

**MINUTES  
CITY OF ST. CHARLES  
HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION  
WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 18, 2017  
COMMITTEE ROOM**

**Members Present:** Chairman Norris, Malay, Kessler, Gibson, Smunt, Pretz, Krahenbuhl

**Members Absent:** None

**Also Present:** Russell Colby, Division Planning Manager

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**1. Call to order**

Chairman Norris called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

**2. Roll call**

Mr. Colby called roll with six members present. There was a quorum. (Dr. Smunt arrived at 7:55 p.m.)

**3. Approval of Agenda**

The agenda was modified to include the following revisions.

Item 6 was split into two parts.

6a. to cover 211-215 Cedar Ave.

6b. to cover 217 Cedar Ave.

8c. Historic Landmark Nomination

9a. Walkability

9b. America in Bloom Report

**4. Presentation of minutes of the October 4, 2017 meeting**

**A motion was made by Ms. Malay and seconded by Mr. Krahenbuhl with a unanimous voice vote to approve the minutes of the October 4, 2017 meeting.**

**5. Preliminary Review: 521 Indiana St. (potential façade grant)**

David Prentiss, the homeowner, was present.

The home is a Historic Landmark known as the Beckstrom House. Mr. Prentiss is interested in applying for a Residential Façade Improvement Grant. He outlined the proposed work to see if it would qualify for funding.

Mr. Prentiss said the entire first floor is sinking in the middle. He would like to install new flooring, but will first need to address the sloping issue. He would also like to do some exterior painting. Mr. Prentiss believes the home has the original wood siding. However, he noted it is time to remove major layers of paint and do some repair work. The east and south sides of the home receive the most sun and get hit the most with the elements. Those two sides have a lot more wear and tear on them than the other two sides of the home. In addition, the porch, balusters, and posts need repairs.

Chairman Norris asked for details in regards to the type of prep work that will be done for the paint job. Mr. Prentiss said he hasn't gotten that far yet. He is hoping to get a contractor who specializes in this type of work.

Ms. Malay asked if the work being done to the floor would qualify under the grant program rules. Mr. Colby said the program is similar to the Commercial Façade program. It will only allow funding for exterior improvements. He said one of the concepts they discussed included connecting interior structural issues to the overall stability of the structure on the outside. He said an argument could be made that it is part of the preservation of the exterior of the building. They would need more information regarding the issue and what would need to be done to correct it. He said they could make that assessment, but they would need input from the Commission to determine if that was a fair approach because it is a bit different than what was contemplated when the program was written. He asked if anyone had any reactions at this point even though they did not have all the project information. Ms. Malay felt if it is truly something structural that will prevent the loss of this home in the future, she would support it. However, if it is not going to make a difference in the overall lifespan of the house, she would need to find out more about the scope of work.

Chairman Norris noted the home has not been condemned or had any type of water damage; the sloping floor is an "architectural feature" at this point. The Commissioners advised they would need to know what is really going on with the floor in order to determine if the fund program could support that work. Mr. Pretz said if Mr. Prentiss works with a contractor, the Commission would like the contractor to be present at a meeting so they could discuss the scope of work with them in person. Mr. Prentiss asked if it needs to be a current, active, licensed contractor, or if it could be someone who formerly had a contracting business. Chairman Norris said it could be whomever the building department allows.

Mr. Pretz asked if the painting project also includes some wood replacement. Mr. Prentiss said there may be some spots where that is needed. Mr. Pretz noted there is a fine line between normal maintenance and a repair item. He said if they were going to approve funds towards maintenance or repair, and there is an issue with the wood, the Commission would expect the issue that is causing the problem to be repaired. They need some assurance that the problem is not going to reoccur.

Mr. Prentiss asked if the Commission could provide names of contractors who specialize in historic homes. Mr. Colby will follow-up with Mr. Prentiss.

Mr. Kessler said with the program being so new, and funds being rather limited, he may not be in full support of moving away from the letter of the ordinance at such an early stage of the program.

Mr. Gibson stated this is a façade improvement grant. He said people are looking for non-regular maintenance items to be done so it has to be packaged in that way. They want to make sure when the work is done, they have done something to make the home more historically accurate or more stable; something that is not maintenance items.

