



## Agenda Item Summary

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### **Submitted By**

Rebecca Houze, Interim Historic Preservation Chair, through Tammie Grossman, Director, Development Customer Services

### **Reviewed By**

LKS

### **Agenda Item Title**

**Deny the Appeal and Concur with the Historic Preservation Commission and Adopt An Ordinance Denying a Certificate of Appropriateness for the Demolition of a Contributing Residential Structure and Garage within the Ridgeland-Oak Park Historic District located at 203 S. Marion Street**

### **Overview**

This is the applicant's appeal of the decision of the Historic Preservation Commission's denial of a Certificate of Appropriateness to Focus Acquisition Company LLC, applicant for 203 S. Marion St., as they found that demolition of the structure at 203 S. Marion St. (commonly known as the Dreschler, Brown and Williams Funeral Home) does not comply with the Historic Preservation Ordinance. Staff does not agree with the Historic Preservation Commission's decision. Per the Historic Preservation Ordinance, upon the denial of a Certificate of Appropriateness by the Historic Preservation Commission, an applicant may stop the process, appeal the decision to the Village Board within 15 days, or request a Certificate of Economic Hardship (7-9-13H).

### **Recommendation**

Deny the applicant's appeal and concur with the Historic Preservation Commission's decision. Demolition of this historic property would have a negative effect on the historic, aesthetic, and architectural value and significance of the Ridgeland-Oak Park Historic District. Retaining historic properties within the historic districts helps to serve the general purposes of the Historic Preservation Ordinance to conserve and improve the value of properties designated within historic districts; enhance attractiveness of the Village to homeowners, visitors, tourists, and shoppers and, thereby, supporting business and commerce in the Village; foster civic pride in the accomplishments of the past as manifested in properties; and foster and encourage preservation and, thereby, prevent deterioration, dilapidation, and blight.

### **Staff Recommendation**

Staff recommends acceptance of the applicant's appeal. Staff believes the historic integrity of the subject building has been compromised and is no longer a contributing structure based on the noted physical changes to the building's exterior identified in this agenda item which includes, in 1928, what was originally a barn was converted into a garage and in 1957 a large, one-story, brick addition and alterations were completed. While Village staff supports the Historic Preservation Commission acknowledging the importance of retaining

historic resources, in this case we believe that it is unlikely that given the history of the building use and the changes to the building it will be adapted for another use.

### **Fiscal Impact**

N/A.

### **Background**

#### **The Ridgeland-Oak Park Historic District**

The subject property has two levels of historic preservation designation, both of which contribute to the Ridgeland-Oak Park Historic Preservation District:

1. National Register of Historic Places (National designation)
2. Oak Park Historic Preservation Ordinance (Local designation)

The property at 203 S. Marion St. was recorded as a Contributing Resource in the original 1983 Ridgeland-Oak Park Historic District National Register nomination. The Ridgeland-Oak Park Historic District was designated locally by the Village of Oak Park in 1994 (7-9-4A). The 1983 NRHP nomination was prepared in part by the Historic Preservation Commission (Commission) and was discussed at Commission meetings as early as 1976. To qualify for the NRHP, a district must retain integrity and show association with historic events, patterns in history, or lives of significant people; or represent a building type or architects; or have the potential to yield important information about history or prehistory. In an NRHP-listed Historic District, most buildings contribute to the significance of the district. These buildings are referred to as Contributing Resources and they help retain the historic integrity of the neighborhood and district. Non-Contributing Resources are primarily buildings in the district that are less than 50 years old or have been significantly altered in the recent past and therefore no longer retain integrity.

The Ridgeland-Oak Park Historic District illustrates a regional and national shift in both architecture and suburban development, including the major re-orientation of domestic architectural from the 19<sup>th</sup> century eclecticism to 20<sup>th</sup> century modernism, and community planning meant to incorporate a greater variety of building types into what was originally a single-family dwelling setting. The Historic District's important role in suburban development stems largely from its integration of single-family housing with apartment and commercial buildings. The Village Board's first building ordinance, adopted in 1902, reflects a local concern about the increase in apartment building construction at the turn of the century. This building ordinance gave specifications for maximum dimensions, access to light, and safety protocols. Meanwhile, prominent local architects such as E. E. Roberts developed design solutions for the growing neighborhood including adapting existing single-family buildings into multi-family buildings; designing duplexes; and designing apartment buildings that met the pre-existing building lines on the block, offered open porches for individual apartments, and provided both light and green space.

#### **History and Significance of 203 S. Marion St.**

203 S. Marion St. (originally 203 Wisconsin Ave) was built in 1881 by James Campbell Rogers (1841-1927). Rogers, was a prominent early Oak Park resident, a grain merchant, and a member of the Chicago Board of Trade for fifty years. Rogers notably gifted a Frank Lloyd Wright house, the Frank Thomas House (210 Forest

Ave, built in 1901), to his daughter and her husband as a wedding gift. The Rogers homestead (203 S. Marion St.) was noted in Mrs. Rogers' obituary as a center of social life in the village. In 1920, the Rogers had 203 S. Marion St. converted into two apartments by prominent local architect E. E. Roberts. The changes made by Roberts likely focused on the interior.

