

ALGONQUIN HISTORIC COMMISSION

MINUTES OF REGULAR MEETING

DECEMBER 11, 2013

7:00 P.M.

CALL TO ORDER – ESTABLISH QUORUM:

PRESENT:

Chairman Jolitz. Members: Purn, Mudra, Zange, Nee, Koepfel

Village: Ben Mason

APPROVE MINUTES OF REGULAR MEETING OF NOVEMBER 13 AND WORKSHOP MEETINGS OF NOVEMBER 12 AND 23, 2013:

Moved by Member Zange to approve above Minutes. Motion seconded by Member Purn

Voice Vote: All Ayes

PUBLIC HEARING FOR CONSIDERATION OF A MAJOR IMPROVEMENT IN THE OLD TOWN DISTRICT
CASE NO. PC13-07: 107 – 111 WEST ALGONQUIN ROAD – DEMOLITION OF TWO PRIMARY BUILDINGS AND
ONE REAR ACCESSORY BUILDING. PETITIONERS: LUUCK PARTNERSHIP. ATTORNEY JOSEPH YEUNG
REPRESENTING THE PETITIONERS

PRESENT: Chairman Jolitz. Members: Purn, Mudra, Zange, Nee, Koepfel

Village: Ben Mason

Attorney Joseph Yeung representing petitioners.

Mr Mason opened this Hearing by informing the Commission that the improvement proposed on this property consists of demolishing both primary structures and accessory structure. There are not any immediate plans for this site other than removing the structures and sod and seed the property. This property has been an ongoing maintenance nuisance in spite of the village issuing numerous code violations which the petitioners paid rather than making any improvement or even maintaining the buildings or property. Mr Mason reviewed and provided a general verbal outline of the staff report dated 12-11-13 for Case No. PC13-07 covering this request for demolition.

Chairman Jolitz asked Joseph Yeung, representing the petitioners, if he had any comments to make regarding this petition for demolition. He presented some background on the property and the current owners. He stated the property was purchased in 2005 by a group of doctors as an investment property intended to return income from the rental of the various residential and business space in the buildings. The collapse of the real estate market and the economy in 2008 has caused a situation where the owners are losing because the property required more in repairs and maintenance costs than the owners are currently able to generate income, as they have been unable to attract "quality tenants" for the buildings in their current condition.

Furthermore, the owners have been unable to sell the property, (A copy of the current real estate listing including a \$359,000 list price was provided with the owners documentation) even though they are asking less than the \$375,000 they had paid in 2005. Mr Yeung advised that the owners were seeking to demolish the buildings to stop the financial drain that maintenance and costs to repair the buildings would require. Additionally, he stated since the Village 2013 Downtown Planning Study Indicated this property (along with dozens of others) as one for consideration of long term "redevelopment" it is the owners desire to demolish all of the structures and put an end to the "money pit" that the investment has now become.

Chairman Jolitz stated that research since the time of the 1995 Historic Survey done by the Commission indicates that the oldest building on the property was constructed in 1857 by George Early. Furthermore, the buildings at 107 and 111 along with the building just to the west of these (115 Algonquin Rd) are in fact the last three remaining structures of Algonquin's very first business district. The present day Algonquin Rd. was originally called Main St. The village buildings that once stood across the street from these structures were lost when the State of Illinois tore them down to add a turning lane to Rte. 62. These remaining structures are the last of our town's "First Growth" business structures and are among the oldest buildings in Algonquin.

At this time the floor was open to public comment. Mr Tom Green of 227 LaFox River Drive addressed the Commission.

Mr Tom Green stated, "I am here representing myself and my Old Town neighbors on LaFox, Washington, Harrison and others that live in the Historic downtown District. When I purchased my home at 227 LaFox about 12 years ago, I did it even with the common knowledge that people know that these vintage structures usually receive more care and repair costs to maintain. I am retired and on a fixed income and even though these costs can be a hardship, myself and my neighbors still maintain our properties and do what is required. Even when we were required by the village to do extra things like putting in a hard surface driveway we did what we had to do, financial hardship or not. These buildings are part of the streetscape of our Old Town neighborhood that made us decide to live in Algonquin's Old Town. Furthermore, Massive three to four story projects like Riverside Plaza overshadow the unique character of Algonquin's Old Town and should be built in other parts of the Village. Just because the owners of these vintage buildings do not live in Algonquin, is no reason why the buildings should not be maintained as the rest of us are doing and remain part of our Old Town neighborhood as they have been for 150 years. I respectfully ask the Commission to vote NO on this demolition request."

