

**MINUTES  
CITY OF ST. CHARLES  
HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION  
WEDNESDAY, JULY 19, 2017  
COMMITTEE ROOM**

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

**Members Absent:** Krahenbuhl

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

**3. Approval of Agenda**

No changes were made to the agenda.

**4. Presentation of minutes of the July 5, 2017 meeting**

Mr. Kessler requested a revision to the last paragraph on page 3. He noted the first sentence should say “does not bring in more visible light” versus “brings in more visible light”.

**A motion was made by Ms. Malay and seconded by Dr. Smunt with a unanimous voice vote to approve the revised minutes of the June 21, 2017 meeting. Mr. Gibson abstained.**

**5. COA: 514 Indiana St. (fence)**

The proposal is for a 6 ft. cedar board-on-board fence to enclose the east side and rear yard of the lot. The fence will adjoin and match a previously approved fence for the neighbor to the west of this lot.

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

## **6. Preliminary Review: 211-215 & 217 Cedar Ave.**

Peter Vargulich and Reverend Mary Zajac, representatives from the Baker Memorial United Methodist Church, were present.

The church owns the structures located at 211-215 & 217 Cedar Avenue along with the parking lot facing Main Street and the lot on the Cedar Avenue side. Mr. Vargulich noted the church's original intent in purchasing these adjoining parcels was to develop an annex for the church as it grew. He noted this never came to fruition and holding onto this property was no longer in their best interest. They have had tenants in both properties, but over the years this has proven to require a significant amount of effort for the church to manage, and has also become difficult to maintain. Numerous trade services, volunteers and contributions have gone into those properties.

The congregation has decided they do not want to own these properties any longer. They are prepared to eventually move forward with soliciting a purchaser. They would like to make the properties as ready as possible for development so they are proposing demolishing everything on the existing properties. They felt that would help them in marketing the properties for redevelopment. Mr. Vargulich stated they haven't determined the asking price yet, but they have done some studies and worked with outside consultants to help educate themselves in determining an appropriate land price. They plan to eventually petition for a demolition permit and will come to the Commission formally to request a review.

Chairman Norris said they need to discuss the properties separately as they are both unique. He asked the Commission to start with the property at 217 Cedar Avenue. It is a non-contributing structure built in the 1850's in the Greek revival style.

Ms. Malay is concerned with the loss of this structure due to its historic significance and allowing demolition without knowing what is going in its place. She noted this was Judge Barry's home, and it is believed that Abraham Lincoln stayed there.

Mr. Gibson noted Judge Barry was one of the original judges in Kane County. He is also known for taking part in helping break up Richard's Riot. Mr. Gibson understands a clear lot could potentially be easier to market, but they have found existence of a structure like this could be marketed as it stands. He said this was an opportunity to potentially get someone who would want to restore it and return it to a more significant structure. Mr. Gibson felt this was one of the more significant houses in the city in terms of history. He would encourage them to investigate what the difference would be to market it with and without the house on the property. He felt it should be one of the City's historic landmarks if it was restored to any level of what it was originally. He did not see any reason why they could not seek national historic registration just based on the scope of Judge Barry's impact on Kane County.

Ms. Malay noted Heritage Square is a good example of preserving a building like that. She said they could find a developer that would be willing to salvage the structure and actually incorporate it into the redevelopment. She said she would like to see them try to do something

along those lines. Mr. Gibson stated that could form the foundation for a series of homes that reflect that same historic look. Ms. Malay said that corner could also be used for commercial purposes so the building could be incorporated into office and retail space.

Mr. Kessler said they have found an upswing in the number of people in that quadrant of town who, on their own, are landmarking and preserving buildings. He felt there would be potential to tie into that in the church's area. He said they know of people who take on these types of projects. Mr. Kessler also noted landlords/investors may also be interested in rental properties.

Dr. Smunt asked if the parking lots are included in the sale of the properties. Mr. Vargulich confirmed that is correct. Dr. Smunt stated the City's Comprehensive Plan is to get a parking lot off of Main Street and develop storefront retail with parking behind it. He said there are all kinds of possibilities that he would like considered before he would approve demolition of an existing structure. He noted he is not opposed to redevelopment and said the next buyer should come up with that plan to present to the City. He said that one building could become a unique feature of a redevelopment project along with many other options for additional parking and more retail space on Main Street. As a whole, it is right for a developer. Dr. Smunt commented on the stone structure of the building and that the perimeter would be fairly solid. He said the area has some great history and this house becomes part of that history. He felt it was very inviting for redevelopment. Dr. Smunt noted the church shares parking with the city. He said if redevelopment occurs they would probably want to keep the same amount as they currently have. Rev. Zajac said the church usually uses parking when others in downtown do not.

Mr. Pretz was not opposed to redevelopment. However, in reference to the home, once it's gone, it's gone. He said not knowing what is going in its place, puts a burden back on the Commissioners due to all the unknowns. He would like to know what is coming in its place. In preparation for that lot, he is not opposed to demolition of the garage. He said it's definitely not contributing and sees no value in that particular structure, but the home itself could be brought up to a contributing level with the appropriate foresight by the potential owner. At this stage, he would be opposed to any demolition on that particular site.

