

City of Excelsior
Heritage Preservation Commission
Minutes
Tuesday, May 21, 2013

1. CALL TO ORDER

Chair Schmidt called the meeting to order at 7:03 p.m.

2. ROLL CALL

Present: Bolles, Brabec, Finch, Nelson, Schmidt

Absent: Macpherson

Also Present: City Planner Braaten, Advisor Caron, City Planning Consultant
Richards

3. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

a. Heritage Preservation Commission Meeting of April 16, 2013

It was moved by Finch, seconded by Bolles, to approve the minutes as written.
Approved unanimously.

4. CITIZEN REPORTS or COMMENTS

None.

5. MISCELLANEOUS/COMMISSIONER'S COMMENTS

a. Recent City Council Actions

No discussion.

It was moved by Finch, seconded by Bolles, to move up on the agenda the consideration of the library item under New Business, since representatives from Hennepin County were in attendance at the meeting. Approved unanimously.

6. NEW BUSINESS

b. Consider Revisions to Approved Site Alteration Permit for Library at 337 Water Street - Hennepin County

Linda Kane, the Excelsior library project manager, stated that the County would like to present various potential options for the library design for HPC consideration, since the project had been scaled back from what was originally

6. NEW BUSINESS

- b. Consider Revisions to Approved Site Alteration Permit for Library at 337 Water Street - Hennepin County – (continued)

approved when it went out for bid, and was likely to go over budget. She was joined by lead architect Mark Wentzell and historical architect Stuart Macdonald.

Wentzell presented the changes that had been made to the plans in the bid package. In the site plan, the parking aisle direction was reversed, and the bike rack location and benches were relocated. Minor trees had been removed along the Artworks side of the site, and one tree in the rear parking area was removed due to a stormwater easement issue. The boulevard tree on the Water Street side will still be replaced but slightly relocated. Bolles asked about the faulty electrical connection at the boulevard tree, and the applicant stated that it will be replaced. Nelson asked about the removal of the trellis, and Wentzell stated that the County would like to hold the trellis in reserve, with the possibility that it will be eliminated for cost reasons if the bids come in high. Schmidt clarified with the applicant that all three options are currently out for bid. The County stated that they are working with a \$3.1 million construction budget target, and they are seeking flexibility in the plans to eliminate approximately \$300,000 in cost from the project.

Regarding the library building, Wentzell stated that the option set forth in the bid requirements reduced the height of the structure by about 3-4 feet, and removed the library plaques on both sides of the main doors. The option also reduced the amount of brick and brick detail, relocated some of the windows in the rear of the building, and the rear windows on the trail side were reduced from three sets of windows to two sets. In addition, the rear canopy was reconfigured to cover the book drop. Two windows were added on the parking lot side.

It was moved by Finch, seconded by Brabec, to approve the outlined changes to the original plan as the preferred option. Motion carried 3-2.

Stuart Macdonald presented two additional options for further cost savings should the library construction bids come in high, for consideration and comment by the Commission. In the second option, a coarse stucco material on the rear of the structure is proposed to replace the brick, but will seek to replicate the brick texture and color of the front facade, and the stucco will integrate the color into the stucco material rather than being painted on. The primary and secondary facades in this option are still brick, and stucco would be used only in tertiary areas in the rear. The stucco would be mounted on a wire lath. This option would maintain the cast stone base.

6. NEW BUSINESS

- b. Consider Revisions to Approved Site Alteration Permit for Library at 337 Water Street - Hennepin County – (continued)

The back side of the parapet is currently brick, but this option would propose that the rear of the parapet would also be stucco, which is difficult to see from most vantage points. The option would also change the parapet material from cast stone to sheet metal which would match the color of the cast stone. No other changes would be made to the front facade in option 2, so the decorative brick work on the primary elevation would remain intact.

Option 3 would remove much of the brick detail, including the corbeling and brick panels on the front elevation, and would add a cornice made of sheet metal as a design element. The building would be brick on all elevations. Some Commissioners expressed a preference for using brick on the entire building, even if some design detail is lost. MacDonald stated that the corbeling is a very important element in the building design for providing historical context.

