substantial alterations, it no longer contributes to the historic district.

Staff read the list of exhibits into evidence.

Chair Houze asked if any members of the public would like to cross-examine at this time. Doug Gilbert introduced himself and said he is also representing the Pleasant Maple Condo Association. He noted that historic east wall is intact on the interior and asked about the south wall. Mr. Mann said most of the wall appears to be intact but has been covered by multiple layers. He said there is evidence of one of the bays coming down to the first floor. Mr. Gilbert asked about the mentioned stigma of funeral homes and asked about their research on this. He asked if the gut the interior and create new interiors, would that help mitigate a potential stigma. Mr. Pelej said you can put enough money into any project to work around issues such as this one, but the reality is that there are other office spaces in this area that do not require that investment. He said it is a great disadvantage. He said they have not converted a funeral home previously, but in projects abutting cemeteries they have had issues. He said a lot of this is anecdotal but the price is not reasonable. Mr. Gilbert suggested marketing techniques could also help. Mr. Pelej said there are risks. Some uses may not care about it being a funeral home but are not their preferred uses.

Chair Houze invited interested citizens to speak.

Mr. Gilbert said he also submitted a letter. He said the building has sustained a number of alterations and additions of the years. He reminded the Commission that as it is currently listed as a contributing structure, the burden of proof is on the applicant to show that it is actually not contributing. He said the applicant indicated that the area has changed but he believes the building represents the district, which itself illustrates the growth of the neighborhood historically. This neighborhood shows that full totality of evolution in that there are still some single-family residences, there are some large apartment buildings, and there are commercial buildings. This building is a microcosm of the district. He said he understands the stigma but that the potential for reuse in a larger scale development should continue to be pursued. He noted that several similar projects have been done in Oak Park.

Doug Varn he is on the board of the Maple Pleasant Condominium, which borders the site across the alley. He said their main concern is retaining the character of the neighborhood. He said even though this building is not the same as when it was built, it helps define the character of the neighborhood.

Chair Houze said they have also received written public comments, which have been shared with the Commission. She asked staff to read a reasonable part of the letters into the record. Planner Trexler said 18 letters were received in opposition to the demolition and none were received in favor. She read the names and excerpts from the 18 letters into the record. She noted that many of the letters address a potential future building on this site but this would be part of a future review.

Commissioner Weidner asked for clarification whether the windows on the south elevation are just boarded up or actually gone. Mr. Mann said some of the windows are boarded up. He said on the second floor one appears to be boarded up but still there, one is boarded up but appears to be

removed, and they couldn't see anything on the first floor. Commissioner Weidner said it is not 100% clear and there could be historic fabric there. He said as far as context, the view provided by the applicant focused on larger buildings, but there are quite a few single-family houses in the area including one across the street and the National Historic Landmark, Pleasant Home. Mr. Pelej said the view they showed was just because of the addition being primarily on the south side.

Commissioner Garapolo asked what the proposal would be, specifically, whether the existing building could be incorporated. Mr. Mann said they are looking at a new development. Their understanding is that if demolition is approved, they would come back with a proposed design for a new building. He said the residence takes up half the site. Mr. Pelej said he has seen developments around historic houses and they often include a tower to offset the cost of renovation. He said they feel the house is not in good enough condition to warrant that discussion. Commissioner Garapolo asked about the scale of a proposed development. Mr. Mann said they are concerned about the scale relative to context. They spend a lot of time analyzing street conditions and the scale of nearby buildings. The development would maintain the scale and qualities existing. Mr. Pelej said this is a process, and the process will likely help determine the scale as well.

Chair Houze asked for clarification about the 1920 alterations by E. E. Roberts and why the applicant noted that they are no longer intact. Ms. Brower said not a lot of the historic building is intact on the interior. Mr. Mann said they have not found any record of exact what Roberts did. Planner Trexler said the original permit from the E. E. Roberts alterations is in the report and it indicates interior alterations only.

Chair Houze asked if Mr. Gilbert had additional information about Mrs. Rogers and the status of the building as a social center in Oak Park. Mr. Gilbert said his information is the same as that which the Historical Society provided to the applicant and the Commission but it did appear from that research that the Rogers were a fairly prominent social family in Oak Park.

Chair Houze asked if the applicant would like to provide a rebuttal. Mr. Pelej said regarding the historic character, their goal is not to be disrupters. He said they are listening and taking this seriously and they appreciate the Commission's time. Mr. Mann said that he doesn't know what qualifies someone as historically prominent and he's not sure of the criteria so he will leave that to the Commission.

Chair Houze began the deliberation phase of the hearing.

