

Rockford Historic Preservation Commission 2008 Annual Report

Over the past several years, the Rockford Historic Preservation Commission has tried to expand its efforts beyond the strictly regulatory aspects into a more proactive stance. During 2008, it met with varying degrees of success in doing this. Commission activities over the past year included:

- ♦ Review of 30 requests for Certificates of Appropriateness;
- ♦ Public hearing and review of one nomination to the National Register of Historic Places;
- ♦ Preparation of a booklet showing the positive economic impact of being in a local historic district;
- ♦ Provided comments for IHPA's Section 106/707 review of two major projects; and
- ♦ Inviting a representative of the Department of Public Works to a meeting to discuss major projects that may affect designated properties.

Here in more detail is our year in review.

Cases Reviewed

Rockford's Historic Preservation Ordinance requires that a Certificate of Appropriateness (COA) be issued by the Preservation Commission before any changes may be made to the exterior of locally designated properties. Of the 30 applications for Certificates submitted to the Commission in 2008, 27 were approved, 1 was denied, and 2 laid over. The one denial was for an application to essentially envelop the existing structure, removing all vestiges of its original appearance and features. Of the 30 applications, 9 were from Brown's Hills/Knightsville. 1 from Garfield Avenue, 15 from Haight Village, and the remaining 5 for individual landmark sites. Here are highlights on a few of the applications reviewed by the Commission.

Garrison Lofts Originally designated as a local landmark, then listed on the National Register of Historic Places, the former Garrison School has been under renovation for conversion to residential apartments for about four years. In 2008, the developers applied for a Certificate for new construction of townhomes on the site. While these had been approved in principle with the original site plan, the details of the new construction had never been reviewed before. These were approved and are now under construction.



Times Theatre When new owners purchased the Times Theatre at North Main and West Jefferson Streets, they were informed of

potential problems with the marquee. Subsequently, they submitted a request to have it taken down due to structural problems. Before approving such drastic action, the Commission asked the owners for an evaluation by a structural engineer. They agreed to do this and the engineer subsequently reported that the marquee was sound enough structurally to remain, so the application was withdrawn.

nFactor at 220 South Madison Street When nFactor took over the former YWCA building in Haight Village, they requested a Certificate for new signage. The request included an original approach to signage that allowed nFactor to have their signature sign placed on the building while at the same time not completely covering up that part of the structure. The sign is actually ¾-inch bird mesh netting hung using aircraft cables and aluminum standoffs attached to an aluminum frame.



904 North Prospect Street The new owner of the house at this location was not informed that it is in a local historic district when he bought it. (More on that later.) His original intent was to demolish the structure and build a new house on the site. Once he learned it was in a historic district, he submitted an application that would have encapsulated the house, almost in its entirety, making it impossible to tell what the original house looked like. After this application was denied, the owned agreed to remove the asbestos siding from the house, returning it to wood.

Renovation work was about half complete at the end of the year.

Local Designations

The Commission did not receive any applications for new local landmarks or historic districts in 2008.

Surveys

No new areas were surveyed in 2008, although Commission staff did make some progress in updating survey tables that already existed.

Monitoring

The Commission reviewed the nomination of the Charles Lundberg House at 946 North Second Street to the National Register of Historic Places. The nomination form was completed by Pam Hein, a local preservation specialist. Following a public hearing on the nomination, the Commission voted unanimously to recommend its approval. The property was listed on the National Register at the end of 2008.

Specific actions regarding properties already listed on the National Register included approval of Certificates of Appropriateness for Garrison School (new construction on the vacant part of the site) and the former Elks Club (window replacement), and submittal of a grant application to pay for Phase I and Phase II environmental site assessments of the former National Guard Armory. The grant application was approved and will be carried out in 2009.

Commission staff continued to monitor proposals for redevelopment of properties already listed on the National Register, primarily the Barber-Colman Industrial Complex. Roughly three truckloads of documents from the company's R & D staff, including some from Howard Colman himself, were removed and taken to Midway Village Museum along with about 15 prototype machines. By doing this, an important piece of Rockford's industrial heritage was preserved. Museum staff and volunteers are in the process of inventorying what was taken out and have already catalogued over 3,000 documents with many more to go. As for the structures themselves, the City is in the process of conducting a phased environmental cleanup of the site. Asbestos removal is about 50% to 65% complete; additional funding from IEPA has been requested for groundwater cleanup. City staff has done some preliminary work on drafting a Memorandum of Agreement that could be used for Section 106 purposes when an actual project comes on line.

Concerns have been raised over at least two of Rockford's National Register sites. Both have been vacant for some time, and are likely to remain so under current economic conditions.



1. Elks Club building – While a new owner had been lined up for the building who would renovate it and return it to productive use, these plans failed to come to fruition with the death of the new owner. While windows and doors were repaired, the building remains in the hands of the Abilities Center which does not have the means to restore it. In the meantime, windows continue to be broken out as the building sits vacant.

2. Midway Theatre – Largely vacant since the re-opening of the Coronado Theatre in 2001, the Midway continues to deteriorate. Staff recently learned that the heat had been turned off in the building some time ago, raising major concerns about the condition of the building's interior.



Other Commission Activities

Economic Impact of Designation In late 2007, the Preservation Commission submitted a grant application to IHPA for funds to pay for preparation and publication of a booklet exploring the economic impact of local designation. This was partly in response to many complaints that local designation (and the mandatory design review that comes with it) adversely affects property values. The Commission staff with assistance from a Planning intern outlined areas that were considered to be comparable to the four residential historic districts 30 years ago when Rockford's preservation ordinance was adopted. By comparing assessed values, sale prices and owner occupancy rates over the past 30 years for our four residential districts with comparable neighborhoods, we found that historic districts performed better over all. For example, average sale prices for single-family homes increased by between 221% and 469% in the districts while the neighborhoods they were compared with showed increases of 154% to 388%. City staff was ably aided in this effort by staff of the Rockford Area Economic Development Council which took the raw document and formatted it into a finished product.

