

MINUTES
Regular Meeting
HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION
January 20, 2021

The City of Wyoming Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) met on Wednesday, January 20, 2021 remotely via the Zoom online video conferencing platform. The meeting was called to order at 7:08 PM by Vice Chair Gene Allison. Attendance was as follows:

HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION MEMBERS:

Gene Allison, Chair
Maureen Geiger
Cathy Ramstetter
David Sparks
Jim Walton

ABSENT MEMBERS:

Zach Green
Chris Magee

STAFF:

Megan Statt Blake, Community Development Director
Tana Pyles, Community Development Specialist

WELCOME NEW MEMBER

Mr. Allison welcomed new member, Maureen Geiger to the Commission. Ms. Geiger said she chose to get involved with HPC to bring a resident's perspective. She added she has no training in historic preservation but works in commercial construction, occasionally on historic buildings.

APPROVAL OF PRIOR MEETING MINUTES

Mr. Sparks moved to approve the October 21, 2020 HPC meeting minutes, seconded by Mr. Walton. All members voted yes. The motion passed.

Mr. Allison moved to approve the November 4, 2020 HPC-ARB joint meeting minutes, seconded by Mr. Sparks. All members voted yes. The motion passed.

NOMINATE HPC CHAIR

Mr. Allison started the discussion of appointing a new Chair. He asked Ms. Pyles if someone has to be appointed at this meeting. Ms. Pyles confirmed that the Commission needs a Chair, and if no one is willing to commit tonight we could rotate the Chair at each meeting until someone fills the role permanently.

Mr. Sparks asked for clarification on the role of the Chair, and if the primary responsibility is running the meetings. Ms. Pyles stated that he is correct and the Chair does not have to be a preservation expert. The Chair is responsible for making sure each meeting is planned effectively, conducted according to Chapters 1135 and 1336, and that matters are dealt with in an orderly manner. Mr. Allison added the Chair typically makes the report to City Council.

Mr. Allison stated the Commission will need to utilize an outside consultant because no members have historic preservation credentials. Ms. Pyles said that a consultant can be brought on for more difficult cases.

Mr. Allison asked the members if they are comfortable rotating the Chair at each meeting until the position is filled. Ms. Ramstetter and Mr. Sparks said they agreed with rotating the Chair. Ms. Pyles stated Ms. Geiger would come first alphabetically but since she is the newest member, we should start the rotation with the next person.

Mr. Allison moved to rotate Chair responsibilities alphabetically per meeting until there is a full-time Chair appointed to the Commission. Mr. Sparks seconded the motion, and all members voted yes. The motion passed.

DISCUSSION OF CHAPTER 1336

Ms. Pyles introduced the item, which is to revisit the definitions in Chapter 1336 governing historic alterations and demolitions. Since the review threshold was changed in 2019, staff and applicants have noticed the language is unclear and can be difficult to apply. The specific sections to focus on are the definition of front façade and demolition. The definition of front façade does not include how to measure the façade, and the definition of demolition includes “if” and “or” which make it overly complicated.

Ms. Statt Blake added since these changes were made a year and a half ago, and we have seen a number of cases and realized that depending on who is interpreting it, you could come to a vastly different conclusion on how to apply it. Ms. Pyles added that she worked with Ms. Geiger to apply the threshold calculations on her home, and she expressed the code was very confusing.

Mr. Sparks asked if staff uses a software to calculate the thresholds. Ms. Pyles explained we do not use any software to calculate the percentages. We take the plans and do the calculations by hand, which can give different results depending on who is interpreting the code. We want to work towards a functional code that is clear to both staff and the public.

Ms. Ramstetter inquired if the thresholds have anyways been written in percentages. Ms. Statt Blake shared that the threshold used to be 50% of the exterior walls or roof structure. The percentage now is 25% of the front façade or 50% of a side elevation, which is more restrictive but focuses on how the property presents to the public way. She thinks the percentage way of measuring is still valid to capture the threshold but we should provide clarifying language as what is included in the percentage.

Ms. Pyles displayed the definitions in Chapter 1336 to the members. Mr. Sparks commented that the wording seems to over complicate the code. Ms. Pyles displayed two past examples of applying and calculating the thresholds. In the first example using plans from 215 Wentworth, the calculation used the outline of the exterior walls and roof structure but did not include the uncovered deck or stairs. The percentage was calculated taking the square footage of the new improvement divided by the proposed overall façade. Mr. Sparks reiterated that we used the new additional square footage as a percentage of the total new façade, rather than as a percentage of the old façade. Ms. Ramstetter commented that she interpreted the regulations to mean 25% or 50% of the existing façade.

Ms. Statt Blake explained that you can have a change to a façade that does not add new square footage beyond the existing façade but still meets the review threshold. An example of this is if you change material components of a house from a wood clapboard siding to vinyl siding. When recommending the threshold change, the HPC wanted to capture that you can diminish the historical significance of a property by changing its cladding, windows, or other material components without actually expanding its footprint or changing its roof structure.