Ms. Malay asked if he is planning on doing any other work. Mr. Prentiss said these are his two main pressing issues right now. Mr. Pretz asked for his timeframe. Mr. Prentiss said he was concerned with the cost of the paint job and would need the contractor's estimate before deciding when to do this work. He is hoping he can do it next year. The flooring issue is his first concern. Mr. Pretz said the Commission would not be able to provide any cost relief for new flooring because this is interior work. However, Mr. Krahenbuhl noted if he can prove there is something structural causing the problem and if it would cause other damage to the exterior of the home, then they may be able to assist.

Mr. Kessler felt the sloping floor would have to be rather severe for it to actually be causing structural issues to the exterior. He said they have already wrestled with some nuances with other homeowner requests in regards to what is considered a repair and what is a replacement. He did not want to add another element of complication to this process at this time.

Chairman Norris asked about the availability of funds for this year and next year. Mr. Colby said the portion of the budget that was attributed to the Residential Program for this year was \$10,000. He said that funding is still available. He noted the Commission has been talking to other property owners about utilizing some of those funds, but he was not sure if those projects would advance. Mr. Colby stated the 2018 budget begins in May. However, he does not know how much funding will be available.

Mr. Prentiss asked if there was a deadline for submitting his contractor information. Mr. Colby said there is no set deadline, but applications are prioritized based on the order in which they are received. When all the information has been received, they consider the application complete.

**6. COA: 211-215 & 217 Cedar Ave. (demolition)**

**a. 211-215 Cedar Ave.**

Peter Vargulich and Chuck Freiberger, representing Baker Memorial United Methodist Church, were present.

The Commission previously reviewed the potential demolition of these properties during a preliminary review discussion on July 19, 2017. Mr. Colby noted minutes from that review are in the packet as a part of the record and there is no need to restate any information contained in those minutes.

Mr. Colby advised the request is for the demolition of the building. He noted the Commission has the authority to approve the COA request and the ability to recommend to the City Council that the COA request be denied. The Commission does not have the authority to actually deny the COA.

Mr. Kessler said the replacement of the structure is a key element of the review process. His understanding was the applicant was going to look into this and return with some ideas. He doesn't see anything new. Although he prefers to see preservation over demolition, he does not think the 211-215 structure is that significant and would not oppose demolition. However, it has to be part of a plan that shows something is going to happen in its place.

Mr. Colby noted the COA process for demolition requires the applicant supply information in regards to what is going to replace the building. He said the site plan shows the replacement is going to be an open area. He said this meets the ordinance requirement. The Commission has to weigh that information as part of its deliberation.

Mr. Krahenbuhl felt the Commission could not approve the demolition at this point due to a lack of information regarding the replacement. He said the building is in bad condition and cannot get approved for insurance.

Chairman Norris asked Mr. Vargulich if the church intends on leaving the lot vacant, or if it would be used for something else. Mr. Vargulich said the intent is for it to be a prayer garden. However, there is some sloping of the lot. For level accessibility, the plan shows the garden on the 217 lot. Both lots will be used for youth activities and youth missions.

Ms. Malay said knowing the condition of the building and the idea of having an open space, she was fine with the overall demolition of the 211-215 parcel.

Mr. Pretz commented on the letters of support for the demolition. He felt the letter from the insurance company needed additional information to support their view. He asked if the church had anyone from the City look at the building to see what might be a maintenance issue and what might be a violation. He felt the report provided showed maintenance issues. He asked if the other letters come from members of the church. Mr. Vargulich said they were not. Mr. Pretz said his concern with the letter from the Maureen Salesky, owner of Directions of Clothing, indicated the issue may be with previous tenants and not the building itself. He felt removing the building to avoid seeing certain tenants was not a reason to demolish a building. There were two other letters that discussed the condition of the houses and the unsightliness of them, and showed support of the prayer garden. Mr. Pretz thought these two people may have been disserved by not being given the whole plan of what the church may ultimately decide to do. He said it's

possible a developer may want that property at a future date in time. Chairman Norris advised the Commission can only consider information provided in the project scope presented.

Ms. Malay asked if the church still intends to put the property up for sale. Mr. Vargulich advised that is their intention.

Chairman Norris stated the property will still be within the historic preservation district, and if the property is sold to someone who would like to build a new structure, the Commission will still have the opportunity to review that project scope.

