

**VILLAGE OF LAKE BLUFF
VILLAGE BOARD OF TRUSTEES
HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION**

**SPECIAL MEETING
MARCH 16, 2019**

APPROVED MINUTES OF MEETING

The Village of Lake Bluff Board of Trustees and Historic Preservation Commission met in the Village Hall Board Room (40 East Center Avenue) on Saturday, March 16, 2019. Village President O’Hara called the meeting to order at 8:30 a.m. Village Clerk Joy Markee called the roll.

The following were present:

Village President:	Kathleen O’Hara
Trustees:	Barbara Ankenman Mark Dewart Paul Lemieux
Trustees Absent:	William Meyer Eric Grenier Aaron Towle
HPC Commissioners:	Steve Kraus, Chair Robert Hunter, Vice Chair Paul Bergmann Janie Jerch Lois Nicol Cheri Richardson
Commissioners Absent:	Randolph Liebelt
Also Present:	Joy Markee, Village Clerk Drew Irvin, Village Administrator Glen Cole, Assistant to the Village Administrator John Scopelliti, Administrative Intern

Non-Agenda Items and Visitors

President O’Hara stated the COW allocates 15 minutes for those individuals who would like the opportunity to address the COW on any matter not listed on the agenda.

There were no requests to address the COW.

Discussion Regarding Historic Preservation Policies and Programs

Introduction

At the invitation of President O’Hara, Chair Steve Kraus came forward to present to the joint meeting regarding the HPC’s planning efforts over the past two years. He thanked the Village Board for the

opportunity to speak, and noted that this was the culmination of work stemming from the Board’s 2017 request for ways to strengthen the Historic Preservation Ordinance.

As there were no further introductory remarks, Chair Kraus proceeded to present a set of slides included in the meeting’s agenda packet, starting with a list of the goals of the Historic Preservation Ordinance; a review of the Ordinance’s current mechanisms applied to historic structures; and statistics documenting the number of structures older than 50 years old and therefore subject to demolition review, the number reviewed for the life of the HPC ordinance, and the number of landmarks demolished.

Trustee Lemieux stated that he believes this slide is misleading in that there are victories for historic preservation, such as counting as a negative the demolition of a house on Center Avenue despite its subsequent replacement with a house that respected the lot’s historic context. Commissioner Bergmann responded that, if the objective of the Ordinance is to prevent demolitions, this example was a failure; if the objective is to preserve streetscapes, it was a win. After discussion among the members of the Board and the HPC, Chair Kraus continued his presentation.

Choosing Lake Bluff

Chair Kraus introduced the HPC’s preservation framework, *Choosing Lake Bluff*. In his introductory remarks, he stated that a common response the HPC receives from new homeowners choosing to demolish is that they simply didn’t know about the historic or neighborhood context. He stated that one of the goals is to educate purchasers about this before their decision to demolish. The *Choosing Lake Bluff* model focuses on interventions concerning branding (discovery by new homebuyers), knowledge (the purchasing process), redevelopment (policies), and rehabilitation (incentives).

In response to a question from Village Clerk Markee, Chair Kraus responded that the HPC has periodically sent letters to owners of historically significant homes over the years with little success.

Trustee Dewart stated that the framework works from the standpoint of a real estate buyer, but that it should also consider the behaviors of sellers and realtors who put a home into a market context (e.g. by advertising it as a teardown candidate). After some discussion among the present members, Chair Kraus responded that the framework does not address the seller specifically but includes elements directed towards the real estate community as well as architects and builders.

From the audience, Ms. Stephanie Bjork (resident) asked if there is any data regarding the number of “legacy” buyers returning to the Village. Chair Kraus responded that this may be a to-do item to investigate. Other members of the audience provided anecdotal evidence. Ms. Bjork stated that there may be an opportunity for homeowners to contribute to or correct their survey results by providing information to the Village.

Trustee Dewart stated that these steps involve selecting or encouraging one segment of the real estate market at the expense of others. Chair Kraus responded that the intent of *Choosing Lake Bluff* is not to create a time capsule, but rather, to encourage decisions that reflect community values. Commissioner Bergmann responded that there is no desire to live in a historic recreation but, rather, that there is a desire to preserve the values and streetscapes that residents bought into Lake Bluff to live among. He noted that modern houses were among those lost due to demolitions since the passage of the Historic Preservation Ordinance. Trustee Dewart stated that the Village must be cautious in building a brand and what the outcomes will be. Chair Kraus stated that some may feel excluded. Trustee Dewart concluded his remarks by stating that there is more to Lake Bluff’s brand than houses - there is a community.

