

Rockford Historic Preservation Commission

September 13, 2005 - 6:00 PM
Conference Room B
Rockford City Hall

Commission Val Olafson, Chairman, Laura Bachelder, Sally Faber, Jeanne Ludeke, Ald. Doug Mark, Frank St. Angel, Scott Sanders

Staff Wayne Dust, Planning Administrator; John Giliberti, City Attorney; Ginny Gregory, RHPC Secretary;
Sandra Hawthorne, Sr. Administrative Assistant

Public Hearing Attendees

Rex & Sandy Blaine	1075 North Second Street
Viengkeo Sati	1053-1059 North Second Street
Richard & Kristine McMahon	1370 Brown Hills Road
Fran Geoghegan	1633 Ethel Avenue
Kay Sward	1010 Ridgewood (resident)
Roberta Rondone	1010 Ridgewood (representative)
Kris Sleezer	1010 Ridgewood (representative)
Lois McDowell	815 C Street
Maurice Rondone	1012 Ridgewood Road
Saulius Ploplys	1633 Arlington Avenue
Gary Carlson	1010 North Second Street
Rob McCarthy	1408 Cosper Avenue

PUBLIC HEARING

Petition to withdraw 9 properties from the Brown's Hills/Knightsville Historic District

Chairman Olafson asked if the Petitioners had selected a representative to address the Commission. Several people stated they had not anticipated having to speak at the hearing, but rather to just attend. Chairman Olafson addressed the group, pointing out that this was a public hearing and was for the purpose of discussion on the application with any input the Petitioners wished to provide.

Roberta Rondone, Kris Sleezer, and Kay Sward were present to represent 1010 Ridgewood Road. Mrs. Sward is the home owner and Ms. Rondone and Ms. Sleezer are her daughters. Ms. Rondone said she would speak on her mother's behalf. She stated her mother has lived in this residence for over 50 years. During that time, the house has been painted countless times and is again in need of painting. She further stated the building would look better if sided and her mother has received input from a firm to do the work. Ms. Rondone stated she and her mother feel they are dealing with irrational people (HPC) since no one has gone to look at the house, so feels their only course of action is to separate from the Historic District.

Richard McMahon, 1370 Brown Hills Road, stated he was present as a neutral opinion. He would like to see the District kept intact, but also feels the Commission should allow Mrs. Sward to put

siding on her house. He feels a compromise would be to allow Mrs. Sward to side her house since she is in the gateway to the District, but not to allow other houses that are deeper within the District. Mrs. Sward stated she appreciates Mr. McMahon's comments, but stated the other eight petitioners have had problems with the rules of the Historic Preservation Commission as well.

Fran Geoghegan, 1633 Ethel Avenue, stated she has also had problems with the Commission. She explained that although necessary signatures and involved costs were complied with in the past, the Commission still would not allow the petitioners to withdraw from the District. She stated the Commission forced work to stop on her porch temporarily until she received their approval. She further stated the house next door to hers was dilapidated, but the Commission did nothing about it until the owner tried to make improvements by installing vinyl siding on it, at which time work was also stopped by HPC.

Saulius Ploplys, 1633 Arlington Avenue, also spoke. He stated he wished to remind all in attendance of the purpose of the Commission as well as the District itself. He explained the establishment of a historic district is for the preservation of property values, and the quality of life within that district. He stated the property to the north of the Brown's Hills / Knightsville Historic District is commercial, and there is also an insurance agency across the street. This commercial section, if brought before the Zoning Board, could be rezoned for commercial use, which could result in a strip mall or an apartment tower as examples. Once commercial development is allowed, there's no going back to what was there before. Mr. Ploplys felt compromises could be reached in some cases between the requests from residents in the District and the historic requirements. He ended by stating he would prefer to keep the neighborhood and the existing District intact.

