



MEETING MINUTES

PRESERVATION COMMISSION

Tuesday, December 12, 2024

7:00 P.M. Council Chambers Room 2800

Members Present: Carl Klein, Thomas Ahleman, Amanda Ziehm, Sarah M. Dreller, Stuart Cohen, Lesa Rizzolo, Joshua Bowes-Carlson, John Jacobs, Charles Smith

Members Absent: Beth Bodan, Matthew Johnson

Staff Present: Cade W. Sterling

Presiding Member: Sarah M. Dreller, Chair

Minutes Taken by: Cade W. Sterling

CALL TO ORDER/DECLARATION OF A QUORUM

PUBLIC COMMENT

Members of the public are afforded three minutes per person to provide testimony related to items listed under discussion, or to otherwise address the Commission generally. Members of the public wishing to provide testimony on new or unfinished business shall be given the opportunity to do so during those agenda items in a manner and under time limits determined by the Chair.

- Jack Weiss, former Vice-Chair of the Preservation Commission and president of Design Evanston, provided public comment related to the Envision Evanston 2045's Preservation Chapter, specifically concerns with the plans ambiguous reference to reducing barriers to adaptive use of historic resources, and asking for more specifics on what these barriers may be. Additionally, Mr. Weiss asked for clarification on how historic preservation may be used as a tool to retain affordability, and spoke enthusiastically about the plans reference to heritage tourism, a concept that has not been included in any prior comprehensive plan, but had tremendous potential for Evanston due to the diversity and significance of its historic resources.

- Mary McWilliams, early member of the Preservation Commission, Associate Member, and former Commission Historian, spoke in regards to the Envision Evanston comprehensive plan as well as providing background on the preservation program and asking that the plan include more thorough and specific reference to efforts to create conservation districts, such as the one proposed in the 90s for the fifth ward, as well as a need to address historically and architecturally significant schools and City owned properties that have uncertain futures.

REVIEW AND COMMENT

Envision Evanston 2045

Pursuant to City Code Sections 2-8-3 (G) 15, 20, 21, 23, and 24 the Commission shall assist in the development and review of the preservation components of the Envision Evanston 2045 Comprehensive Plan as well as review the associated City-initiated amendments to the Zoning Ordinance -- providing written testimony and recommendations on their appropriateness for the protection and continued use of existing landmarks and properties, structures, sites, or objects within historic districts, as well as their potential affect on other historically, culturally, architecturally, or archaeologically significant areas, sites, structures, and objects throughout the City.

- Mr. Sterling provided background on the purpose of a comprehensive plan and its relationship with the zoning code as well as the intersects of historic preservation across the plans many chapters not only the preservation chapter.
- Mr. Sterling reviewed the Commissions purpose statements, noting that the Commission had broad authority to not only review the plan and zoning within historic districts and landmarks, but also through the lens of city-wide orderly and efficient development, as well as neighborhood stabilization for areas that may not currently have historic designations, but may be eligible, or otherwise hold special interest for the residents of the City.
- Mr. Sterling outlined the basis for the conversation, noting that a series of prompts had been created to guide discussion. These prompts were created through areas of consensus reached by reviewing and analyzing written and verbal responses by individual Commissioners. The goal of the evening was to find areas where there was broad agreement and that those recommendations would then be forwarded to the Land Use Commission and City Council for consideration.
- The Commission discussed the relationship of Preserve 2040 and the draft comprehensive plan as inadequate, noting that the preservation plan was a much more specific and thoroughly developed roadmap for the future changes needed to evolve the preservation program over the next 20 years. It was recommended that the comprehensive plan incorporate more reference to the existence and value of the preservation plan, and that it was created for Evanston by Evanston.

- The Commission discussed the use of Neighborhood Conservation Districts. Specifically, the notion that they are only a useful tool for retaining affordability, as noted in the draft comprehensive plan, is overly reductive and does not communicate their true value as a neighborhood planning and stabilization tool. Additionally, neighborhood conservation districts can be used in areas rich with not only built heritage but cultural heritage and the combination of conservation districts, retention of a neighborhoods character defining features, celebration of cultural heritage, and preservation-based economic development approaches could be transformational for the City.
- Mr. Sterling provided an overview of how NCD's work, noting that each is different and there is no single model that meets the needs of each neighborhood. It was also noted that the concept has been widely successful across the country. NCDs can be a powerful mitigation tool that balances the plans more significant development and growth oriented goals.
- The Commission discussed the need for more data in the plan, more sources, and more justification for its foundational claims. Additionally, an implementation chapter is absolutely necessary to understand how the plans various chapters and actions intersect with one another, how they're prioritized, and when and how they will be implemented. The current plan lacks any kind of framework for its effective implementation and risks being reactionary or ineffective without these considerations.
- The Commission discussed the need for a chapter or section on community systems that helps identify and build capacity for the plans implementation and find consensus on vision across the City's many institutions. Most notably missing from the plan is reference to the school districts which are facing significant challenges that will have significant consequences for the City, its character, and its identity. The plan needs to acknowledge that schools will be closing, and how to deal with those resources, many of which are historic or otherwise of special interest to the community. This is also true of significant City-owned resources including the Civic Center, the Police and Fire Headquarters, and the Noyes Cultural Arts Center, all of which have uncertain futures. The community systems chapter must address these issues and create clear policy directives that inform future decisions.
- The Commission asked that a separate agenda item show up on the February or March agendas to specifically address the issue of the Civic Center, which is eligible for landmark designation.
- The Commission discussed the idea of not only consulting with tribal representatives, but having the draft comprehensive plan explicitly call for identifying and designating a reinterment location. It was noted that this has come up at multiple Commission meetings, and was supported by representatives of the Tribes already. This concept is especially important if the plan catalyzes more widespread change of space and construction as the likelihood of inadvertent discovery is higher.