Chair Kraus provided an overview of the branding goals of *Choosing Lake Bluff*. He stated that the Village must incorporate its past as integral to the community’s present and future character (among other goals described on the slide). He stated that the Village should provide brochures on community features; prominently identify historic places and areas; and provide tours, histories, timelines, and research resources concerning historic events.

Chair Kraus provided an overview of the knowledge goals of *Choosing Lake Bluff*. He reiterated that there is no central location for Village residents to access historic housing information in the Village, but that other communities have compelling resources. He provided a demonstration of such a mapping tool built for Evanston’s Lakeshore Historic District and stated that Lake Bluff should produce a similar resource, *Lake Bluff Online*. In response to a question from Village Clerk Markee, Chair Kraus stated that the HPC had discussed privacy concerns and that the data displayed in these tools would already be publicly available.

Chair Kraus provided an overview of the rehabilitation goals of *Choosing Lake Bluff*. He stated that the Village must reinforce its bias for preservation by reducing obstacles and providing incentives for preservation and rehabilitation. In summary, he said that the Village must choose its posture on a continuum between “No fees” and “No special treatment” for historic rehabilitation projects. He presented a list of possible individual policies that the Board could adopt.

Chair Kraus provided an overview of the redevelopment goals of *Choosing Lake Bluff*. He stated that the Village should adopt policies that shift the focus away from preserving individual structures and towards preserving neighborhood character despite teardowns. He presented a list of possible individual policies that the Board could adopt.

Trustee Lemieux asked how structures would be selected for protection. Chair Kraus stated that guidelines existed today and would be further adapted if the Village Board directed the HPC to propose revisions to the Historic Preservation Ordinance. Trustee Lemieux asked who would conduct residential design reviews. Vice Chair Hunter, who also serves as the Chair of the Architectural Board of Review, replied that the consensus of the ABR is not to conduct these reviews. A discussion ensued regarding design review. Chair Kraus, concluding the conversation, said that he wants to enable new residents to make positive decisions for Lake Bluff’s streetscape and character while preserving homeowner rights.

Policies that complement a preservation framework.

Chair Kraus proceeded to the next section of his presentation regarding possible changes to the Historic Preservation Ordinance, including various changes to existing mechanisms; the introduction of a new “Historic” designation for individual structures; and the introduction of “Landmark” and “Historic” designations that could be applied to areas.

Chair Kraus stated that he is uncomfortable with retrospectively nominating landmarks after they are being considered for demolition. He stated that the HPC would, under certain circumstances, agree with a rule prohibiting teardown nominations. Referring to a proposal to extend demolition delays for up to 365 days, Chair Kraus stated that the Village Board may hear all requests to exceed 120 days of delay or that there may be different lengths of delay based on the party that nominated a structure or area as a Landmark or Historic property.

Chair Kraus stated that the goal of this policy approach is to extend the highest level of protection to a

number of community jewels as “landmarks”, and to extend a better level of protection to a larger number of “historic” properties. He noted that his view, a minority among the members of the HPC, is that the Village could eliminate significant demolition delay at a later time if these policies were diligently implemented.

Trustee Dewart and the board discussed the mechanics of designating a Landmark District or a Historic District, as those terms were used in the presentation.

Chair Kraus concluded his presentation with a list of requested action steps, including: adopting *Choosing Lake Bluff* as Village policy; developing the various resources and policies proposed throughout this morning; and comprehensively amending the Historic Preservation Ordinance. Before the meeting recessed, Trustee Ankenman stated she wanted to know more about the funding mechanism for *Lake Bluff Online* and was worried that designating landmark areas is an imposition upon homeowner rights.

Recess

At 9:10 a.m., Village President O’Hara declared the meeting in recess. The meeting reconvened at 9:20 a.m.

Discussion

Trustee Lemieux stated that he was very encouraged by the inclusion of the following sentence on slide 17 of the presentation: “Shift focus from preservation of an individual structure to preservation of neighborhood character.” Referring to slide 22, which presents the designation levels for individual structures, he stated that he remains concerned about the Village nominating structures involuntarily. Chair Kraus responded that the Board could choose to restrict “landmark” nominations to the owner.