Gary Carlson, 1010 North 2nd Street, spoke as a member of the Brown's Hills District, and as a past Historic Preservation Commission member. He explained that issues of vinyl siding and synthetic windows are usually the main reason people want to get out of historic districts, not just here but across the country. He further explained that it is much more difficult for an area to be named a historic district than to withdraw from one. He discussed the five criteria that must be met to become a district. If these criteria are met, it means the house is worthy of the protection of the Historic Preservation Commission. Mr. Carlson further explained that when "low maintenance" treatments such as siding are put on homes, there are dangers because it does not protect the material under the siding. He stated he would not have put the amount of money into restoring his house on North 2nd that he did if it were not under the protection of the Historic District. Mrs. Rondone interrupted Mr. Carlson, stating vinyl siding was not as dangerous as he was making it out to be. Chairman Olafson explained vinyl siding is not "no maintenance" and actually causes more structural damage to a home, stating studies have proven this. Ms. Sleezer stated she feels her mother (Kay Sward) is the only person who is having difficulty with being allowed vinyl siding and feels she is being singled out. Ginny explained the two Housing Authority houses in this District were approved by the Commission after over 6 months of discussion and working together.

Mr. Carlson continued by stating a historic district is designed to protect the entire area. He gave an example of the two Rockford Housing Authority homes built in this District, pointing out that they were made with more stringent designs, with overhangs, larger doors with trim, larger windows, etc. than were other similar RHA homes built at the same time because these added details were required by the Historic Preservation Commission in order to blend in with the existing neighborhood.

Mr. McMahon questioned enforcing rules to a point that makes it uneconomical to keep the house up. He suggested that perhaps the Commission could find unique reasons to allow vinyl in some cases but not in all situations.

Val explained to the Petitioners that at the original meeting held with Mrs. Sward for application of vinyl siding, names of paint contractors were given to Mr. Sward to see what arrangements could be made. She stated no further contact was received from Mrs. Sward up until the recent Petition for Withdrawal from the District. She indicated that Mrs. Sward was the one who chose to put a stop to a compromise.

Rob McCarthy, 1408 Cospers Avenue, stated the main portion of his house is 100 years old. Aluminum siding was put on the house prior to the area's becoming a Historic District. He has recently been told there is now major damage to the house due to the aluminum siding. He further explained that unless a vapor barrier is placed between the studs and inside walls, substantial rot will usually occur over a period of 4 to 10 years with older homes. Mr. McCarthy stated early next year he will be coming before the Commission to request the removal of the aluminum siding. He would prefer to see Mrs. Sward's house painted rather than sided because of the future problems that would result. He also stated he would like to see this corner of the District preserved, and agreed there is nothing to stop a major land developer from building a high rise on the corner once it is removed from the District.

Rex Blaine, 1075 North Second Street, stated his house is aluminum sided. He stated Mrs. Sward cannot afford to have her house painted every five years. Mr. Blaine protested that he has lived in his home for 30 years and is tired of watching other neighbors do what they want with their property while he cannot. He stated the residents of the District own these properties and the homes and want to be able to do what they can to preserve their own property without having to ask permission. He added that his property is zoned for 9 apartments and stated several times that he would turn his property into apartments.

Kris Sleezer, daughter of Kay Sward, stated her father scraped and painted their house every year. She explained that when her parents were able to afford siding they were denied its use by the Commission, but that they live next to a person who has put up a wall that is now rotting and falling apart. She stated the Historic "Society" was not in place when the Swards purchased their home. She further stated that several people around her mother's house have been allowed to put on siding and another neighbor been allowed to construct a shed. It was explained to Ms. Sleezer by Chairman Olafson that the shed and wall in question could not be seen from the street and therefore did not have to meet Historic District requirements.

Mr. Viengkeo Sati stated he owns a duplex within the District at 1053-1059 North Second Street. He would like to make improvements to his property without having to go through the Commission's requirements.

Mr. McMahon felt the rigid rules of the Historic District were going to backfire, stating the cost to improve properties will prohibit improvement.