At this time Chairman Jolitz opened the floor to comments from Commission members

MEMBER MUDRA stated that some "old fashioned elbow grease" and routine maintenance such as pulling weeds , washing windows, powerwashing and paint would eliminate the look of blighted structures and as referenced in the staff report would go a long way to make the buildings presentable to potential tenants.

MEMBER ZANGE stated he objected to the use of "blighted" appearance in the staff report. He stated and Member Nee agreed that vacant empty lots can be even more of a "blighted condition" in a streetscape. Furthermore they agreed with Member Mudra that the current condition is temporary and could be resolved, whereas demolition was permanent. Also it could be decades before the type of large scale redevelopment the petitioners referred to happens, if ever. Such a project could cost millions in addition to contending with potential issues with this parcel, given its location in a flood plain.

MEMBER: NEE further questioned the rationale behind demolition from an economic perspective . She stated "the buildings have the potential to generate income for the owners, whereas an empty lot has both a blighting effect on the Old Town District and costs for the owners to maintain including mowing, taxes, liability insurance with no hope of any income. Furthermore, they then hope at some time to sell the empty land to someone for redevelopment, which has no guarantee of ever happening in a reasonable amount of time. If the owners main reason for demolition is to stop the "financial drain" then the owners should reduce the current \$359,000 asking price significantly to sell the property.

Attorney Joseph Yeung responded that even if the buildings were fixed up, they are not desirable to attract tenants due to the traffic downtown and parking problems with the property only having a single driveway to the back parking area, He stated the village needs to allow this demolition to relieve his clients of the poor investment the property has become.

MEMBER PURN stated he felt the buildings were historically significant in the development of Algonquin's first business district. Also, the 107 building is one of only two "original false front" buildings left in Old Town, the other being 8 S. Main. All the other false fronts referenced in the staff report are new replacements or reproductions of vintage buildings. Other towns have a lot of inventory of these types of buildings but our list is very small.

Member Purn also stated that architectural design is only one of the criteria used by the Commission in the historic survey of structures of 1994, Significance to the history of the village, age of the buildings were also an important consideration.

MEMBER KOEPPPEL stated in the past buildings were beautifully maintained, especially by the Divis family, owners of this property. George Divis kept the buildings clean, painted with flowers in window boxes. The trees and bushes trimmed and the property weed free. He also had a variety of tenants including a bridal shop, real estate office, law office and others. Even though Mr Divis was 80 years old, the buildings were always kept attractive.

Furthermore, she was very frustrated that any buildings would be allowed to decline to the point where someone would contemplate "demolition" as an alternative to maintenance and repairs.

Chairman Jolitz stated the need to respond to several claims made in the petitioners comments. First, regarding "lack of parking" and having a "single driveway entrance" to the parcel. Jolitz identified many parcels in Old Town with business and residential mixed entrances that were operating with the same situation (single driveways) including all of South Main Street from Washington South to the bike trail. And also many of the locations on N. Main St. These buildings include a wide variety of service, office, retail and residential use.

Furthermore, regarding traffic, the Western Bypass project is due to be completed next summer. Traffic patterns and intensity are expected to change with its completion.

Regarding parking – the 2013 Downtown Planning study identified the potential for development of additional parking in the Old Town area including greatly expanding the municipal lot along S. Harrison from Washington St. to the creek – less than 200 feet from the petitioners buildings. Also there is a sizeable area that could be developed for parking at the back of both of these primary structures as well as behind behind the vacant building next door at 115 Algonquin Rd.

