

Rockford Historic Preservation Commission

2006 Annual Report

In addition to carrying out its normal review responsibilities during 2006, Rockford's Historic Preservation Commission expanded efforts to educate and inform not only the citizens of Rockford of the issues it faces, but also its own members. Commission activities included the following during the past year:

- ♦ Review of 29 requests for Certificates of Appropriateness;
- ♦ Review of one nomination to the National Register of Historic Places;
- ♦ Setting up a display for National Preservation Month in the lobby of City Hall;
- ♦ Plans to offer a class to local realtors on the ins and outs of dealing with historic properties;
- ♦ Publication of its first newsletter; and
- ♦ Meeting with the Winnebago County Health Department's Lead Inspector.

Here in more detail is our year in review.

Cases Reviewed

Rockford's Historic Preservation Ordinance requires that a Certificate of Appropriateness (COA) be issued by the Preservation Commission before any changes may be made to the exterior of locally designated properties. All 29 applications for Certificates in 2006 were approved. These included 9 for properties in Brown's Hills/Knightsville, 12 in Haight Village, 3 in Indian Terrace and 5 for individual landmark properties.

813 North Main Street While most requests are for fairly mundane things such as fences or new windows, the Commission deals with unique properties from time to time as well. One of the first in 2006 was rehabilitation of the boathouse at the Burpee Museum of Natural History. The structure, which is used as an educational facility, was in need of repairs of its exterior surfaces. This included refinishing these surfaces, re-stuccoing cement plaster on inset panels, and repainting the concrete surfaces. The final result was an added plus for the Museum and Rockford's riverfront.



307 Grove Street A problem facing virtually every historic preservation organization is that of lead paint. In April, RHPC received an application to replace the windows in this house with vinyl ones because of lead paint. While the house is not one of Haight Village's exotic Victorians, it is nearly 100 years old, having been built around 1910. However, because the project was being paid for through the Human Services Department, funds were limited. After considerable discussion, the Commission agreed to allow the vinyl replacements as long as they matched the size of the originals

and included matching mullions. As a follow-up to this, the Commission invited Jim Hilliger, the Lead Inspector for the Winnebago County Health Department, to explain how they determine when windows need to be replaced and why they do not consider repair a viable option. Mr. Hilliger attended a subsequent meeting and explained the process they go through in determining lead levels and the source of the lead. He also explained that with windows, the most significant difficulty stems from movable parts and the dust they create. It is his opinion that while windows can be scraped and cleaned to an acceptable degree, the dust will return because of those movable parts.



401 North Main Street In August, the Park District submitted a proposal for repair of the gazebo in Beattie Park. This involved repairing or replacing columns, depending on cost; installing new light fixtures; and painting the entire structure. It also included removing plumbing waste vent stacks that led to restrooms that had been below grade as part of the initial structure, something that most people don't know even existed. This icon of downtown Rockford has since been restored.

Local Designations

The Commission did not receive any applications for new local landmarks or historic districts during the past year. However, it did receive a request for preliminary evaluation of a property for landmark designation. This was the house at 1617 South 5th Street which was the home of Alfred and Ella Peterson Anderson. The request came from descendents of the Andersons by way of the Alfred and Ella Peterson Anderson Family Foundation. According to the letter we received from the Foundation, the house was built between 1875 and 1890 and is in its original condition. Census records from 1900 show that the Andersons lived there at that time, and that P. A. Peterson and his mother, Mary Peterson, lived there as well. The letter also alluded to two projects that may endanger the house, the planned improvements to Kishwaukee Street and the planned recreation path connecting various areas.

The letter from the Foundation included a reference to two of the criteria listed in Rockford's ordinance as being qualification for designation as a landmark – being the property most closely associated with the life or activities of a major historic person, and being a current or formal focal point of life in the City of Rockford. After considerable discussion, the consensus of Commission members was that they would not be comfortable in pursuing this designation without more definitive information about the house, especially any connection it may have had with P. A. Peterson. This information was relayed to the Foundation. The individual there said they would consider their options. No application has been forthcoming as of yet.

Surveys

Commission staff carried out the initial field work for a survey of the College/Seminary area. This was done as part of a neighborhood planning project. Digital photos were taken of all primary structures which were then ranked by staff and by a two-member subcommittee of the Commission. A final review by the full Commission and report will be completed in 2007.



A similar effort was begun in the HOPE VI/Concord Commons area as part of a similar neighborhood planning project there. However, because of extensive demolition done as part of the HOPE VI project and subsequent new construction, it was decided that this would not be of sufficient value to pursue.

Monitoring

The Commission reviewed the nomination of the Barber-Colman Industrial Complex to the National Register of Historic Places. The nomination form was prepared by Granacki Historic Consultants of Chicago under contract with the City of Rockford. The purpose for doing the nomination was to enable anyone redeveloping one of the buildings on the site to use the 20% federal historic preservation tax credits. The nomination shows all 11 of the structures still standing on the site as contributing to the district, i.e., eligible for tax credits. Following a public hearing on the nomination, the Commission voted unanimously to endorse it. Barber-Colman was officially listed on the National Register on October 17, 2006.



Commission staff also provided assistance to Granacki Consultants on a second nomination, this time for west downtown. For this, the firm was hired by the River District Association. Again the intent is to enable building owners to pursue tax credits as they rehabilitate buildings. A draft of the nomination form has been submitted to IHPA. It is unknown at this point when they will schedule it for review by the Illinois Historic Sites Advisory Council.

Activities involving sites already listed on the National Register included:

- ♦ Certificates of Appropriateness for City Hall, the Coronado Theatre, Graham-Ginestra House, Garrison School and the aforementioned Beattie Park gazebo.
- ♦ Acquisition by the City of Rockford of title to the former Illinois National Guard Armory at 605 North Main Street.

Activities

Proposal to Provide Training for Local Realtors The Commission had hoped to submit an application for a CLG grant from the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency in fall 2006 but was unable to meet the filing deadline for a variety of reasons. However, progress continues to be made in putting such a training session together and the Commission hopes to bring this project to fruition in the next 12 months.

Preservation Month In order to celebrate National Historic Preservation Month and to inform local residents and officials about preservation, the Commission set up a weeklong display in the City Hall lobby showing various facets of preservation. This was done with assistance from the River District Association, Tinker Swiss Cottage Museum, Ethnic Heritage Museum, Erlander Home, and the Camp Grant Museum.

Newsletter As promised earlier in the year, the Commission mailed out the first issue of its new newsletter in September. This was included as part of the annual mailing to owners of all locally designated properties and was posted on the City's website. We hope to have two issues in 2007.

Training City staff provided training on the legal aspects of what the Commission does to all Commission members in March. This has become a biannual session.