Wayne Dust, Planning Administrator for the City of Rockford, discussed a report he had prepared recommending the request for withdrawal be denied. [Planning Division review is required by ordinance.] He stated the report was written addressing the standards within the ordinance for withdrawal. He explained a gap, or hole, would extend along North Second Street and would

hold potential for an unfavorable zoning situation with adjacent C-3 zoning to Cosper. The nine parcels on the petition are part of the original 44 acres included in Horace Brown's farm and a small part of the original Cosper farm. He stated another requirement is that the properties proposed for deletion do not contribute historically to the District as it was originally designated. Mr. Dust explained that all nine were included in the District when it was created in 1983. He further stated that two of the properties – 1010 and 1012 Ridgewood Road – are referenced in the "History" of Brown's Hills and Knightsville prepared when the District was created while the house at 1012 Ridgewood is included in the list of significant structures included in the original application for designation of the District.

Mr. Dust then moved on to discuss ordinance criteria that relate more to planning concerns than to strictly historic preservation ones. He pointed out that North Second Street could create a very unfavorable situation if these properties are withdrawn. It would be much more difficult to protect the District from the impact of increased commercial development along North Second once these properties are taken out of the historic district. He also stated that retaining the existing boundaries would be consistent with the goals of the City's 2020 Plan. Mr. Dust ended his report by stating there is considerable evidence to suggest that inclusion of an area in a historic district encourages a high level of home maintenance and ownership, both of which strengthen property values.

Mr. Ploplys said he understands the need for preservation. He asked if there were monies available through the government or historic society to help cases like Mrs. Sward. Ginny explained there is a program run by the state under which the assessed valuation of an owner-occupied designated property is frozen for a period of eight years and incrementally increased to what it should be over the four years following that. This applies when renovation costing at least 25% of the market value of the property is carried out. She also explained the Commission does have an additional application form for vinyl siding that can be used if it can be shown that vinyl siding is the only way to preserve the house.

Mrs. Sward stated the basement walls of her home are limestone, which is a detriment to preservation. She stated she feels the Historic Preservation Commission took their money under false pretenses. She further stated it was obvious that Mr. Dust had already prepared his report stating that they could not get out of the District. Efforts by the Commission to explain the requirement and process of the Staff report were not acceptable by Mrs. Sward.

With no one else indicating a desire to speak, Scott Sanders made a **MOTION** to close the public hearing. The motion was seconded by Ald. Doug Mark and **CARRIED** by a vote of 7-0. The hearing closed at 7:05

NEW BUSINESS

Minutes

A **MOTION** was made by Ald. Doug Mark to **APPROVE** the minutes of the August 17 and August 24, 2005 meetings. The motion was seconded by Frank St. Angel and **CARRIED** by a vote of 7-0.

Recommendation to Rockford City Council re the Petition to withdraw from the Brown's Hills/Knightsville Historic District

In response to Ms. Rondone's statement that no one on the Commission has ever gone to look at her mother's house, Scott Sanders stated he has visited every property on every application he has received in the six years he has been involved with the Commission. His concern was that the conversation from the Petitioners has been largely about the painting of Mrs. Sward's house rather than discussion on the concept of the nine parcels leaving this Historic District. In ending the discussion regarding the past application of Mrs. Sward to paint her house, Mr. Sanders explained that the letter Mrs. Sward received from the Commission after her application some time ago was a denial for only one solution to a problem. Scott continued, stating that the Commission's job is preservation of the neighborhood as a whole but that this is done one house at a time. He stated the Commission is not haphazard on vinyl siding, that vinyl is a material that the Commission looks at very carefully and on an individual basis. He further stated there are some very specific materials that do replicate wood that could have been investigated by Mrs. Sward. Applications are denied when building materials still exist and the original material is repairable and salvageable. Mr. Sanders stated compromises between applicants and the requirements of the Commission are reached all the time, but that a different layer of requirements for homes on the edge of a district as opposed to those inside a district is not a fair compromise. Mr. Sanders concluded by stating he is not in favor of the Petition for withdrawal.