Also, the building next door. This building has a single driveway and perhaps the owners could work with the owners of the 115 building and create rear parking for all the buildings, using one driveway for ingress and the other for egress for increased efficiency and ease of use.

Mr Yeung stated that the boarded up, neglected condition of the 115 building next door made his clients parcel even more difficult to market. Chairman Jolitz asked if he or the petitioners had any contact with the owners of the adjacent parcel or the village to discuss an option such as this which would benefit all of the parcels. He stated they had not made any such contact as the petitioners were not interested in any such contact as the petitioners were not interested in spending more money on the parcel and again stated the village needs to help his clients by allowing the demolition of their three buildings to relieve them of their financial burden caused by the economic collapse in 2007/2008 and the drop in the real estate values which have impacted the property owners.

Chairman Jolitz replied that the struggling economy and the sharp decline in property values is a nationwide problem and his clients face no more hardship as a result of this than anyone else in America. In fact many people lost their homes or are left with mortgages on property worth far less than it can be sold for. The petitioners are in no more difficulty than others in this marketplace.

Furthermore, the costs associated with property maintenance and repair is not part of the Preservation Code. He stated that the petitioners current lack of tenants is not the charge or responsibility of the Historic Commission and suggested that the petitioners reach out perhaps to the EDC or Chamber of Commerce for help or advice on these matters.

Additionally, he felt that the information contained in the 2013 Downtown Study is not a basis for consideration of this application of demolition of these three vintage buildings. The planning study has been discussed at this Hearing only because it was referred to extensively in the staff report and the petitioners submittal information. However, information referenced from the study seems to only highlight the possibility of further redevelopment which may never happen in our lifetimes and does not consider options for additional parking and expected changes in local traffic patterns which were also included in the study.

Jolitz summarized by stating that the petitioners had purchased the historic buildings in 2005 in a designated OLD TOWN HISTORIC DISTRICT covered by an established PRESERVATION CODE and additionally the parcel is included within a designated "FLOOD PLAIN" location. Despite the fact that the petitioners have submitted cost estimates for required repairs from contractors – the fact remains that they had every opportunity to have the property completely inspected to reveal any major problems needing to be addressed at the time of purchase.

He stated "frankly routine maintenance consisting of painting, roof work, repair/replacement of services such as heating, electric, etc. are a part of property ownership and the responsibility one assumes with owning buildings. He stated, recently, "I took out a mortgage and spent a lot of money to remake and rehab a property in the Old Town area that was empty for a few years. Now it is rented and a structure that will remain part of Old Town Algonquin streetscape for the years ahead. Property owners in the Old Town area have stepped up to their responsibilities and have maintained or refurbished their vintage buildings as well, including buildings at 8 S. Main, 115 S. Main, 220 S. Main and 211 Washington among others.

Chairman Jolitz then read the Village of Algonquin Mission Statement and its references to "Preserving its Ecological and Historic Richness" "And Remain Mindful And Respectful of The Past". Furthermore, there have been many buildings and homes in Algonquin that, prior to the establishment of property maintenance ordinances and codes, had declined to a point of condemnation and tagged "Unfit For Habitation". Through work and maintenance by property owners these same structures are again a viable part of our Old Town area. These property owners need to face their responsibilities of ownership just like every other property owner, regardless of where the buildings or houses are located in the village. These structures are among a small handful of remaining first growth buildings that remain in the village.

The petitioners proposal only "TAKES" from our village and its history and gives nothing in return. Past actions by other property owners clearly prove that that vintage structures can be saved and once again become viable elements of our Old Town district historic streetscapes.

Chairman Jolitz asked if any members had other comments regarding the request from the petitioners. At this time Member Zange moved to recommend that the Building Commissioner not issue the requested Certificate of Appropriateness for demolition of buildings located at 107-111 Algonquin Road due to the historic structures. Case No. PC13-07. Motion seconded by Member Purn.

Chairman Jolitz repeated the motion and opened the floor for additional questions, comments or debate.

MEMBER ZANGE: If the Petitioners had taken care of this property from the beginning it wouldn't be in such disrepair. We will lose significant examples of our early history and some of our oldest examples in town if they are demolished.