203 S. Marion St. was sold to Earl Drechsler in ca. 1926. Drechsler owned a funeral home business that was founded in 1880 and bought out by his father, Charles Drechsler, in 1894. The Drechsler Funeral Home business, which was previously located in the E. E. Roberts designed Drechsler Building at 1112 Lake St (still extant), was relocated to 203 S. Marion St. in 1933. What was originally a barn was converted into a garage in 1928. A large, one-story, brick addition and alterations were completed in 1957 by architect John Barr Todd for Earl A. Drechsler.

203 S. Marion St. contributes to the story of the historic district on multiple levels: it is an example of the district's early single-family architecture and it embodies the growth and change of the district from a largely single-family neighborhood to a neighborhood noted for its diversity of building types. The building's conversion from a single-family dwelling to apartments by prominent local architect E. E. Roberts was reflective of the growth and change of the neighborhood as a whole around the turn of the century.

#### Historic Preservation Ordinance Requirements

In order to seek demolition of a contributing resource within a designated historic district in Oak Park, the applicant must receive an approved Certificate of Appropriateness or Certificate of Economic Hardship from the Historic Preservation Commission (7-9-9A.3). The Historic Preservation Ordinance states that the United States Secretary of the Interior's Standards and the Commission's Architectural Review Guidelines shall be used when considering whether a Certificate of Appropriateness for demolition of a contributing resource should be granted (7-9-12B).

In most cases, Certificates of Appropriateness are for demolition of portions of a building (for example, demolition of a portion of wall to add a rear addition or basement egress window), generally meet the Architectural Review Guidelines, and are approved by the Historic Preservation Commission. However, demolition of an entire contributing building does not meet the Architectural Review Guidelines or the Secretary of the Interior's Standards. Based on the Ordinance, if the Commission finds that the proposed work does not meet the established criteria and that the demolition will adversely affect the historic, aesthetic, or architectural character or value of the historic district, it shall take no action (7-9-13F). The applicant may then request a hearing. Upon the denial of a Certificate of Appropriateness, an applicant may stop the process, appeal the decision to the Village Board within 15 days, or request a Certificate of Economic Hardship (7-9-13H).

Alternatively, the applicant may request re-evaluation of the status of the building as a contributing resource within the historic district. As the district is listed on the National Register of Historic Places, an evaluation of this type would be conducted by the Illinois State Historic Preservation Office and the National Park Service. Such an evaluation would require feedback from the Historic Preservation Commission. In order to be reclassified as a non-contributing resource, it must be found that the building does not contribute to the significance of the district. Once a property has been determined to be a non-contributing resource, it can be altered or demolished without review or approval by the Historic Preservation Commission. The applicant is

aware of the re-evaluation process.

### Certificates of Appropriateness History

The applicant submitted a Certificate of Appropriateness (COA) application to demolish the building at 203 S. Marion St. on May 19, 2020. The COA was heard at the June 17, 2020 meeting, at which the Commission took no action. The applicant requested a public hearing on June 19, 2020. The public hearing was held on September 10, 2020. See Commission Action below.

### Alternatives

1. Reverse the Historic Preservation Commission's resolution denying a Certificate of Appropriateness to the applicant. This would likely result in the demolition of the historic building at 203 S. Marion St. Provided the structures are allowed to be demolished, the Zoning Ordinance would allow this site located within the Downtown DT-3 Pleasant Sub District to be developed with a 5 story (60-foot-tall) mixed-use (residential above the first floor) development lot line to lot line. If any zoning relief is sought, a Planned Development application and public hearing process will be required.
2. Modify the Historic Preservation Commission's resolution denying a Certificate of Appropriateness to the applicant. While this is an option based on the Historic Preservation Ordinance, due to the nature of the project, modification as to allow a portion of the project or alternate of the project may not be feasible.

### Previous Board Action

N/A.

### Citizen Advisory Commission Action

The applicant submitted a Certificate of Appropriateness (COA) application to demolish the building at 203 S. Marion St. on May 19, 2020. The COA was heard at the June 17, 2020 meeting, at which the Commission took no action. The applicant requested a public hearing on June 19, 2020. The public hearing was held on September 10, 2020. The Commission adopted a resolution denying the COA on the same day. On September 15, 2020, the applicant requested an appeal to the Village Board.

Prior to the hearing, the Commission received 18 letters from the public in opposition to demolition and zero letters in support. At the hearing, two members of the public spoke in opposition to the demolition. The Commission adopted a resolution denying the COA on the same day as the hearing. The Commission felt that a sufficient case was not made to determine the building as non-contributing. Commissioners stated that the building retains its historic integrity, the non-historic alterations could be removed, and creative reuses are possible. The Commission felt that the applicant did not thoroughly investigate reuse options. Following denial of the COA, the applicant was informed that they may stop the process, appeal the decision to the Village Board within 15 days, or request a Certificate of Economic Hardship. On September 15, 2020, the applicant requested an appeal to the Village Board.

The Historic Preservation Commission Hearing is available online here:

[https://oak-park.granicus.com/MediaPlayer.php?view\\_id=3&clip\\_id=1286](https://oak-park.granicus.com/MediaPlayer.php?view_id=3&clip_id=1286)

### Anticipated Future Actions/Commitments

N/A.

**Intergovernmental Cooperation Opportunities**

Historic Preservation matters are unique to Village government within the corporate limits of Oak Park and therefore, intergovernmental cooperation opportunities do not exist.