Alderman Mark began by stating that the question before the Commission is whether or not to endorse withdrawal of nine properties from this District. The Commission has heard concerns expressed about several individual cases; these need to be addressed individually. He went on to state that some petitioners in the past have spent several months working with the Commission to reach a compatible agreement – a denial to one request does not mean that everything ends at that point. He explained there are economic hardship allowances that are in place, but those cases need to be addressed individually and are not part of the Petition that is before the Commission at this meeting. He stated he would hate to see this withdrawal take place. He is very concerned with the gap that would be created on North 2nd Street if the Petition were approved, adding that it could lead to commercial development. He did not support the Petition.

Jeanne Ludeke agreed that the loss of these properties could be disconcerting given consideration with what could happen down the road from a zoning standpoint. She stated she also is not in favor of the Petition to withdraw.

Sally Faber also stated she would not be in favor of losing these properties in Brown's Hills. She suggested discussion about the property of Mrs. Sward to see what compromises might be reached would be a better resolution. There is a need to address the emotion that was expressed at this hearing.

Mrs. Sward stated she is past the point of compromising. She gave the example of Mr. Viengkeo Sati (1053-1059 North Second Street) who was not allowed to rebuild his garage. When asked when his application came before the Commission, Mr. Sati stated he never brought a request before the board. He stated he only asked his neighbor, Mr. Blaine, who told him he couldn't do it.

Frank St. Angel stated that the Commission needs to be able to separate the issue at hand from the siding issue.

Alderman Mark stated that someplace in the process, someone dropped the ball in communicating options to Mrs. Sward. However, he also stated he feels the process does work, and that the Historic Preservation Commission does show a willingness to work with applicants if they are interested in working with the Commission.

A **MOTION** was made by Scott Sanders to **RECOMMEND DENIAL** of the Petition to withdraw nine properties from the Brown's Hills/Knightsville Historic District based on the following factors:

1. Their removal would widen the gap in the District along North 2nd Street in a particularly sensitive area at an intersection with a high traffic count which could compromise the integrity of the District because of the potential of future commercial use; and
2. It would contribute to a lessening of the historical characteristics of the District due to the location of these nine properties; and
3. The properties included in the Petition do include historic properties as indicated in the original application for designation.

The motion was seconded by Sally Faber and **CARRIED** by a vote of 7-0.

Ginny Gregory explained this is only a recommendation to City Council. She further explained the process of this item going to the Codes and Regulations Committee of City Council and then to the full Council for a final decision. She stated she will notify the Petitioners of the date when this will go before Codes and Regulations.

Certificates of Appropriateness

♦ *Addendum to Certificate for 201 West State Street*

Ginny Gregory explained this Addendum is for the Richardson building. Normally, an application for a façade rebate from the City would go through the City's Downtown Design Review Committee unless the property has been designated locally as a landmark or part of a historic district. When that is the case, review is done by the Preservation Commission. When the owners of the Richardson Building submitted an application for a façade, she told Economic Development staff that this project had been approved by HPC; she didn't realize that the owners had included work on their façade rebate application that had not been included in the Certificate of Appropriateness. The work in question was replacing the cream-colored brick uncovered when the metal sheathing was removed from the front with red brick matching the rest of the building. Since this error was not the applicant's fault, Ginny asked that the Commission approve the work as an addendum to the existing COA.

A **MOTION** was made by Ald. Doug Mark to **APPROVE** an Addendum to the Certificate of Appropriateness for 201 West State Street to allow replacement of cream-colored brick that had been beneath metal sheathing with red brick matching the rest of the building. The motion was seconded by Laura Bachelder and **CARRIED** by a vote of 7-0.