Commissioner Bridge said she has not seen a case made that the structure should be reclassified as non-contributing. She said she thinks it is contributing. Commissioner Weidner agreed and said it retains its historic integrity. He said if the additions were removed and the applicant built on the rest of the lot, that would be more in-keeping with the Guidelines. He said the burden of proof has not been met.

Commissioner Garapolo agreed and said he is not convinced that a thorough investigation was made to reuse the existing building. This was mentioned but not attached to dollars. He said he is not convinced that anyone will ever know that this was a funeral home if it is renovated in a creative what for offices or some other use. Commissioner Chase said there is not enough evidence that some of the original building is still existing under the additions.

Commissioner Sokol said there has not been enough thorough exploration of what original fabric is still there and what creative reuses could be done. He said there are quite a few examples of this nearby, mostly residential, all compatible enough to get comparatively easy approval. He said there

is substantial space and a tremendous opportunity here. He said the burden of proof has not been given, even in response to the questions about the windows. Reuse doesn't seem to have been seriously considered.

Chair Houze agreed. She said the renovations had been made prior to the historic district listing and it was listed as contributing at that time, so she doesn't see why it wouldn't continue to be contributing. She said if you want down that block, there are several historic residences that serve as anchors and illustrate the historical development of this area. She said 203 S Marion in particular serves as an anchor at the end of its block. 224 S Marion across the other street is another anchor. They compliment the commercial buildings to the north and the east. She said the building has been a social center to the Village even before it was sold to Drechsler and it continued to be a social center as a funeral home. She noted that while the changes were made after, the building was sold to Drechsler within the period of significance.

*Motion by Commissioner Bridge to approve the Certificate of Appropriateness for demolition of the building and garage at 203 S Marion St. Second by Commissioner Weidner. Motion denied 6-0.*

*AYE: None*

*NAY: Commissioner Bridge, Commissioner Chase, Commissioner Garapolo, Commissioner Sokol, Commissioner Weidner, and Chair Houze*

Planner Trexler explained the next steps at the request of Chair Houze.

*Motion by Commissioner Sokol to approve the draft resolution as finalized by the Chair, attorney, and staff. Second by Commissioner Weidner. Motion approved 6-0.*

*AYE: Commissioner Bridge, Commissioner Chase, Commissioner Garapolo, Commissioner Sokol, Commissioner Weidner, and Chair Houze*

*NAY: None*

**D. HPC2020-29:1118 Wenonah Ave (Floyd Mohler):** Certificate of Appropriateness to demolish garage and build a new garage (Gunderson Historic District).

Interim Chair Houze introduced the application. Planner Trexler gave an overview.

*Motion by Commissioner Sokol to open for discussion. Second by Commissioner Chase.*

Commissioner Weidner said he drove down the alley and it has a lot of historic character. He said he understands the engineers report but doesn't agree with the conclusion. He felt the roof and concrete could be repaired. He said there is a space for a parking pad next to the garage. He said another garage or carport could be another, reversible solution.

Chair Houze said she agrees that it could be repaired and this is recommended by the Guidelines. However, it is a garage that is not very visible from the street. She said she doesn't know how the Commission has thought about alleys in the past. Planner Trexler clarified that "visible from the street" is defined as from the street or sidewalk. Anything directly behind a house is generally not considered visible from the street. This garage projects to the south of the house so is considered visible. Chair Houze said it is minimally visible.

Commissioner Garapolo said the ARC was not convinced that repair is impossible. They felt it would be better if it came to the Commission. Commissioner Weidner said the applicant has not provided costs for repair. Commissioner Sokol said that is a key point. He cannot vote to demolish without a consideration of a cost of repair. An equally strong statement from a credible source should be made for repair. Commissioner Weidner said there is a parking pad and driveway in front of the house. He asked staff to ask the applicant to consider a carport or parking pad adjacent to the garage. Planner Trexler said she did recommend an addition as it could be not visible from the street. Commissioner Bridge said cost estimates of repair are also asked for roofs and they should be provided in this case.

The Commission discussed the path forward. Several commissioners said they might reconsider the item if the applicant brought forward cost estimates for repair.

The Commission took no action on the item.

### **OTHER BUSINESS**

### **ADJOURN**

*Motion by Commissioner Sokol to adjourn; Second by Commissioner Garapolo. Motion approved 6-0.*

*AYE: Commissioner Bridge, Commissioner Chase, Commissioner Garapolo, Commissioner Weidner, and Interim Chair Houze*

*NAY: None*

The meeting adjourned at 10:00PM.

Minutes prepared by Susie Trexler, Historic Preservation Urban Planner.