The consensus after discussion by the Commission was that the corbeling is an important element in the design, and the Commission might be willing to allow the use of rear stucco on tertiary elevations as an option to preserve this element. The use of brick around the entire structure is also desirable, though much of the texture of the facade would be eliminated resulting in a more modern, flatter appearance. Macdonald also pointed out that the soffit under the front entrance would be plaster rather than brick.

The applicant presented exterior light fixtures for approval. It was moved by Finch, seconded by Nelson, to approve the light fixtures as presented. Approved unanimously.

After discussion, it was moved by Finch, seconded by Bolles, that both options 2 and 3 featured design elements that are non-objectionable under the standards, but that the sense of the Commission is that the elements presented in option 2 are more compatible than those in option 3 due to the retention of the primary elevation brick design details in option 2, and that the County will come back for final approval when bids have been received and a final design option has been selected. Motion carried 4-1.

It was moved by Bolles, seconded by Finch, to move two of the Unfinished Business items up on the agenda since Becca Sanders, former chair, was in attendance. Approved unanimously.

7. NEW BUSINESS

b. Exploring Grant Funds for Oak Hill Cemetery

Sanders reported on the status of this item. She stated that, when serving on the Commission, she had proposed to work with the Excelsior Lake Minnetonka Historical Society (ELMHS) to consider how to restore and improve parts of the Oak Hill Cemetery, which is a designated historic site. Sanders stated that she is now the President of ELMHS, but the Society has never worked on preservation activities, only the archives, publications and a newsletter. She felt the cemetery might present an opportunity for ELMHS to work with the HPC, such as by seeking Legacy Fund grants for improvements to the cemetery. She felt that the Society might be more likely to support such collaborative projects. Grant deadlines occur four times per year.

Finch noted that the City's long-term financial plan includes funding for a project to install a cemetery gate and fencing.

Schmidt mentioned that he had received a copy of a letter from Wayzata inviting Excelsior to participate in a Lake Minnetonka scenic by-ways project.

c. Possibility of Historically Designating Portions of Excelsior Elementary School

Sanders reviewed the status of the potential designation of the historic portion of the school building. While the Commission had discussed designating a portion of the old Excelsior High School building for some time, the school district staff has been opposed. The Commission had looked for an opportunity to interest the district in the benefits of preservation. Nelson sought clarification that the contemplated designation would affect only the historic portion of the structure.

Caron suggested pursuing an advocacy piece and commissioning a professional survey to refine the basis for designation with state CLG grant assistance, once requested City matching funds are available, as had been discussed with the Council. Schmidt offered to request available information from the Preservation Alliance of Minnesota, with help from City staff, to inform potential advocacy efforts. Finch suggested approaching elected school board members, and Schmidt agreed to spearhead a political approach to the school board with Finch.

6. NEW BUSINESS

a. Public Hearing on the Historic Designation of 100 Lake Street - Purchase/Olds House

Braaten presented historical information regarding the Purchase/Olds House, including the results of the professional residential historical survey which determined that the house is historically significant and recommended for local designation as a historic site, two letters in opposition to designation and one letter in favor of designation. Bolles urged the Commission to take action, and stated that there would be no opportunity to educate the public about the importance of the structure and why it should be preserved if the site were to be sold as a teardown.

Schmidt opened the public hearing.

Linda Putnam, Excelsior resident, stated that she would love to see the house preserved, but she does not think the City should be heavy-handed in pursuing such a goal. Perhaps contacting the owner to encourage saving the structure voluntarily would be appropriate.

The Commission discussed the options and limitations of honorary recognition of structures without protection.

