

MINUTES
CITY OF ST. CHARLES
HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION
WEDNESDAY, March 3rd, 2021
Zoom/ Council Committee Room

Members Present: Norris, Kessler, Mann, Smunt, Malay, Pretz

Members Absent:

Also Present: Russell Colby, Comm. and Economic Asst. Director
Rachel Hitzemann, Planner

1. Call to order

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

2. Roll call

Ms. Hitzemann called roll with six members present. There was a quorum.

3. Approval of Agenda

Item 10.c 7th Ave. Project Update was added to the agenda.

A motion was made by Mr. Kessler and seconded by Ms. Malay with a unanimous voice vote to approve the agenda modification.

4. Presentation of the minutes of the February 17th, 2021 meeting

A motion was made by Dr. Smunt and seconded by Mr. Pretz with a unanimous voice vote to approve the minutes of the February 17th, 2021 meeting.

5. Preliminary Reviews-Open forum for questions or presentation of preliminary concepts to the Commission for feedback

6. Landmark Applications

a. 511 Illinois Ave

i. Public Hearing:

The Commission discussed the Landmark Application. Dr. Smunt felt that the home should be landmarked for solely the history aspect of the building and not the architecture. He recommended that the criteria E.4 be removed since

the structure does not possess distinguished characteristics of style valuable to study. Ms. Malay noted that the structure is suitable for preservation since the house is still standing. The other Commissioners agreed with Dr. Smunt and Ms. Malay.

A motion was made by Mr. Pretz and seconded by Ms. Malay with a unanimous voice vote to close the public hearing.

ii. Recommendation:

The Commission discussed possible names for the Landmark and settled on “Dr. George W. Richards”

A motion was made by Mr. Pretz and seconded by Mr. Kessler with a unanimous voice vote to recommend landmarking 511 Illinois Ave. “Dr. George W. Richards” to the Planning and Development Committee.

7. Certificate of Appropriateness (COA) applications

a. 11 N 2nd St.

Proposed is to install 3 wall signs for Billy Bricks. The wall signs will be illuminated by external goose neck lights that are already in place.

A motion was made by Ms. Malay and seconded by Mr. Pretz with a unanimous voice vote to approve the COA as presented.

b. 612 W Main St.

The applicant is seeking COA approval for two wall signs that were placed in two of the structure’s gables without a permit. The signs are made of white acrylic composite and say “Real Estate”. Ms. Hitzemann read an email from the applicants, who were not present at the meeting. The email stated;

“Dear Committee Members. Thanks for your time to review our proposal. The REAL ESTATE letter signs on our building are Letters only with no backing and highlight rather than obstruct the gable features. They draw attention to the beautiful detail of the Gables.

Furthermore, we researched other historic buildings around town and many have the name of the business on the structure in prominent areas as well. We sent the City of St. Charles many examples for your review.

Please take into account that we worked very hard to find a way to have signage for our brokerage while paying homage to a historic era and the general feel of our building and its history. Our competitors have lighted signs, multiple signs all over their buildings so we are hoping these elegant letters will be approved so we can compete as a business as well.”

Mr. Pretz and Ms. Mann both noted that the examples provided by the applicant were all commercial uses located in commercial buildings, which is different than the current situation. Mr. Pretz also said that most of those signs were put in before the establishment of the Historic District and many were even elements built into the building at the time of the construction.

Dr. Smunt went through several photo examples of other commercial business located in traditionally residential structures and noted that none of these other properties have wall signs, let alone wall signs in locations that would be considered distinguishing characteristics of the style of the building. He expanded his thought saying that this current building was built as a residence and the intent was never to have signage on it. He also stated that he suspects that the shingles in these gables are most likely original to the building, but have probably been painted.

Dr. Smunt then went through the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation. He pointed out that item 3-B, *"The distinguishing original qualities or historic character of a building, structure or site, and its environment, shall be retained and preserved. The removal or alteration of any historic materials or distinctive architectural features should be avoided when possible"*, was not being met because the sign over the fancy cut shingles in the gable was an inappropriate alteration to an architectural element. He also stated that 3-E, *"Distinctive stylistic features, finishes and construction techniques or examples or skilled craftsmanship, which characterizes a building, structure or site, shall be preserved"*, was not being met because shingles are a distinctive style of the Queen Ann architectural style. To support his stance, he pulled a quote from page 348 of *"A Field Guide to American Houses"*, which is one of the books used in the creation of the City's architectural surveys and is often referenced by the Commission during reviews of COAs and landmark applications. The quote was, *"Differing wall textures are a hallmark of Queen Ann houses. These are most commonly achieved with patterned wood shingles shaped into varying designs."* Dr. Smunt said he is opposed to allowing signs to be placed over a distinguishing characteristic of a style of architecture. He stated shingles are one of the few details that Queen Ann style houses share in St. Charles and these shingles are the one thing that connects this structure to the rest. He felt there that there had to be a better location for these signs.

Several Commission members discussed whether to table the COA or vote on it. They settled on a vote since the applicant had already received feedback regarding these signs and have not changed them. The Commission stated that they would be open to wall signs on other portions of the buildings, or a different type of signs if the applicant was interested.

Mr. Kessler noted that the Commission should not set a precedent to allow signs in this location. Dr. Smunt added that there may be situations where a location like this might

work, but it would be on a different architectural style structure, not a Queen Ann where decorative shingles are a main style element.

Ms. Malay said that the signs were done in a subtle manner, but with that being said, they had come before the Commission and got feedback regarding the signs and understood that the Commission was not favorable. She said that the fact that they put up the signs without a permit, preventing the Commission from further discussions with the applicant regarding the signs, sways her vote to recommend denial of the COA.

A motion was made by Dr. Smunt and seconded by Ms. Malay with a unanimous voice vote to recommend denial of the COA to the Planning and Development Committee based on the following; the applicant proposed signs are not in compliance with 3-B and 3-E of the Secretary of Interiors Standards for Rehabilitation which is stated in the City’s Historic Ordinance; that according to page 348 of “*A Field Guide to American Houses*”, a distinguishing characteristic feature of the Queen Ann style are being obscured by signage; that the applicant had ample time based on previous Commission consolation and recommendations to make effective changes to the location of the signs, which they failed to do and proceeded to place the signs without a building permit .

8. Grant Applications

None.

9. Other Commission Business

10. Additional Business and Observations from Commissioners or Staff

a. St. Charles Library Partnership

Darcy Tatlock, on behalf of the Library, presented to the Commission requesting a partnership with the Commission for a video series the library is doing for middle school kids. The Commission discussed possible topics for the videos.

b. Architectural Surveys for Review

The Commission discussed the first 5 surveys in the Central Historic District for review and directed staff to make changes to be presented at the next meeting.

c. 7th Ave. Project Update

Mr. Pretz presented an update on the information he found when researching the homes that were demolished for the 7th Ave. Creek project. He noted no historic homes in terms of history or architecture were removed.

11. Meeting Announcements: Historic Preservation Commission meeting March 17th, 2021 at 7:00 P.M.

12. Public Comment

None.

13. Adjournment

With no further business to discuss, the meeting adjourned at 8:43 p.m.