

MEETING MINUTES

**WASHBURN-FAIR OAKS HISTORIC DISTRICT
DESIGN GUIDELINES UPDATE**

ENGAGEMENT: Focus Group 1

March 6, 2023

Location: Centro Nicollet

Attendees:

Pigeon: Tamara Halvorsen

TEN x TEN: Maura Rockcastle, Rachel Salmela

City: John Smoley

HPC: Barbara Howard

Homeowners: Bennett Hartz, Deborah Girdwood, Stephanie Brown, Nora Radtke, Joni Cromer, Wendy Jedlicka, Angela Gazia

The following minutes constitute TEN x TEN's understanding of the meeting. Please report any discrepancies to the author within seven (7) calendar days.

1. Introduction

- Tamara provided an overview to how Washburn-Fair Oaks received its Historic District designation, why the period of significance is defined as 1863-1939, and what implications that has on how the Design Guidelines affect the future of different structures.
 - o Design Guidelines will protect preservation best practices and maintain tax credit opportunities.
 - o Allow for more consistent review across permit applications in the neighborhood.
 - o City staff confirmed that when 60% of walls or roof of building are removed it is considered demo. This is the standard across the city, not just in historic districts.

2. Breakout Discussion 1: Bennett Hartz, Deborah Girdwood, Stephanie Brown, Nora Radtke, John Smoley, Rachel Salmela, and Tamara Halvorsen

1. Which areas of the District feel most historic to you?
 - o Homeowners' focus was less on what felt "historic" and more on what felt special about the neighborhood. Walkability, density, and diversity came up consistently.
 - o Discussion around how historic preservation is perceived.
 - Many homeowners felt it was exclusionary and expensive.
 - Worried that historic materials are cost prohibitive.
 - Worried that stopping construction in the neighborhood would make it less diverse, which adds to the character of the neighborhood.
 - o The mansions north of Washburn-Fair Oaks Park
2. Which areas of the neighborhood do you like the most?
 - o Alley behind row houses on 25th serve as a community outdoor space. Represents people making the most of the small lots they have and strong neighborly relationships that happen because of the density.
 - o Like the different ages and scales of the buildings, including some of the non-contributing structures (Bauhaus Flats.)
 - o The businesses just outside of the district contribute a lot to why people like this neighborhood.

- Washburn Fair Oaks Park is a dead zone. Would like to see more amenities, such as bathrooms, to better serve the community.
 - Some felt that the large lawns around the mansions felt inappropriate in this neighborhood given the density.
 - Anecdote about the building at the corner of 26th St and Steens Ave. Good example of building that maintains historic character while making updates to make it feel more contemporary and match current needs.
 - Love activity on the street – people utilize their front porches.
3. What physical changes to the neighborhood would cause you to consider moving out of the neighborhood?
 - a. Would like to encourage more mixed use development to maintain diversity.
 - b. Homeowners are worried about irresponsible developers.
 - c. Feel that homeowners should be allowed to put solar panels on their houses in the way that is most efficient for the technology, not based on what aesthetically “pleasing” based on historic guidelines.
 - d. Desire to have buildings come right up to the sidewalk and encourage more walkup units for new development. Living units connecting directly to the street encourages activity that benefits both the feel of the neighborhood and safety.
 4. Do you live in a historically contributing property?
 - a. Corner of 3rd Ave and E 26th Street – yes historically contributing.
 - b. Row houses on E 25th Street – yes historically contributing.
 5. Do you feel like you live in a Historic District? If yes, please explain why.
 - a. Homeowner didn’t realize they were buying property in a historic district. They were only told that they were not allowed to build a garage on property.
 - b. Discussion around not knowing the neighborhood was designated as a Historic District but likely the dense/ walkable nature of the neighborhood, which is a direct result of the age of the neighborhood (pre cars).
 6. What would help you understand how to use the Historic District Design Guidelines? How might you use Historic District Design Guidelines?
 - a. Would like to use them to help determine the proper course of action to repair historic buildings depending on the level of disrepair.
 - i. Desire to potentially revert buildings back to historic character even if the current form has been significantly altered.
 - ii. How can doing these kinds of restorations help bring money back into the district. Guidelines could help give people more direction to funding resources.
 7. It would be helpful if the Historic District Design Guidelines included... (Please list language, guidance, tools, and information that you would need from these guidelines.)
 - a. How to find resources – to find historically accurate materials, contractors, DIY repair instructions.
 - b. Information on where to find resources. Residentials typically look on the Whitter Alliance website but wouldn’t necessarily think to look on the City’s website.
 - c. Anticipate climate resilience better.
 - d. Make the guidelines friendly.
 - e. More clarity for how to interpret material requirements across the span of the period of significance. Some materials are no longer available – how accurate do replacement materials need?
 - f. Links to the historic photos of properties in the neighborhood that have recently been made available online.
 - g. List of Preservation Specialist Directory.

