



MEETING MINUTES

PRESERVATION COMMISSION

Thursday, February 20, 2025

6:00 P.M. Council Chambers Room 2800

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

Members Absent: N/A

Staff Present: Cade W. Sterling

Presiding Member: Carl Klein, 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.

- Resident John Kennedy, provided public comment in support of landmark designation, noting that the building has grown to be a part of our historic heritage, first as a school and then as a center for civic engagement and as such, it deserves to be part of future generations.
- Resident Joan Safford communicated the significant work resident and Associate Member of the Commission Mary McWilliams has done to prepare a nomination for the property. She went on to provide background on the reasons the site was selected for City Hall in the 1970s following a complicated search for a new center of local government. The building has a tremendous history and significance architecturally as well as culturally and has newly discovered associations with nationally recognized architects.

- Resident Julie Cowan expressed that the building a cornerstone of Evanston's identity and that it has enormous adaptive use potential and deserves to be part of our built heritage for generations to come. Designating the building a landmark would honor its past and present mutually compatible opportunities to meet the City's housing, sustainability, and cultural goals.

DISCUSSION

2100 Ridge Avenue - Lorraine H. Morton Civic Center - Discussion on the Potential for Local Landmark Nomination

The Preservation Commission will discuss initiating a nomination for local landmark designation for the property at 2100 Ridge Avenue, known as the Lorraine H. Morton Civic Center and historically as the Marywood Academy and Visitation Academy. The property is currently listed in the National Register of Historic Places, [reference #223406](#). The Preservation Commission previously determined the property to be eligible for local landmark designation in 2005.

The Commission seeks public input regarding the property's architectural, social, cultural, and political significance, including its associations with significant people, stories, and events. Public input will inform the Commission's decision regarding landmark nomination and help discover the property's broader significance to the community. Landmark designation would serve to honor the Civic Center's legacy and ensure its ability to effectively communicate its past and importance to the community's identity for future generations, regardless of the property's future use.

- Mr. Sterling provided an overview of the procedure for landmark nomination.
- Commissioners noted the significant opportunity and relationship between retention of the building and sustainability goals including retention of the buildings embodied carbon.
- Commissioners noted the significant and varied layers of history embodied within the building including its well documented architectural significance but also lesser acknowledged cultural, social, and political significance including its associations with women's history, major events and legislation, and many significant community leaders. It was noted that the building was commissioned by women (nuns) for the purpose of providing education to

women. Additionally, it is named after the City's first black mayor, and it was said that Alderman Holmes, a highly significant figure in Evanston history, was deeply involved in the transition of the property to municipal use in the 1970s.

- Commissioners asked about perceived or real consequences for landmarking the building in an effort to address and overcome those early
- Mr. Sterling noted that in terms of the buildings adaptive use potential, the fact that its already listed on the National Register creates significant value and opportunity for redevelopment by way of the federal preservation tax credits. There is likely between 10 and 15 million dollars available based on some past rehabilitation estimates. If someone goes after those, they go through a process with the National Park Service and State Preservation Office that mirrors our own preservation standards, so there is really no additional burden at all. There is also opportunity to combine those tax credits with the low income housing tax credit which creates for a really viable adaptive use model for larger structures like this.
- Commissioners asked if the building only or the building and grounds would be part of the nomination and how Ingraham Park could be included.
- Mr. Sterling noted that the park was subdivided from the rest of the property purposefully to protect it as a park in perpetuity. As to how much of the grounds are included, the entire parcel is whats nominated and designated, but the Commission can create specific guidelines for portions of the property that are more significant to the buildings significance and integrity of setting.
- Commissioners discussed the importance of creating guidelines for the nomination that create clarity in what portions of the building and property are highly significance, where change should be minimized as well as portions of the property that could more readily absorb change without impacting integrity.
- Commissioners discussed the importance of understanding the City's redevelopment goals for the property as a way to come to mutual agreement on those guidelines. For example, it was noted that there may be a desire to maximize development potential on the site by developing parts of the property north of Simpson Street and west of Ridge. There is potential to balance these redevelopment goals with preservation of the more critical areas associated with the site like the Ridge frontage and areas with mature trees.

- Commissioners asked about the upcoming City Council discussions about the use of the building and whether the Commission felt it was important to keep all available options on the table.
- Mr. Sterling stated that how the property is used or who owns it, is not really something the nomination or designation, nor the ordinance have any affect on. Regardless of what direction the Council provides, there is value in honoring and celebrating the building and creating a record of its contributions to our culture.
- Commissioners also noted that the rear of the building could also likely absorb more change and it could be necessary for the building to meet code and accessibility requirements
- The Commission stressed the importance of working with the City as a partner to find a mutually agreeable path forward for all parties that can accomplish multiple City goals related to housing, sustainability, preservation, and economic development.
- Commissioners noted that it will be important to communicate that landmarking the building does not create additional burdens for the City's rehabilitation goals, and would primarily honor and celebrate the building but also protect it from future threats decades after its been adapted initially. As an example, it was mentioned that the only reason Harley Clarke isn't a parking lot and patch of grass is because it was a landmark. It offers future protection from scenarios that are unknown today.
- Commissioners noted that all previous City Hall locations over our long history have been demolished. This one is important to keep.
- The Commission and Mr. Sterling discussed options available to communicate the Commissions position on the property, a landmark nomination, and its broad significance. Mr. Sterling noted the Council is scheduled to discuss it at the February 24 meeting and also the March 10 meeting. Speaking in-person or submitting something in writing was preferred.
- Mr. Sterling also stated he would continue conversations with the City Managers Office and scheduling something with them and members of the Commission would be a logical next step.
- Commissioner Dreller made a motion to encourage a landmark nomination for the property which was seconded and unanimously approved.

The meeting adjourned at 7:45 pm.

APPROVED