Trustee Ankenman asked what the effect of a homeowner’s objection to an area designation would be. Chair Kraus responded that the homeowner would still be included in the district and subject to restrictions. Trustee Ankenman expressed her concern that a homeowner could be subject to a 365 day demolition delay involuntarily. Commissioner Bergmann, to illustrate, described a historic district where the back of many houses were modern additions but where the front facades are maintained. He states that this balance is a goal of preservation. Village Clerk Markee stated that the Village should consider increasing the threshold to avoid pitting neighbor against neighbor in the designation of a district.

In response to a question, Assistant to the Village Administrator Glen Cole described the process and work effort involved in *Lake Bluff Online*. He stated that the minimum product would not require an excess of effort, but that the amount of time volunteers could spend researching and improving the data on individual houses is indefinite.

Village President O’Hara recognized Ed Wynn (resident). Mr. Wynn stated that the Village could prioritize the most important 200 houses. He stated that, of 83 houses recognized as significant by the Village’s historic surveys, only 14 are landmarked. He said that the Village should make it easier for owners to landmark their property by producing a fillable PDF form and by shortening the form through legal mechanisms such as presumptions tied to the survey’s designations. He described issues with the interaction between certified landmarks and obtaining tax credits for preservation, but believes the Village should pursue making these protections and incentives an “and” discussion rather than an “either or” discussion.

Continuing, Mr. Wynn described three classes of situations that he believes should receive different treatment: (i) existing homes with no pending demolition; (ii) demolitions by owners; (iii) demolitions by national building firms seeking to construct speculative housing. He agreed with Vice Chair Hunter that architectural standards would be intrusive and hopes instead to promote design consistency. He stated that he was scared by the idea of prohibiting landmark nominations where demolition applications are filed, but likes the idea of avoiding pitting neighbor against neighbor. He believes that stronger protections regarding drainage and environmental issues would help the comfort level with these changes.

Mr. Wynn stated that homes not in keeping with their neighborhoods depreciate quicker, and that property values falling is bad for all properties. Referring to the concept of heritage lots, Mr. Wynn stated that there should be ways to restore and protect these lots because they provide Lake Bluff's unique housing variety as well as lower priced housing options for retirees and households with different economic situations.

Vice Chair Hunter, recalling the discussion surrounding the initial adoption of the historic preservation ordinance, stated that residents did not want to diminish their property values right as they were about to retire, sell, and realize their equity value in cash.

Commissioner Richardson stated that the Village Attorney had previously advised that discriminating against national builders would be inappropriate. Mr. Wynn responded that he believes there are reasonable and defensible standards that would distinguish between speculative builders and existing homeowners and that these have been adopted elsewhere.

Discussion ensued regarding the interaction between historic preservation and property values.

From the audience, Ms. Stephanie Bjork (resident) responded to the idea that 365 day delays are punitive. She stated that capital gains taxes would apply if a sale occurred without the house having been held for at least 18 months, and so most builders will hold their property at least that long. Trustee Ankenman responded that the delay would punish individual homeowners. Ms. Bjork responded that individual homeowners are not building for resale.

Village Clerk Markee described what she believes is a typical situation, where children are selling their inheritance without necessarily being concerned with who they're selling to or what the buyer will do to the streetscape.

Village President O'Hara extended her thanks, on behalf of the Board of Trustees, to the Historic Preservation Commission for their diligent and comprehensive plan. She believes it is sweeping in areas of concern, but that it will take more consideration. She stated that she wanted to see the results of the newest Village historic survey including significant houses and areas, and that she also wanted another Committee-of-the-Whole meeting to discuss next steps.

Chair Kraus asked if Village President O'Hara was asking for specific recommendations at this time. Village President O'Hara responded that she was not. A discussion ensued regarding next steps, including a need to confer with the absent Trustees as well as the Board's new trustees following April's election. Village Administrator Irvin responded that Staff would develop budgets for marketing; review information provided by Mr. Wynn and rewriting the regulations on speculative builders; and come back to discuss an action plan in 45-60 days.

Chair Kraus reiterated that the framework, which he requests the Village Board adopt by resolution, deliberately excludes the ordinance recommendations the HPC provided elsewhere in his presentation. In response to a question by Village Administrator Irvin, he stated that there are existing materials that document historic areas and the location of significant homes and landmarks that could be brought to the Village Board’s attention when they next consider *Choosing Lake Bluff*.

Adjournment

A motion to adjourn was made, seconded, and passed on a unanimous voice vote. The meeting adjourned at 11:20 a.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Glen Cole
Assistant to the Village Administrator