Dr. Smunt said he does not see a reason to spend money on demolition. He thinks the church could find a buyer and sell him/her the idea of mixed use development with historical features.

Ms. Malay said if they think they can get more money with a cleared lot, another option would be to work out a deal with the potential buyer to have the church take care of the demolition, but first come through the Commission with the preliminary concept to see if it is going to work before they agree to purchase. She said they can have as many people as they want come before the Commission with a concept plan.

Mr. Gibson pointed out that a "non-contributing" rating does not mean it is not important. It is specifically referring to the condition of the house as it stands architecturally. Some modifications as simple as taking a porch or railing down can restore the architectural status to contributing.

Discussion on 211-215 Cedar Avenue:

Mr. Kessler said someone may want to utilize the site on a temporary basis. A landlord/investor may want to use it as a rental unit until they determine what they want to do with the site. The corner area could also be named “Barry’s Corners” or “Judge Barry Corners” giving it a distinct little district. However, once the structures are gone, all those possibilities are gone too.

Mr. Gibson is not aware of any unique architectural or historical feature on this building that would prevent him from approving redevelopment use. However, he would like to see further research done before any demolition is approved.

Ms. Malay said this house would be the one she would be more likely to approve for demolition if they presented a good redevelopment plan. However, she would not want anything demolished until they see a plan. Mr. Pretz said he would also need to see the replacement before approving demolition.

Dr. Smunt said this structure would be the one most likely to be removed on a redevelopment plan, whereas, the 217 structure has more historical significance. He also prefers to see a plan before making a final decision.

Chairman Norris noted that 211-215 is a non-contributing structure and the date of construction was from 1900-1920.

Ms. Malay clarified that what the Commission is asking is not usual for anyone asking for a demolition.

Dr. Smunt said he hoped that a potential developer would look at the City’s Comprehensive Plan that talks about getting some retail structures on Main Street with some residential space on the second or third floors. He said if they used some turn of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century commercial vernacular architecture, it could be a beautiful redevelopment. He would be open to a variety of ideas.

Mr. Gibson said they could relocate 217 next to 201, a nearby stone house.

Mr. Vargulich clarified his intent was not to suggest by demolishing the houses that the potential redevelopment would not be coming back to the Commission for review. He said they will be going back to their church committee to see what they want to do. Mr. Pretz stated it is important any potential developer pursuing demolition know they should be ready to talk about what they want to put in its place.

Rev. Zajac said, as a neighbor to the redeveloped space, the church wants to choose a buyer with a plan that they are comfortable with. She noted the idea of moving the structures sounded interesting because the current structures are oddly placed within the parking lots.

Dr. Smunt said that whatever is presented, the Commission will give all due consideration.

## **7. Additional Business and Observations from Commissioners or Staff**

Mr. Kessler said he had been thinking about the building they previously discussed which is located on Walnut and 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue. He found a few companies that provide solutions to their window issues and the petitioner needs to do a little more research. Mr. Colby said they are currently obtaining quotes on aluminum windows. Mr. Kessler asked how much help the Commission provides in situations such as this. Mr. Pretz said it's good to give suggestions, but it is their project and they need to do their homework. His impression is the gentleman felt comfortable with the original window representative, and he will do whatever he can do to put that deal together. Mr. Pretz noted the City has programs that can help with financing the project so they could potentially have a bigger budget to work with.

Mr. Kessler asked if the Commission is allowed to provide names of people who can help with issues that applicants face. Dr. Smunt said it's appropriate to provide a list of resources. Mr. Colby noted they just cannot make recommendations as to who they should use.

### **a. Architectural Survey Requirements**

There were no updates.

## **8. Meeting Announcements: Historic Preservation Commission meeting Wednesday, August 2, 2017 at 7:00 P.M. in the Committee Room.**

### **9. Public Comment**

Pat Pretz said she would like to see a "For Sale" sign placed on the building formerly known as George's. Mr. Kessler asked if any stabilization work has been done while the City waits on the next steps regarding the sale of the building. There was no known work being done. Chairman Norris noted there is an ordinance that states the property must be maintained. He said they could nudge that along in an effort to get the City to maintain the building while they are deciding what to do with it.

Ms. Pretz also expressed concern over the house next to her home, located at N. 3<sup>rd</sup> Ave and Chestnut Ave. The tenant moved out after the health department advised her she couldn't live there. The fuse box sparked out; there was water in the basement; and raccoons were living in the kitchen. Ms. Pretz fears this will become a demolition situation. It is an old home in the historic district and she asked if anything can be done to prevent this. Mr. Colby noted there are issues concerning access to the property in order to enforce property maintenance codes. He said the Building Department may be aware of this, he will check.

### **10. Adjournment**

With no further business to discuss, the meeting adjourned at 7:54 p.m.