♦ *511 Oak Street*

Sandra Hawthorne, co-applicant, reviewed the request for fencing in the rear yard of the property. This property includes a Lustron house. She explained the property is currently fenced in on the south and east sides with six-foot high, sight-obscuring wood fencing. She would like to

continue this fencing along the east and north sides of the property to fence in the remainder of the rear yard. She asked the Commission's input on what type of gate could be used in the center of the north portion that would allow for visibility into the yard for safety reasons. Scott Sanders suggested the fence on each corner of the north side could start at six feet and transition to four for the majority of the fence, thus allowing visibility into all sections of the rear yard. This was acceptable to the applicant and other Commission members. The gate itself would not be visible from the right-of-way so would not be subject to Commission approval. Ms. Hawthorne is aware that a fence permit is required prior to installation.

A **MOTION** was made by Scott Sanders to **APPROVE** the installation of fencing on the east and north sides of the rear yard with fencing matching what already exists on the west and east sides. The new fence should be six feet high along the west side of the property, with the north side beginning at a six-foot height at each corner and transitioning down to four feet in the rear yard at 511 Oak Street. The motion was seconded by Doug Mark and **CARRIED** by a vote of 7-0. A concept drawing was provided to the applicant after the meeting.

Although not requesting a Certificate at this time, Ms. Hawthorne asked for input on the appropriate material or process for repairing the steel roof of the house which has a pinhole leak. Chairman Olafson stated she would provide information after the meeting.

Discussion was also held on the material for a small shed in the southeast corner of the property. It was decided by the Commission that as long as the shed was of a size that was not visible from the street in light of the fencing and trees, the material was not one that would have to come before the Commission.

♦ *Renewal of Certificate for 1105 North Court Street*

Ginny Gregory explained this is an extension of an already granted extension. Chairman Olafson stated she had presented the National Register nomination for the property to the State Historic Sites Advisory Council on September 9, 2005; they voted to recommend National Register recognition..

A **MOTION** was made by Doug Mark to **APPROVE** the renewal of a Certificate of Appropriateness for 1105 North Court Street originally granted July 14, 2004 and renewed February 16, 2005. The motion was seconded by Scott Sanders and **CARRIED** by a vote of 7-0.

Recommendations for new Commission members

Ginny indicated that terms for three Commission members expire at the end of this year – Val, Scott and Laura. Val and Scott have already served the maximum two full terms allowed by ordinance. However, Laura is just completing her first term so can be reappointed if she is willing. She indicated that she is, but felt that she had one more year to go on her first term. Ginny said she would double check on that. She also said she had checked with the Mayor's office and he would like to hear recommendations from the Commission on potential new members. While Val's position is the "open" one that has no professional requirements attached to it, Scott's does have professional requirements. Scott asked if his position has to be filled by someone who is a Registered Landscape Architect, (which he is). Ginny responded that it does not – it does, however, have to be someone from the fields of either architecture, landscape architecture or architectural history. Clearly the preference would be someone from landscape

architecture since those types of questions do come up from time to time. Ginny also indicated that she had received a request from an individual to serve on the Commission who could fill Val's position.. However, that request came several months ago and the person has never attended a meeting. Consequently, Ginny mailed her a letter inviting her to either this meeting or next month's just so she could make sure the Commission's work actually matches her expectations. Valerie recommended Pam Hein for her position, stating Pam had just finished her masters in Historic Preservation.

Staff Report

Ginny announced she hopes to have a training session for new Historic Preservation Commission members early next year. She also stated the Commission needs to review the strategic plan it adopted in 2002.

Other

The poles holding the banners for the open house in Haight Village still have spears on the end of the top poles. Ginny will notify Gary Anderson and Lori Gustafson that these need to match what was approved by HPC.

Ginny reminded everyone that the next meeting of the Commission is October 4th. It's early in October in order to avoid having a meeting the same night as City Council due to the Monday holiday.

With no further business to come before the Commission, the meeting was adjourned at 8:00 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Sandra A. Hawthorne
Sr. Administrative Assistant