

## MINUTES

**TOWN OF NORMAL HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION  
UPTOWN STATION, 4<sup>th</sup> FLOOR (Multipurpose Room)  
11 UPTOWN CIRCLE  
NORMAL, ILLINOIS**

**REGULAR MEETING  
September 13, 2016  
12:30 p.m.**

### **Members Present**

Kristen Allen, Nancy Armstrong, Kathy Burgess, Laurie Christensen, Anne Matter, Chris Niebur, Bruce Warloe

### **Members Absent**

None

### **Others Present**

Mercy Davison, Town Planner; Linda Giles, 611 Normal Ave.

### **Call to Order**

Ms. Matter called the meeting to order at 12:35 p.m. noting that there was a quorum.

### **Minutes**

Ms. Burgess moved to approve the minutes of the August 9, 2016 regular meeting. Ms. Christensen seconded. The motion carried 6-0.

### **CA-16-09-34: Solar Panels, 611 Normal Ave.**

Ms. Davison explained the proposal to add solar panels to the detached garage, which was built in the 1990s and which sits further back from the street than the house. Ms. Armstrong confirmed that this style of solar panel is very flat against the roof, noting that the same solar panels have been installed elsewhere in town. Ms. Armstrong stated that the proposed location is not obtrusive and not inappropriate for a historic district.

Ms. Matter and Ms. Burgess expressed serious concern with the precedent of permitting solar panels in a historic district based on the modern appearance. Ms. Burgess noted that this location is very visible from the street, especially if the nearby trees were to be cut down. She and Ms. Matter agreed that in this case it is a positive that the garage structure is noncontributing and that it's further back from the street than the house.

Ms. Allen noted that it is positive that the solar panels would be affixed to a non-historic asphalt roof. She further noted that the roof material could play a role in future decisions – if solar panels

would damage a historically significant material such as slate or tile roofing, it would be more difficult to approve.

Ms. Burgess asked if the owner had a deadline pressure that would require the commission to make a decision today. The owner stated that the deadline to sign the solar panel contract is September 30. Ms. Armstrong provided further details about the solar program, focusing on the program's steep cost reduction for homeowners, the likes of which are likely to never happen again. She also confirmed that the deadline is firm.

Significant discussion ensued, with the general agreement that every property will have to be analyzed differently. In other words, if the solar panels are approved at 611 Normal Avenue, it would set no precedent for future requests. Ms. Davison stated that she could develop a policy for the commission to review, which would identify the types of criteria to be considered in similar circumstances. The criteria would include, at the very least, proposed solar panel location, visibility from the street, placement on a contributing versus non-contributing structure, and potential damage to historic materials.

Ms. Armstrong moved to approve the installation of the solar panels as proposed. Ms. Christensen seconded. The motion carried 7-0.

**CA-16-09-35: Front Porch Restoration, 611 Normal Ave.**

Ms. Giles explained that she would like to replace the front concrete steps with new concrete steps, repair the cracks in the concrete porch floor, tuckpoint various areas on the front porch and wing walls, and add a railing. She has only owned the house for one year.

Ms. Matter requested that in the future a project such as this be split into two items – the concrete/tuckpointing work and the railing.

The commissioners discussed various methods for repairing the cracks, and Ms. Davison said that the contractor would be speaking with Residential Building Inspector Troy Sondgeroth to ensure that it is done correctly. The commissioners also recommended the owner investigate whether water running off the roof could be contributing to problems with the wing walls settling.

Ms. Giles mentioned that she had investigated having the wing walls somewhat dismantled and reassembled in order to fix the cracks. However, she then consulted with Mel Wollenschlager (local masonry expert), who said the mortar is likely too strong to permit that. If it were attempted, the bricks would likely fall apart.

The commissioners then asked about the railing design. Ms. Giles provided a sample image of a powder-coated aluminum railing sold at Menards. Ms. Matter stated that the design is too contemporary for the style of the home and requested that Ms. Giles return to the next meeting with a different railing design. The commissioners agreed that wrought iron would be acceptable, not

aluminum. Ms. Davison also noted that the addition of a railing is not required as part of this project and Ms. Giles may choose to not add it.