- The Commission discussed the need for demolition delay procedures that would allow as-of-right demolitions to be paused to assess the potential impact on historic resources that are eligible or may be eligible. Reference was made to Northwesterns decision to demolish the landmark eligible warehouse building in the Research Park. The building was in good condition and could have been adapted to any number of uses. It was stated that a goal for demolition delay should be to assess whether an existing structure currently meets the City's many goals outlined in the comprehensive plan and whether its loss would be detrimental to the public good. If more development is being prioritized, this issue becomes more important.
- Mr. Sterling noted that demolition delay could live in a number of places including the zoning ordinance, the preservation ordinance, or in the building code. There are many models to choose from.
- The Commission identified the existing map in the preservation chapter as being highly deficient and not representative of existing conditions nor the large body of work the Commission has undertaken over half a century. The Commission recommended including local and national historic districts, individual landmarks, eligible landmarks, legacy businesses, eligible districts, and Shorefronts African-American Heritage Sites. The map needs graphic improvements as well and additional annotations including what dates districts were established or found eligible.
- The Commission discussed the basis of the proposed zoning changes to be rooted in the community's diverse built environment and that the zoning, particularly built interventions that can be as-of-right, need to respect context and be to-scale and compatible. The Commission identified many areas in the downtown, the Chicago Avenue corridor, and elsewhere that have posed challenges in the past and rather than repeat those mistakes, the code should create more predictive and compatible outcomes. This was also seen as important for existing individual landmarks outside a district that may have their integrity of setting and feeling impacted by incompatible built forms adjacent to them. The Commission recommended that the comprehensive plan address this issue explicitly and call for giving the Commission advisory review over these kinds of adjacencies when major projects such as demolition and new construction were proposed.
- The Commission discussed the character of Evanston's built environment and that its diversity across geographic regions, including its lower-density residential neighborhoods, are significant to its identity and sense of place.
- The Commission commented that the proposed housing goals are not currently based in an analytical study of the City's existing housing, housing needs, housings trends and consumer preferences, nor the city's ability to compete with neighboring communities as a residential city of choice in the region.
- The proposal to allow four units in all residential zones isn't supported by data or metrics. Based on the population projections that are included, this

transformational change seems unnecessary to achieve the plans more ideological housing goals. Significant changes in the built environment such as this should first identify a problem and justify how the change is a necessary part of the solution. The Commission noted that the City has a tremendous diversity in housing stock and housing typologies already and that single-family homes only account for 30% of that housing stock with the majority being various forms of multi-family. It seems like a solution is being proposed for a problem that does not exist.

- The Commission further identified the proposal for allowing four units in all residential zones as a destabilizing force that inserts a significant profit motive that has the potential to catalyze a widespread rearrangement of space that may not be necessary or desirable. This goal is counter to so many of the plans other goals including preservation, adaptive use, and sustainability. It will result in the demolition of smaller, more vernacular homes, change the character of neighborhoods, and increase displacement pressures, especially in areas already suffering from destabilization.
- It was discussed that both the number of units proposed, the inherent density increase, as well as the change in character and increase in bulk and mass for these structures was problematic.
- The Commission discussed the need for the plan to address how parks and open spaces in historic districts are treated differently. Specifically, how their historic and cultural associations inform future planning and design decisions. It was further noted that all parks in the City have historic and cultural associations and that these should form the foundation for decision making.
- The Commission discussed the importance of trees and landscapes to not only sustainability and recreation, but as significant cultural resources that are tied to Evanston's identity and sense of place.
- The Commission discussed the importance of deconstruction and recommended that the plan more explicitly address the issue and call for a deconstruction ordinance. Generally, it was noted that the plan is insufficient in its recognition of the importance of embodied carbon.
- The Commission discussed the difference between contiguous and non-contiguous historic districts, and the importance of the City's train stations and railways to its patterns of development. The physical resources that communicate this past history need to be identified and incorporated into the plan and the architectural significance and artistic value of these resources should be balanced with future accessibility and use improvements.
- The Commission further discussed the proposed zoning code. Foremost, the Commission expressed frustration with timeline and process, noting that they were being asked to review something that has yet to be released in its entirety.
- The Commission recommended that references to historic preservation be re-inserted in the draft zoning ordinance, that standards related to not

destroying historic resources be included in requested variations and planned developments, and generally that the proposed zoning districts should include more context based language that seeks compatibility in form, mass, and scale with surrounding design vocabularies.

- The Commission noted that many communities empanel a design commission or even a specific compatible design commission for these purposes and that this makes sense for a community as built out as Evanston that has such a rich and complex built environment most of which predates modern zoning controls.
- The Commission noted inconsistency with the proposed zoning map and associated designations within the downtown, along corridors, and within neighborhood business districts and felt there was potential that what was proposed in these areas would result in a loss of character and compatible built forms.
- The Commission asked to revisit the zoning code at a later date and asked Mr. Sterling to compile their comments on the comprehensive plan for review by the Commission and incorporation into a comment letter to send to the Land Use Commission.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 10:37 pm