

VILLAGE OF RIVER FOREST
Historic Preservation Commission Special Meeting
December 5, 2017

I. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 7:00 p.m. Upon roll call, the following persons were:

Present: David Franek, Michael Pritz, Brian Prestes, Tom Zurowski, Al Popowits, Carla Graham-White, David Raino-Ogden

II. PUBLIC COMMENT

None.

III. PUBLIC HEARING – Application #17-01 - Certificate of Appropriateness application for the DEMOLITION of the single family residence located at 747 William Street, River Forest, IL, a structure listed on the Village survey of architecturally or historically significant properties.

Chairman Zurowski stated the Commission is meeting to consider the approval or denial of a Certificate of Appropriateness for the demolition of 747 William. The Chairman stated that there will be an opportunity for public testimony and that the Applicant will have a chance to speak first and that everyone may ask questions.

Chairman Zurowski entered a letter into the record from an architectural historian named Mr. Storrer, a letter from Harry Robinson, who is believed to be related to the original architect, a petition from the 700 block of William, an ad from Garden Revolution, a couple of newspaper articles, an article from the Chicago Tribune, and an article from the Wednesday Journal called Right of the People. He stated that the Commission also has before it a number of books, being the Anonymous Franky Lloyd Wright, Storrer with Johnson and Watts, also the Life and Work of Harry Franklin Robinson, by James Alexander Robinson.

Those wishing to speak at the meeting were sworn-in.

Chairman Zurowski asked for an explanation of the context around the application. It was explained that the Commission's ordinance details the options before them. The Commission may issue the Certificate of Appropriateness, the Commission may choose to withhold the certificate and issue a demolition delay of 6 months, from the October 25, 2017 application date, or may issue a Certificate of Appropriateness with conditions that would allow for a lesser demolition delay.

The Applicant, Robert Sarvis, the owner of 747 William Street spoke first. He is planning to demolish the property. The property is in severe disrepair. To renovate it, is not an option for him. It's beyond repair and homes have changed in how they've been designed since 1913. He believes this home is too far gone to save.

Chairman Zurowski allowed those present to question the Applicant.

Jan Dressel, 750 Bonnie Brae, asked why the Applicant purchased the home if it was beyond repair. Jean suggested that the Applicant bought the home to tear it down. She asked if he knew it was in bad condition before he bought it. The Applicant said he knew its condition but it turned out to be much worse than he originally thought.

Markie Reitz, local resident, asked the Applicant if he was still planning on providing a drawing that reflected what he would build in place of the home. The Applicant stated he would build a home incorporating Prairie-style influences. Markie said the Applicant promised to provide drawings, and the Applicant denied that he ever made such a promise.

Vicki Witt, local resident, asked the Applicant for drawings again. The Applicant stated that he is trying to build something that fits in with the other Prairie-style homes in the area. Vicki again asked for a drawing. The Applicant agreed that he would see how this meeting went then discuss the issue of drawings.

The Chairman asked for comments from the public.

Tom Bierzychudek, 754 William, said it was widely acknowledged that there are 24 of these style homes built by Henry Hogan on the 700 block of William in River Forest. He stated that tonight's discussion was not about the destruction of one home, but of the collection of the 24 homes. He stated that tonight was about setting a precedent for future home buyers in River Forest. He asked that this demolition permit be denied.

Sue Blaine, 803 Monroe, said she's opposed to the demolition of the home. She stated that the block is a unique collection of homes not found anywhere else. She stated there are alternatives to demolition, such as renovating the home. She provided a variety of proposed updates that could be made within the Commissions' ordinance. She stated the home was an integral part of the block.

Pat Heiman, 714 William, addressed comments made in previous sessions. To comments made about buyers looking for modern amenities in homes, she adds they are also looking for character and history. She refers to a home that was recently renovated without tearing down the home. She says cultural heritage of River Forest is tied to these homes.