New Owners Twice this past year, the Commission was confronted with the issue of new owners not being informed during the purchase process that the property they were buying was in a historic district. In one case, although the immediate impact was simply have a fence relocated, the new owner stated categorically that had he known he was buying property in a historic district, he would not have done it. The other case had more serious implications since the new owner had intended to demolish the house and build new. The Commission has begun to address the issue through a letter to the Rockford Area Association of Realtors, a copy of which is attached. By combining information such as what is included in the economic impact report with this, the hope is that more local realtors and title companies will be aware that local designation is recorded with the Winnebago County Recorder.

Section 106/707 Reviews The Commission provided comments to IHPA on two major projects in 2008, construction of the roundabout at Main & Auburn and demolition of roughly 100 homes along Keith Creek. Since both involve state and/or federal funds, the review was required. The Commission endorsed the concept of the roundabout but asked that a HABS report be completed on any buildings being demolished and photographs taken. While many of the homes in the Keith Creek project show historic value, the fact that they have suffered catastrophic flood damage two years in a row led to the conclusion that demolition was unavoidable. The Commission did ask that when City staff prepares the bid specs for demolition, that they include provisions for salvage of usable materials such as doors and fireplace surrounds.



Violations The Commission faced three instances of violation of the minimum maintenance requirement of the ordinance as well of the requirement for Commission approval of exterior changes. One of the violation sites has been taken care of, that being 515 Grove Street; however, it could become an issue again in the future since the house remains vacant. The other locations – houses in the 400 block of Kishwaukee Street and the house at 904 North Prospect Street – are still in process as 2009 begins.

Public Works Projects Public Works' Capital Development Manager, Patrick Zuroske, met with the Commission to discuss major downtown projects. These are the proposed removal of the downtown mall (part of which abuts the Northeast State & Main Historic District), the systematic upgrading of streetscaping on Main Street from Green Street north to Park Avenue, and development of the proposed Riverwalk. The latter may impact the Armory and part of the Indian Terrace Historic District when it is fully developed. This represented an attempt to update Commission members before projects are finalized, giving them an opportunity to comment.

Rockford Historic Districts and Landmarks

Brown's Hills/Knightsville Historic District

Generally north of Rural Street between North 2nd and North Prospect Streets

Garfield Avenue Historic District

600 through 900 blocks of Garfield Avenue

Haight Village Historic District

Bounded by South Madison, Walnut and Kishwaukee Streets and the Union Pacific Railroad

Indian Terrace Historic District

Located between Beattie Park and the former Illinois National Guard Armory

Northeast State & Main Historic District

North side of West State Street from Wyman Street to the Mall, plus 107 & 109 North Main Street

Burpee Museum of Natural History

737 & 813 North Main Street

Anderson Building

803 North Church Street

Times Theatre

222-230 North Main Street

Coronado Theatre

312-324 North Main Street

Four Squires Building

203 West State Street

Tinker Swiss Cottage Museum

411 Kent Street

Graham-Ginestra House

1115 South Main Street

7th Street Passenger Depot

701 7th Street

Shumway Market Building

713 East State Street

Erlander Home

404 South 3rd Street

Freeman School

910 2nd Avenue

Elks Club Building

210 West Jefferson Street

Beyer Stadium Gatehouse

311 15th Avenue

Midway Theatre

721 East State Street

Lake-Peterson House

1313 East State Street

Herrick-Logli Cobblestone House

2127 Broadway

West Middle School

1900 North Rockton Avenue

East High School

2929 Charles Street

Garrison School

1105 North Court Street

Liebling (Jackson Piano) Building

330 North Main Street

Illinois National Guard Armory

605 North Main Street

Rockford City Hall

425 East State Street

Winnebago County Courthouse Annex/Jail

403 Elm Street

Chick House

119-123 South Main Street

Lincoln Middle School

1500 Charles Street

National Register Sites in Rockford

Coronado Theatre

312-324 North Main Street

Herrick-Logli Cobblestone House

2127 Broadway

Lake-Peterson House

1313 East State Street

Soldiers' & Sailors' Memorial Hall

211 North Main Street

Chick House

119-123 South Main Street

Rockford Morning Star Building

127 North Wyman Street

The Brown Building

228 South Main Street

Garrison School

1105 North Court Street

Graham-Ginestra House

1115 South Main Street

Tinker Swiss Cottage Museum

411 Kent Street

Jacoby House

2 Jacoby Place

Spafford House

501 North Prospect Street

Beattie Park Mound Group

401 North Main Street

Illinois National Guard Armory

605 North Main Street

Rockford Elks Lodge #64

210 West Jefferson Street

Charles Lundberg House

946 North Second Street

Haight Village Historic District

Generally the same boundaries as the local historic district but with some variations. Primary additions are the Administration Building of the Rockford School District and the Watch Factory.

East Rockford Historic District

East State Street from the Rock River up to and including the Faust Landmark, and extending about a half block in either direction on the cross streets.

7th Street Commercial Historic District

Generally 7th Street from Charles Street to Keith Creek, including some properties on some cross streets.

Barber-Colman Co. Historic District

Generally the area between Loomis and Lane Streets on the east side of Rock Street; includes eleven industrial buildings that formerly housed the Barber-Colman Company.

West Downtown Rockford Historic District

Generally follows an irregular boundary from Park Avenue as far south as Elm Street, and from the alley west of Church Street east to Wyman Street.

Illinois Register of Historic Places

Herrick-Logli Cobblestone House

2127 Broadway

Coronado Theatre

312-324 North Main Street