Mr. Gibson asked if the church would be okay with an approval for the demolition of the 211-215 building and not the one at 217. Mr. Vargulich said he would have to go back to the church leaders for that decision. Mr. Gibson was concerned that the project presented was based on having a certain amount of square footage that may not be available if one structure stays standing.

Mr. Colby advised procedurally if the Commission approves a recommendation for denial, they would need to make reference to the COA findings, and note which findings are not being met. The denial recommendation would need to reference the specific structure and it may be confusing when they are discussing two different structures where there are different interpretations being made. Mr. Colby said it was OK to split the COA into two because they are different buildings with different architectural surveys and different historical information associated with them. He said it also provides the church the opportunity to pursue demolishing one without having to return to the Commission. He thought it might confuse the issue if they were combined together and the Commission voted for denial, but then said they are okay with one of them being demolished. He recommended against putting the two buildings together under one COA consideration.

Mr. Gibson referenced the minutes from the July 19, 2017 meeting. He said the Commission asked for information regarding the plan for replacement. Although they received a replacement plan, they were also told the property could be sold before that ever happens. He asked if they are approving a demolition to create a green space, or are they approving a demolition to create a saleable property. Chairman Norris said the church has the right to sell the property.

Mr. Gibson said the plan talks about access and he felt that appeared as if they needed a plan to come back before them. Chairman Norris said the sketch they have is the plan they presented. There are no plans to add a fence for access control. If the house was taken down, the existing fence would also come down.

Mr. Colby stated the COA requires they show what the replacement is, and as part of the demolition permit, it is a requirement the site be brought to the state that was presented. He said that gets tied to the approval.

Ms. Malay asked if they could put in any stipulations regarding maintenance. Mr. Colby said it would fall under the property maintenance code.

Mr. Gibson stated the paperwork from the insurance company is a bit disingenuous. He said it states there needs to be some repairs done, but it does not state they are going to terminate the insurance coverage. He felt they could always get some kind of insurance coverage.

Mr. Gibson asked if the reason they were considering the demolition was because the building is in a state of disrepair. Chairman Norris said the City has not cited it yet and anything can be fixed. At the moment, there is nothing on file with the building department. Mr. Gibson asked if the reason the Commission would vote on a motion to approve demolition was due to the fact that they do not consider this building to be historically significant. He said he was uncomfortable voting for demolition of a building that has fallen into such disrepair. He felt that was not appropriate in the historic district. Mr. Colby said the architectural survey lists it as a non-contributing structure and there hasn't been any information offered on the historic significance of the building. Mr. Gibson stated they are not considering anything from the insurance company and only considering whether or not the replacement grass will have a negative impact on the historic district.

Dr. Smunt joined the meeting after the discussion of this item had concluded.

**A motion was made by Ms. Malay and seconded by Mr. Kessler with a 3-2 voice vote to approve the demolition of 211-215 Cedar Avenue based on its non-contributing factors; and that it would be replaced with green space as proposed in the COA. Mr. Pretz and Mr. Gibson voted nay. Dr. Smunt abstained.**

**b. 217 Cedar Ave.**

Ms. Malay said she is opposed to this demolition due to the historical significance of this property and how losing it would be a great loss of that history. Mr. Kessler agreed. He said the previous discussion in July included his options for saving the building.

Mr. Gibson provided a picture of the building as it was before it was modified with stucco. A second picture showed the building when it was purchased around 1921 by Frederick Rasmussen. He also showed a picture of the Collins House at 201 Cedar and commented that this house was restored and is now a beautiful part of the Century Corners shopping area. People are curious about that house and where it came from. He feels the house in question has the same potential. He said even in its present state, it stands out. He said the house ties in historically because the woman who purchased the home in 1942, Edith Kohlert, was the sister of Henry Kohlert. Henry was the person who originally purchased the property the DuPage Airport sits on. Edith was the secretary to Mayor Langum. He said there are a number of things that can be done to this house besides knock it down. It could be relocated, or it could be incorporated into a larger project. He also noted the last remodeling job done on the house was in 1921, and that in itself was historic enough to consider keeping it.

Mr. Pretz asked for the date of the house. Mr. Gibson thought it was about circa 1846-1850.