Ms. Armstrong moved to approve the concrete step replacement, crack repair, and tuckpointing (thus removing the railing from the project). Ms. Christensen seconded. The motion carried 7-0.

**BG-16-09-08: Front Porch Restoration, 611 Normal Ave.**

Ms. Matter started the discussion on whether some or all of the project is maintenance rather than restoration, noting that Ms. Giles has only owned the house for one year and is not responsible for the current state of the porch.

Ms. Burgess stated that she believes the replacement of the steps is restoration; however, repairing cracks is maintenance. Mr. Warloe agreed with the steps but noted that the owner could simply caulk and skim coat the porch cracks rather than taking the project further, as she proposes. Ms. Allen stated that the steps seem more like restoration because it is a complete replacement.

Ms. Burgess moved to approve a grant in the amount of \$1,475, which is half of the lowest bid amount minus the cost of the crack repair. Ms. Armstrong seconded. The motion carried 7-0.

**DP-16-09-37: Demolition, 1100 Beech Street (Administration Building, ISSCS)**

Ms. Davison explained that the owner of 1100 Beech Street has submitted a demolition permit for the Administration Building. She noted that the Admin Building runs parallel to Beech Street and that there is a modern breezeway that connects the south end of the Admin Building to the even older Infirmary, which is perpendicular to Beech Street. The demolition permit does not include the Infirmary.

Ms. Matter stated that the Soldiers and Sailors Home is one of the most historic parts of Normal, and the Administration Building is part of that campus. She further stated that it will be very sad to lose this building.

Ms. Burgess agreed, noting that this building is very prominent.

Ms. Armstrong noted that her office is very nearby, so she passes this building almost daily. She has been very disappointed to see the building neglected over the years.

Ms. Matter stated that the newspaper's article about the project strongly suggested that the demolition was going to happen, but that it is still important for the commission to register its opinion on the demolition.

Mr. Warloe stated that this seems like a situation similar to the Mecherle Hall demolition, in which a building was let go to the point that renovation became very difficult. He stated his hope that the Town will not let similarly important historic buildings fall into this state of disrepair.

Ms. Burgess expressed her hope that any redevelopment on the site be appropriate within the context of the ISSCS property. Ms. Davison noted that the property is within the One Normal Plaza PUD and that any new construction would require a public hearing. She said the only other new construction in this PUD is the Masonic Lodge, which was built a few years ago.

Ms. Matter pointed to the success of the power plant restoration, which had also been slated for demolition and cited as beyond repair. It is now one of the most interesting buildings in town. Ms. Burgess agreed, noting that in other countries where demolishing a historic building isn't even an option, people find ways to creatively re-use old buildings.

Ms. Armstrong moved to approve the demolition. Mr. Warloe seconded. The motion failed 0-7.

**DP-16-09-38: 304 E. Cherry (Residence)**

Ms. Matter explained that this residence is not architecturally significant but that it is extremely culturally significant in regard to the history of African-American residents in Normal. The house is featured in The Legacy. The original owners – the Barton family – were among the first African-American families to move to Normal at the behest of Town founding father Jesse Fell. The Bartons continue to own it to today, but it has been vacant for at least 15 years. Ms. Matter has been in the house, and she confirmed that it is in extremely poor condition, especially due to animal damage.

Ms. Burgess asked Town staff to make efforts to reach out to groups that may be interested in knowing about this house prior to demolition, including the history museum and the NAACP. She suggested that attempts be made to retain artifacts from the structure if any exist.

Mr. Warloe moved to approve the demolition. Ms. Armstrong seconded. The motion failed 0-7.

**Other Business**

1. Ms. Burgess again requested that Town staff follow up with the owner of 620 N. School, who built a rear deck without HPC approval. The subsequent after-the-fact Certificate of Appropriateness requires certain modifications to the deck, none of which have been made. Ms. Davison stated that she has been in touch with the owner once but will check back again.

**Adjournment**

The meeting was adjourned at 1:35 p.m. so that the commission could hear a presentation by Darius Bryjka of the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency.

Respectfully submitted,



Mercy Davison  
Town Planner