Mr. Allison stated that he would consider striking “or proposed” in the definition of demolition because if an application is modifying 25% or more of the existing façade, we want to make sure it is done right. Ms. Statt Blake interjected with the Wilmuth project historic review, which put on a major addition a few years ago. The existing front façade was not touched but they made a major addition to the back of the house that created an almost new front façade. Including proposed front façade in the definition is trying to protect against the front façade from being impacted, even if the existing façade is not being altered. Mr. Allison said he wants to review any project that is impacting more than 25% of a façade. Ms. Statt Blake stated that the language needs to encapsulate what is currently there and what is proposed. Mr. Sparks suggested breaking the threshold into two different measurements – 25% of the existing façade or a 25% change to the proposed façade to distinguish the two measurements.

Ms. Ramstetter asked why the definition of alteration does not include the historic review thresholds. Ms. Statt Blake explained that the definition of demolition includes the term alteration. In the previous ordinance, the definition of demolition included alteration but did not define an alteration. In the recent changes, alteration was pulled out and defined separately but kept the threshold measurements under demolitions. There may be a way to reiterate the review thresholds under the alteration definition.

Ms. Geiger said she is new to the group but she reads architecture specs and noticed that the more words that are included, the more it does not make sense. She thinks making things simple will benefit the residents. She found the definition of front façade very confusing when she was calculating the threshold of her own house. Mr. Sparks agreed that the

language should be more precise but easier to apply. Ms. Statt Blake said she would argue for clarifying the language and not make it shorter but easier to understand.

Ms. Pyles shared her screen to show the second example at 200 Worthington Avenue, Ms. Geiger's house. In this example the calculation only included the exterior walls (not roof structure), which shows how the regulations can be interpreted differently. Mr. Sparks asked how do we calculate the square footage of the roof. Ms. Geiger said that is a great question, and she had many issues when trying to apply the code, particularly the piece about intervening walls. Ms. Pyles added that several architects have expressed difficulty applying these calculations.

Ms. Geiger commented that the historic review and permit approval can take three months, which is too long when a homeowner wants to reinvest in their property. Ms. Statt Blake said the concept of a streamlined review has been talked about previously and could revisit that question this year. The Commission will need to consider if there is an appropriate way that certain alterations or demolitions could be reviewed by the HPC and ARB, and off-ramped for a shorter approval process if it meets the *Historic Guidelines*. The City Council approval usually adds a month to the timeline but a three-month approval process is the worst-case scenario. However, if there is a significant demolition like of a primary structure, then a longer review process seems appropriate.

Mr. Allison said if the code is rewritten that it should include information about preliminary meetings. Ms. Statt Blake explained that is provided in the guide and explained on the webpage. It is not codified because typically that information is captured in materials outside of the code.

Mr. Allison stated they now understand the issue and asked staff to draft revisions to the ordinance. Once drafted, staff should bring the changes back to the HPC to react to. Additionally, the revisions should include streamlining the review process for applicants. He asked if these changes are required to go to City Council. Ms. Staff Blake said it would go as recommendation from the HPC to Planning Commission, and then to City Council for approval and adoption if there are ordinance changes.

Ms. Pyles confirmed they can draft the changes but it will be a working document. Additionally, we will want to work with ARB on any potential changes.

REVISITING MASTER PLAN OBJECTIVES

Mr. Allison shared that one objective that Ms. McTurner had worked on updating the boundary survey. He asked if the City received any of those results. Ms. Statt Blake said we did not receive anything from Ms. McTurner from that initiative. Staff will contact Ms. McTurner for her findings on the boundary survey.

Ms. Pyles said the intention of this agenda item is to get in the habit of referring to the Master Plan and see if any of the members had an item they want to focus on this year. Staff will

circulate the update implementation matrix for discussion at the next meeting. In the meantime, we will work towards the strategy of streamlining the review process.

MISCELLANEOUS

Mr. Walton asked for an update on the Village Green. Ms. Statt Blake shared the fundraising is still ongoing through the Community Foundation. The City is completing some survey work for preparation to get bids on the project. It is optimistic the construction will begin in 2022.

Mr. Allison asked if the new houses on Crescent Avenue have submitted for permits. Ms. Statt Blake said there are renderings and they are completing their utility tap-ins. She would expect permit submittals in the next couple months.

Mr. Allison asked if there are any updates on the house at 432 Springfield Pike. Ms. Statt Blake stated there is nothing active but it will likely come back before the ARB or HPC in some fashion. It is currently leased to a residential tenant but it is possible it will convert to a commercial use once that lease is up.

ADJOURNMENT

Ms. Sparks moved to adjourn the meeting, seconded by Mr. Walton. The motion passed unanimously. The meeting adjourned at 8:07 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Tana Pyles,
Community Development Specialist
Secretary of the January 20, 2021 Meeting

Gene Allison,
Vice Chair of the Historic Preservation Commission