MEMBER MUDRA: It would be a shame to allow these buildings to be demolished now after standing since 1857 especially when due to a lack of maintenance or repairs.

MEMBER NEE: These buildings are important to preserving our history and the Old Town neighborhood historic streetscapes. I agree with remarks made by Chairman Jolitz and the other Commissioners. If the owners are willing to demolish and destroy their "investment" why don't reduce their asking price and sell the structures. Demolition by way of neglect or lack of willingness by individuals to live up to their responsibilities as property owners should not be allowed. I also feel a vacant lot creates a significant "blighted" effect and offers the owners no means of generating income from the property, especially when you consider that there is no guarantee as to when or if the parcel would be redeveloped. We have a preservation code to preserve structures like this and the buildings should be retained.

MEMBER KOEPEL: I agree with Member Zange and find it unconscionable that these buildings were left to deteriorate to the point that the petitioners or anyone else in town would choose to demolish these buildings. Perhaps our codes, regulations, fines etc should be revised to provide for greater enforcement to protect our structures in Old Town and throughout Algonquin. The neglect of the buildings on this block should not be allowed. It is not fair to the owners in our village that do such a great job with their properties. Look what Tony Bellino did with 8 S. Main and others.

CHAIRMAN JOLITZ: I think these buildings can and should be preserved. *It is not the responsibility of the Commission to provide an easy way out to someone that feels they made a poor choice in an investment. What is merely an investment to these owners is part of our local history and as resident Tom Green stated the buildings are part of our "Old Town Neighborhood" The old town district is a unique area with a wide variety of mixed uses. However, everything including the current Preservation Code has been in place for many years, long before the petitioners decided to purchase the buildings. Additionally there were dozens of sites and buildings identified in the 2013 study as suitable for possible future redevelopment. It is absurd for any owner of any property in the village to fail to maintain or renovate their buildings or homes based on the premise that one day there may be a redevelopment for consideration on a site.*

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It is every owner's responsibility to maintain their property and these buildings are more than just wood and mortar. They have been a part of our community and our history for 150 years and this is why the preservation code was created. If we continue to allow the destruction of these examples of our past, soon there will be little left to hold together the "feel of Old Town as a special and unique place." Not every building is a high Victorian Queen Anne style building like the Woodhouse Day Spa property.

Algonquin is the oldest community in McHenry county. We should be able to point to a few structures and say "this building has been here for over 150 years". Hopefully someday residents can say we have some buildings over 200 years old. However, if we allow this type of demolition, future generations of Algonquin residents will not be able to say that and we will have failed in our mission.

Being no further comments, Chairman Jolitz called for a vote:

Roll Call Members: Purn aye, Mudra aye, Zange aye, Nee aye, Koeppel aye, Chairman Jolitz aye
Motion passed unanimously to recommend denial of the Petitioners request for demolition.

Chairman Jolitz advised Attorney Yeung that the Petitioners have the right to appeal this recommendation of the Commission to the Village Board. He informed Attorney Yeung to obtain details from Mr. Mason on the appeals process if interested.

Mr. Yeung thanked the Commission members for their time in allowing him to present the case for consideration on behalf of the property owners

COMMISSION'S MONTHLY MEETING RESUMES:

OLD BUSINESS:

A. Interview project – Status Report:

Still checking candidates for January and February. The Teson brothers were suggested..

AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION:

None

NEW BUSINESS:

Accessioning Revisions:

Member Nee explained that we have been hand writing the accessions in the archival ledger. She suggested looking into a soft ware program to accession. Member Purn suggested looking at Programs currently used by Union, Crystal Lake and many other historical groups. He will contact several of them for information.

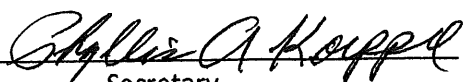
CORRESPONDENCE, COMMENTS OR: OTHER BUSINESS:

None

ADJOURNMENT:

Moved by Member Purn to adjourn. Seconded by Member Nee

Voice Vote: All Ayes Meeting adjourned at 8:30 P.M.


Secretary

1-8-14
Date Approved