3. **Breakout Discussion 2:** Joni Cromer, Wendy Jedlicka, Angela Gazia, Barbara Howard, Maura Rockcastle
1. Which areas of the District feel most historic to you?
 - o The mansions north of Washburn-Fair Oaks Park
 - o The two blocks of Stevens Ave west of MCAD and Mia
 - o The block on 3rd Ave S across from Mia between E24th and E25th
 - o Pockets of houses on Clinton Ave, just north of E 24th St and E 26th St
 - o There are a few plaques with dates/information about the history – those give the impression of a historic district
 2. Which areas of the neighborhood do you like the most?
 - o Walking along Stevens Avenue
 - o Enjoy that there are lots of children in the neighborhood and the neighborhood is very diverse (culturally, racially, and economically)
 3. What physical changes to the neighborhood would cause you to consider moving out of the neighborhood?
 - a. More demolition of smaller houses that are being replaced by apartment buildings or metal/modern houses
 - b. More larger developments put a pressure on parking and that is frustrating.
 - c. Keeping to the old guidelines which block new sustainable technology improvements (solar panels). The current guidelines perpetuate reliance on fossil fuels, which is frustrating.
 - d. Inability to upgrade sustainable my house with sustainable improvements.
 4. Do you live in a historically contributing property?
 - a. Yes, they live in the houses on E 26th Street and Clinton Ave S – which are noted as contributing but the homeowners feels that the changes made in the 70's-90's by previous owners over time degrade the quality of the contribution.
 5. Do you feel like you live in a Historic District? If yes, please explain why.
 - a. No. When you walk into the district from any edge, you do not feel or notice you are entering a historic district. There is no celebration, no signage, and the balance of historic looking houses is very small compared to the rest of the neighborhood fabric.
 - b. These homeowners did not know they were buying a house in a historic district when they purchased their homes.
 - c. No. So many of the original Queen Ann Homes were torn down and 1960s apartments were put in their place.
 6. What would help you understand how to use the Historic District Design Guidelines? How might you use Historic District Design Guidelines?
 - a. Tables and graphics to break up text would be helpful
 - b. Precedent photos to help understand the definitions and language that are not easy to understand. Historic photographs of your property over time, showing how previous improvements altered historic character over time.
 - c. Less text!
 - d. We need to know what our options are for renovation/upgrades/changes. What can we NOT do, what CAN we do, and what elements have flexible?
 - e. We need flexibility, but where we have flexibility needs to be very clear
 - f. It would also be helpful if the guidelines could tell us where and how to begin improvements. Resources for contractors, details, construction assemblies that work for houses like ours, permitting processes, etc
 - g. When homes are classified as “historic”, one size does not fit all. Houses that have been modified or not well kept need to be considered and treated differently than houses that have been preserved to a higher degree or level of quality.

7. It would be helpful if the Historic District Design Guidelines included... (Please list language, guidance, tools, and information that you would need from these guidelines.)
 - a. The Guidelines need complete revision.
 - b. Tools, information, resources, contractor lists
 - c. Signage standards
 - d. Examples of improvements and repair strategies
 - e. Partnership and fundraising precedents/frameworks
 - f. List of grant opportunities and resources to support grant pursuits by individuals or non-profits. Barbara noted that there are several federal/state/city grants to support homeowners to restore homes.
 - i. Homeowners were curious whether they could work with WNA or other non-profits as a fiduciary to manage application processes and funding
 - ii. HPC noted that it is true that the City doesn't provide financial "carrots" to support financially or with unhoused communities in the neighborhood.
 - g. It would be helpful to have as part of the design guidelines how to help applicants manage houses that have deviated from their original contributing character and have deteriorated from their original integrity.
 - h. Guidelines need to address purchasing and demolition rules for new design.
 - i. Centerpoint Energy contacts and preservation specialists
 - j. Material families – what works across a range of time periods that can be complimentary when original materials are not available

4. Group Discussion: General Concerns/Challenges

- ADU rejections and lack of clarity around what can be done. So far, all the homeowners had heard of rejected ADU applications
- Long-term rental properties see a lot of deterioration over time. What is HPC doing about this? Barbara noted they cannot really do much. Partnerships with neighborhood alliance or non-profits – often partnerships are the best way to prevent deterioration.
- The Parks are stagnant and have not seen any improvements in years, why is this?
- No dignity in the unhoused community on E 26th Ave and the highway
- There is zero new development that celebrates the historic character of the neighborhood
- The homeowners in this neighborhood are of moderate means for the most part. Limited resources and the ability to spend significant resources into improvements are a challenge. Similarly, homeowners trying to save costs by improving systems towards renewable energy to be more efficient and depend less on fossil fuels should be supported, not prohibited from doing so.
- Landscape is important – boulevards, planting typologies, native planting mixes, habitat, sun and shade mixes.
 - o What to do about poor soils!