Rockford Historic Preservation Commission Newsletter

425 East State Street
Rockford IL 61104

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815-987-5600

Why a newsletter?

Last year, in our annual letter to owners and residents of all properties designated by the City of Rockford as a landmark or as part of a historic district, we promised to produce a newsletter to keep you better informed about who the Commission is, what it does, and just as importantly, what it doesn't do. This is our first edition, so it focuses on the basics. We will be looking for your input on how we can improve in future editions.

Historic Preservation Commission – Who are these people, and how did they get there?

Rockford's historic preservation ordinance includes requirements for the seven members who serve on the Preservation Commission (usually shortened to HPC). These are:

- All members must live in the City of Rockford.
- Members must include
  - A licensed architect;
  - An active member of a Rockford historical society;
  - A registered realtor or broker;
  - A resident of a local historic district;
  - A landscape architect or someone from a related field if one cannot be found;
  - A member of Rockford City Council; and
  - A member chosen at large.

Members are nominated by the Mayor and confirmed by City Council. With the exception of the City Council representative, they may serve up to two three-year terms, after which they must leave HPC for at least three years. (The City Council representative is appointed annually.) This means that there is at least one new member almost every year.

Over the nearly 30-year history of the Commission, roughly 40 people have served on Rockford's HPC.

Who's on the Commission now?

Here's a run-down of current members, going from right to left in the photo below:

- Frank St. Angel, licensed architect and currently Chairman of HPC;
- Laura Bachelder, member of the Tinker Swiss Cottage Museum and Curator of Collections at Midway Village and Museum Center;
- Ald. Doug Mark, City Council representative;
- Maureen Flanagan, an attorney and River District Board member, and fills the "open" position on HPC;
- Mike Pauly, landscape architect;
- Jeanne Ludeke, lives in Haight Village and the Vice Chair of HPC; and
- Sally Faber is a registered realtor (not in the photo).

What do they do?

Rockford's ordinance lists several duties for the Commission. These include reviewing applications for new landmarks and historic districts (with City Council making the final decision on designations), reviewing National Register nominations (with the Keeper of the National Register making the final decision), reviewing applications for Certificates of Appropriateness (with HPC making the final decision), and working with City staff to identify historically significant sites through an ongoing survey program. The Commission also works with other organizations such as the River District Association and Mid Town District to further the goal of protecting and enhancing Rockford's historic resources.

Our Historic Districts and Landmarks

The City has designated roughly 480 parcels in Rockford as either individual landmarks or as part of historic districts. These include about 40 lots on Garfield Avenue, 250 in Brown's Hills/ Knightsville, 140 in Haight Village, 18 in Indian Terrace, and 6 at Northeast State & Main. In addition, there are 25 individual landmarks ranging from the Coronado Theatre to the Beyer Stadium Gatehouse where the Rockford Peaches played.

Each historic district is defined by its history, its buildings and its streetscapes. Each conveys a unique piece of Rockford's history and development. It may be the quintessential Victorian district of Haight Village or the 1920s urban neighborhood of Indian Terrace – each is an equally important representation of how Rockford evolved over time. In future editions of our newsletter, we will highlight each of our districts and landmarks so you can become better acquainted with what the City is protecting through its preservation ordinance.

Certificates of Appropriateness, Part I – What are they and how do I get one?

A Certificate of Appropriateness, or a COA, is simply written verification that you have approval from the Commission to make exterior changes to your property if it's a landmark or in a historic district. One is required if you want to change how something looks and/or what it's made out of, if that something is visible from a public right-of-way. That means visible from a street, public alley or the Rock River.

To get one, submit an application to HPC a week before one of its regular monthly meetings. You can either pick up a form at the Community Development Department's office on the second floor of City Hall, by calling HPC staff at 815-987-5618, or by downloading the form from the City's website. (More info on how to do this later.)

It's important to remember that what HPC does is design review. To do that, they need to know what your property looks like now and what it will look like when you finish your project. While this generally does not require a drawing by an architect, it does require some form of illustration of what is being proposed. When putting together your application, ask yourself if you could tell from the information you've provided what was being proposed.

Certificates of Appropriateness, Part II – What if I'm not sure about the best way to do something?

Commission members are always willing to work with you when you're planning a project. If, for example, you're planning an addition but want advice on what kind of windows to use and where to place them, just call the HPC office at 815-987-5618 and let us know. You will be placed on the agenda for the next regular meeting. At that time, you can explain what you would like to do and ask the Commission's opinion on the best way to proceed. This approach can be most effective when you bring photos of the property as it is now and any illustrations you may have that will clearly show what you would like to do.

Certificates of Appropriateness, Part III Satellite dishes

As some of you have discovered, HPC has developed a good working relationship with the City's Building Department over the years. When someone applies for a building permit for exterior changes without first getting a Certificate of Appropriateness, the Building Department will direct the individual to HPC. Occasionally, something will slip through the cracks, but the system works at least 95% of the time.