Jennifer Caron spoke as a resident about the importance of the HPC's role in the City and in fulfilling many of the Comprehensive Plan goals. She noted that the City is starting to lose some of its residential district character, and the number of teardowns is attracting attention on the Council and throughout the community. She felt that more should be done to make sure that significant older homes are preserved and that new construction fits into the fabric of the community in terms of mass and scale and setbacks. While designation of this site might feel to some like a dramatic change, the City does not have a formal policy on requiring voluntarily designation, but this has been a recent practice that may need to change if current trends continue.

Bolles stated that it would be a travesty if nothing was done to preserve such a significant structure. The Jimmy Hutmaker house is an example of where there is more value to the site with the original building there than if it were to be torn down. It was not that long ago that the high school building was also threatened with demolition, and it is a functioning and treasured community asset today because it was saved.

Lucille Crow, Excelsior resident, stated that she believes the City should respect the autonomy of homeowners.

6. NEW BUSINESS

- a. Public Hearing on the Historic Designation of 100 Lake Street - Purchase/Olds House – (continued)

The Commission discussed possible further outreach to the Olds family regarding designation. Commissioners expressed concern that sale and demolition might be imminent and any action should be taken quickly. Nelson stated she did not feel comfortable making any determination on this matter tonight.

It was moved by Finch, seconded by Nelson, to continue the discussion and public hearing to a special meeting on June 5, 2013 at 7:00 p.m. Approved unanimously.

7. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

- c. Consideration of Exterior Alterations at 234 Water Street -- Bart and Wendy Baker dba Capers

Bolles recused himself from the discussion.

Braaten reviewed the history of this item. He had been requested by the Commission to write a letter to Mr. Baker with a questionnaire regarding awning installation options but received no response, Braaten then sent another letter, and Baker provided information from Acme Awning Company, which had installed the original awning, to the effect that the current installation was optimal. Braaten then sought similar responses from another awning company, which stated that the options for the existing awning are limited, but there are other options that could be considered. There are now two viewpoints from two different awning vendors before the Commission for consideration.

Advisor Caron distributed a photo of the original awning on the building in response to the Commission's request for historical context. Sanders reported on her attendance at the City Council meeting at which the applicant had appealed the Commission's decision. The Council was prepared to uphold the Commission's decision, and the applicant withdrew the appeal and agreed to work with the Commission on an alternative for the non-compliant awning that had been installed without a permit.

The Commission reviewed the reasons for the HPC denial. Schmidt noted that he had viewed other awnings currently in town that appeared to have some of the same issues as possible precedents. Finch pointed out that many of the awnings identified by Schmidt predate the existence of the Commission and enactment of

7. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

- c. Consideration of Exterior Alterations at 234 Water Street -- Bart and Wendy Baker dba Capers – (continued)

its ordinance, and that the Commission should apply the City's standards in reviewing proposals.

Schmidt stated that he would uphold the prior HPC action. Staff clarified that no application is currently before the Commission, but it should provide direction to either uphold the decision and ask that the awning be removed under the administrative penalties ordinance or to take some other action to resolve the situation. The Commission discussed whether the existing awning could be reused or reconfigured in some way and meet the City's standards.

Since an option to address the awning had been worked out previously between the applicant and the HPC's subcommittee for a workable awning that would meet the City's standards, but has simply not been pursued by the applicant, it was moved by Finch, seconded by Schmidt, to deny reconsideration consistent with the original decision and findings of fact. Motion carried 3-0, with 1 abstention.

8. ANNUAL MEETING (continued from April 16)

It was moved by Finch, seconded by Nelson, to continue the remaining agenda items to the next meeting. Approved unanimously.

- a. Review of By-Laws
- b. Goals and Objectives for 2013
- c. Code of Conduct and Decorum for Appointed Officials

9. COMMUNICATIONS AND REPORTS

- a. Designate Liaison for Planning Commission Meeting - June 4, 2013
- b. Site Alteration Permits Administratively Approved
- c. Next Meeting - Tuesday, June 18, 2013

10. ADJOURNMENT

It was moved by Finch, seconded by Schmidt, to adjourn. Approved unanimously.
Adjourned at 9:37 p.m.

Tim Caron
Recording Secretary