Chairman Norris asked about the garage. Mr. Gibson stated it was of no use and he would be okay with that being taken down.

Mr. Krahenbuhl said this house looks more unique and he would support keeping it. Dr. Smunt noted this house has greater historic significance and thought there could be a bit more architectural significance uncovered if the stucco was removed. He still supports saving the building. Mr. Pretz stated most of the issues are maintenance. He said he could support removing the stucco to expose the stone, removing the garage, the deck, the driveway, the sidewalks, the vegetation and the front knee wall.

Liz Safanda of Preservation Partners of the Fox Valley was present. She said the house is in one of the oldest, and possibly one of the first, neighborhoods in town. She said there have been significant improvements made in this area and this is part of the fabric of this neighborhood. She felt it was acceptable as is, but there was room for improvements.

Chairman Norris asked if the church representatives would like the Commission to take this to a vote. He said they could consider the primary structure with the attached south porch as one item, and the garage with everything in the back as another item. Mr. Vargulich said yes, to continue with the vote.

**A motion was made by Ms. Malay and seconded by Mr. Pretz with a unanimous voice vote to recommend to City Council denial of the COA for demolition of 217 Cedar Avenue for the primary structure and the south porch, based on the following findings:**

- 1) Significance of a site, structure or building: The 1994 Architectural Survey classification of the building is non-contributing. The home has historical significance. The house is known as the Judge Barry house and is listed on the Library historic buildings site. The Commission believes there is evidence to support changing the classification. Evidence was presented at this meeting that supports changing this to a contributing structure.**
  - **Exhibit A is a picture of the house believed to be from the turn of the century.**
  - **Exhibit B is a picture of the house believed to be from the 1960's that shows remodeling work.**
  - **Exhibit C is the Sandborn Map from 1898 that shows the building with the south structure attached.**
  - **Exhibit D is a descriptive statement for the landmark nomination.**
- 2. Architectural and aesthetic guidelines: Demolishing the building would remove an example of Greek Revival Architecture that meets items 2a through 2h.**
- 3. Secretary of Interior Standards for Rehabilitation: Removing the structure will not be in compliance of 3a, 3b and 3e.**

**A second motion was made by Ms. Malay and seconded by Mr. Pretz with a unanimous voice vote to approve a COA for the demolition of the axillary buildings (garage, deck, driveway, knee wall, sidewalks) for 217 Cedar Avenue.**

**7. COA: 307 Cedar Ave. (refuse enclosure)**

The proposal is for the relocation of a refuse enclosure for the Baker Memorial United Methodist Church. The enclosure will consist of a CMU backup. The visible portion will be clad to match the façade.

**A motion was made by Dr. Smunt and seconded by Mr. Kessler with a unanimous voice vote to approve the COA as presented.**

**8. Additional Business and Observations from Commissioners or Staff**

- a. Residential Façade Improvement Grant**
- b. Architectural Survey requirements**
- c. Historic Landmark Nomination**

These items were not discussed.

**9. Downtown Partnership Update**

**a. Walkability**

Mr. Gibson advised the Downtown Partnership is working with the St. Charles History Museum to develop what they are calling the “walkability of downtown St. Charles”. As part of that, they are going to offer the downtown businesses branded materials. The Executive Director of the Partnership is asking for feedback on the type of materials that can be used for the signs and how can they be attached to historic buildings. The director will attend a future meeting for assistance with this. The Commission discussed some options.

**b. America in Bloom Report**

Mr. Gibson read information from the America in Bloom report that pertained to heritage preservation.

**10. Meeting Announcements: Historic Preservation Commission meeting Wednesday, November 1, 2017 at 7:00 P.M. in the Committee Room.**

**11. Public Comment**

Brian Graf, the property owner of 515 Walnut Street, was present. He was seeking information on the positive and also challenging aspects of owning a landmarked house.

Dr. Smunt said since he is already in the historic district, there would be no additional rules or responsibilities that would apply if he landmarked his home. He said it is just a higher recognition by the city on the significant points of architecture and history. Mr. Pretz noted some of the recognition could increase the value of his home. He also mentioned the opportunity to receive a tax freeze.

## **12. Adjournment**

With no further business to discuss, the meeting adjourned at 9:15 p.m.