Mark Witt, 710 William, asked a question to the Commission. He asked if the Commission had agreed to discuss the amount of money it would take to renovate the home. The Commission said they had a drawing of a possible way to add on to the house with figures.

Mark Zinni, former resident of River Forest and architect, in his experience, he truly believes this home could be renovated and be profitable for the community. He encourages this and offers to give some free time to help the Applicant and his architects with the renovation.

Joe Bobak, 751 William, states he's conflicted between demolishing and preserving the home. He proposes saving the house from demolition by filing a lawsuit claiming their block is a historically significant block.

Bill McDonald, 803 Bonnie Brae, opposes demolition of the home because of the consistency of the design on the block.

John McDonnell, 738 William, opposes demolition because he just moved onto the block and one of the things that encouraged him to buy a home on the block was the cohesion of the design on the block.

Tony Leg, 722 William, opposes demolition because losing the house would be detrimental to everyone on the block through his involvement with the Preservation Trust.

Jan Saeger, 435 William, quotes a survey that properties have in the past have been rehabbed and redone to preserve the home. She references other homes that are also on the market that may be threatened with demolition. She hopes the owner agrees to rehab the home with guidance from the Commission.

Jan Dressel, 750 Bonnie Brae, the President of the Historical Society, spoke of a firehouse that was in a bad state and they agreed to restore it. They have worked on it for 5 years and received over a million dollars for renovation costs. She states that at some point, everyone must put their foot down and ask, "Is this worth saving?" She states that this building is special because it's on a special street. She, as a citizen, is taking a stand.

Bill McNeil, 731 William, would like to see the house stay in its style, but he states that he house is coming down one way or another, even if it's delayed 3 or 6 months.

Lindsay Rask, 742 William, is opposed to the demolition but she fully realizes that there may not be much everyone can do to stop the demolition now or later.

Ron Hines, 714 William, states the only thing they can really do is delay the demolition. He states the Applicant has the ability to stop the demolition.

Fred Hess Jr., formally of 747 William, 407 Franklin, insists renovation can be done but he hasn't seen the figures for either demolition or renovation. He notes that other houses on the block have been renovated. He also quotes a news story from Hinsdale about properties that cannot afford their property taxes and he wouldn't want to see this happen in his neighborhood.

Ms. Ambrosino, 755 William, notes the specialness of the block. She admits the home needs repairs but she states that her home needed major repairs as well.

Chairman Zurowski then closed public comment and opened up discussion and deliberation by the Commission.

IV. DISCUSSION AND DELIBERATION

Commissioner Raino-Ogden discussed a sketch from a residential architect as example of the possibilities that exist for the home. He encouraged the Applicant to take a look at the preservationist response.

The Applicant stated he did see the sketches but still has issues with the structural issues. He insisted the sketches only address the design issues, rather than the substantial structural issues.

Commissioner Raino-Ogden stated that the structural issues are not beyond repair in that house.

Commissioner Popowits stated that there is no angel that will come down and save this property. He commended the Applicant for his forthrightness and his honesty in this process. He stated that if River Forest actually values historic properties, the Village needs to come up with procedures for valuing the homes because these issues will come up again. He stated that the Village needs to put money where their mouths are.

Commissioner Prestes stated they are steward of the Commission ordinance that outlines and defines the parameters of their roles. He stated the issue is narrow: whether to authorize or delay the demolition of the property. He stated that the question becomes, "Is it appropriate to preserve this property?" He stated they have heard all the testimony and evidence of successful renovations that were previously thought to be too far beyond repair. He believed they ought to issue a delay to the demolition.

Commissioner Franek noted the challenges with renovating old, unique homes. He noted other types of properties that had challenges and notes that they were able to be restored and repaired. He doesn't believe the entire structure should be demolished because renovation has been able to be achieved before.

Commissioner Graham-White questioned why the Applicant purchased a property located on a significantly historic block when there were many other cheaper properties available on the market. She hopes the Commission votes to delay the demolition and find another solution, perhaps another buyer to obtain the property and finance the renovation. She believes the Applicant won't just destroy one home, but 24 architecturally significant homes.