However, this does not help us when someone is doing something that does not require a building permit. A fairly common one is installing a small satellite dish. Because of this, these have proliferated within our historic districts, in most cases without benefit of a Certificate being issued. Up to now, we have dealt with these on a case-by-case basis as we received complaints about them. In fairness to those who have followed the rules (and those who have been cited for violations), the Commission has decided to take a more proactive role. By the end of October, we will check all properties in all 5 historic districts and the 25 landmark sites for satellite dishes. We will notify all owners who have such dishes without a COA that they need to either obtain a Certificate, move the dish to a spot where it is not visible from the right-of-way, or be considered in violation of the ordinance. While this will entail a fair amount of work on our part, we feel it is the only fair way to deal with the issue.

Satellite dishes (continued)

So what are the rules for satellite dishes? Here's what we have in our design guidelines, starting with a general statement on HPC's approach to them.

Satellite dishes have become common additions to both residential lots and nonresidential buildings. The older dishes span ten to eleven feet while the newest type of DBS dish measures only 18 inches in diameter. These are the types of things that become problematical in historic districts or on landmark sites. They clearly are not historical in character or appearance, but they have become common features in modern life, not unlike garages.

Guidelines for satellite dishes and antennas

- Ground-mounted dishes or antennas should not be installed in front yards or in readily visible side yards, nor should they be installed at readily visible rooflines.
- The smaller, 18-inch dishes are more appropriate than the larger ones.
- No more than one dish or antenna, regardless of size, may be installed on any residential property with less than ten units; no more than two dishes or antennas may be located on a residential property with ten or more units.
- Ground-mounted dishes or antennas should be mounted as low to the ground as possible and screened by landscaping or fencing.
- Dishes or antennas should be a neutral color, black or gray in most circumstances. Other colors may be considered neutral if they blend with the surrounding dominant color, such as a white dish against a white house; if the color helps to camouflage the dish or antenna; and if the color is neither bright, reflective nor metallic.
- Dishes may not display advertising in any form except for a six-inch square area displaying the manufacturer's or distributor's name.
- Rooftop dishes or antennas must be installed so as to avoid damage to the roof covering. When they are removed, the roof covering must be appropriately repaired to maintain weather and water tightness.

HPC Meetings with District Residents

In addition to promising to start a newsletter this year to keep district residents informed about what the Commission does, we promised to hold at least one meeting this year in each district. Thus far, we have met with two – Haight Village and Brown's Hills/Knightsville.

Haight Village On April 18th, HPC staff and one Commission member met with a dozen or so residents of Haight Village. Several issues were raised, but there were three key ones:

1. Distribution of information: We need to make sure that everyone has a copy of the design guidelines so they know the rules. These were mailed to all owners when the guidelines were first published, and they are posted on the City's website. **If you would like a hard copy, please call us at 815-987-5618 and request one.** We'll be happy to mail one to you.
2. Disclosure by realtors that a property is in a historic district and what that means: We are working on setting up a training session for local realtors to address this issue. We hope to have the first session in early 2007.
3. Consistency in Commission decisions: There was a lengthy discussion on the need for the Commission to be more consistent in the decisions it makes regarding Certificates of Appropriateness. We are in the process of reviewing all HPC decisions, which covers a span of nearly 30 years. Once that work is done, we will take a hard look at how we have done and find ways to resolve any problems.

Brown's Hills/Knightsville On May 10th, HPC staff and two Commission members met with about 15 residents of the District. Many of the same issues came up, but the main focus of discussion was the role and importance of realtors in historic districts. More than one person has come to us saying they did not know their house was in a historic district when they bought it. On the flip side, more than one person has come to us saying their realtor *did* tell them they were in a historic district and that they wouldn't be able to change anything on their property. Both create problems for us.

As was mentioned above, we are planning a training session for realtors to deal with both sides of this problem.

Information Sources

We've referred to information on the City's website a couple of times in this newsletter. To get to it, go to www.cityofrockford.net/government/community/index.cfm?section=historic&id=210. Or, if you don't want to type all that in, just go to www.cityofrockford.net, then click on "Government" on the left side of the screen, then "City Departments," then "Community Development," and then on the right side of the screen, "Historic Preservation." This will lead you to our forms, ordinance, design guidelines, a booklet on how to research the history of your house and links to information on various topics, including resources for homeowners and property (which includes information on financial incentives).

Tell us what you think

This is our first edition. We want to know what you think about it and how we can improve it. While this edition is primarily an introduction to the Commission and what we do, we hope to delve into more into specific issues in the future, much like the section on satellite dishes in this one. If there are any particular topics that you would like to see addressed here, either call us with your suggestion at 815-987-5618, fax us at 815-967-6933, or e-mail us at ginny.gregory@ci.rockford.il.us. And if there's something else you think should be on our website, let us know that too. We look forward to hearing from you!

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