Commissioner Raino-Ogden noted that this Prairie-style block is unique in the neighborhood. He noted the audacity of the Applicant for wanting to tear this home down.

Commissioner Pritz noted that they cannot stop the demolition of the home even though it pains him and the rest of the Commission to watch this home get demolished. He noted they can't stop the Applicant from demolishing the house. He notes two options: deny the Certificate, allowing for a six month demolition delay, or reach an agreement, for example that the Applicant meets some of the requirements proposed by the renovation architects to meet the character of the neighborhood. If the Commission does not vote for an agreement, they leave the home open to being demolished.

Chairman Zurowski stated the purpose of the 6 month delay is to seek creative options to save the home. He wants to find a solution to satisfy 95% of the people who showed up at the meeting tonight. He is unsure if they are ready to vote on this.

Jan Dressel, 750 Bonnie Brae, stated that the Oak Park Historic Preservation Commission has teeth and that this would never happen in Oak Park. She states that the Commission needs to have power over this matter.

Tom Bierzychudek, 754 William, asked if the Applicant is open to reselling the house. The Applicant responded that he is open to reselling the home.

Pat Magner, architect for the Applicant, has noted that he has redone homes in River Forest and Oak Park that feel exactly like the homes in the neighborhood without losing character.

Tom Bierzychudek, 754 William, stated they are still destroying a collection of homes.

Village Attorney, Michael Marrs, was asked how a negotiation with the Applicant would take place. The Village Attorney discusses the options of a collaborative process. The attorney stated that the Commission may shorten the delay period if they agree to certain conditions with the Applicant. These conditions need to be voted on and approved in an open meeting. The attorney says the Applicant would be bound by these conditions until they are met and the delay period could be shortened.

Markie Reitz, local resident, asked whether the conditions of demolition can be made to include new building materials of stucco and wood. A Commissioner stated that they could ask the Applicant if those materials be used but he would have to agree to that. Ms. Reitz stated that the Applicant said he would never use those materials and would be in favor of better materials.

The Applicant stated that he never said he would not use those materials.

Pat Magner, architect for the Applicant, agreed to submit the addresses of the homes he built in River Forest and Oak Park if the Commission asked him to. This way, the residents could see the work he's done to see how they feel exactly like the originally built homes.

Vicki Witt, local resident, pleaded with the Applicant to not demolish the home. She insisted he would be a hero in the community to set such a precedent.

Commissioner Popowits moved to close the public hearing. Commissioner Pritz member seconded the motion. A vote was held to close the public hearing.

Ayes: Pritz, Popowits,
Nayes: Franek, Prestes, Zurowski, Graham-White, Raino-Ogden

Motion failed.

V. DECISION REGARDING CERTIFICATE OF APPROPRIATENESS

There was a discussion of possible negotiation of conditional requirements to be met in 3 months.

The Applicant was asked if he would be willing to put the property on the market and if he could sell it in 3 months. The Applicant said he is willing to resell if someone wants to negotiate, but he will not put it on the market.

A local resident noted again that the property is salvageable.

The Applicant insisted that they are losing money if the Commission holds the demolition up for 6 months.

Jan Dressel, 750 Bonnie Brae, said the Applicant's attitude is not one with the community.

Commissioner Prestes moved to Continue the Public Hearing. Commission Raino-Ogden seconded the motion. A vote was held to continue the public hearing.

Ayes: Pritz, Popowits, Franek, Prestes, Zurowski, Graham-White, Raino-Ogden

Nayes: None

Motion passed.

VI. OTHER BUSINESS

No other business was discussed.

VII. ADJOURNMENT

It was moved and seconded to adjourn the meeting of the Commission, with the Commission meeting next on December 13, 2017 at 7:00 p.m. at the Village Hall, River Forest, Illinois for the Commission to deliberate and make a decision on the Certificate of Appropriateness. The motion passed and the meeting was adjourned at 8:46 p.m.