

HISTORIC PRESERVATION BOARD
CITY OF PALATKA
Meeting Minutes April 2nd, 2015

The meeting was called to order by Chairperson Roberta Correa at 4:03 pm. Other members present included Lynda Crabill, Larry Beaton, and Laura Schoenberger and. Absent: Robert Goodwin, Meri Rees, Elizabeth van Rensburg and Gilbert Evans Jr. Staff present: Planning Director Thad Crowe and Recording Secretary Ke'Ondra Wright.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Motion made by Ms. Crabill to approve the January 8th, 2015 minutes, seconded by Ms. Schoenberger. Motion passed unanimously.

APPEALS PROCEDURE

Chairperson Correa read the appeals procedures.

NEW BUSINESS

Case:	HB 15-16
Locations:	114 S 4 th St (St. Monica's Catholic Church Old Rectory)
Applicant:	Steven Mack, Y2K Construction
Request:	Request for a Certificate of Appropriateness to add a front porch and handicap ramp (South Historic District)

Mr. Crowe summarized the facts of this case and noted that the church contacted staff because the church wanted to have handicap access by the proposed ramp. The initial design was basically an open deck that included a handicap ramp on the side. Staff worked with the applicant to come up with a better design to fit in with the character of the house and the neighborhood (and of course to meet the historic district design standards). The South Historic District has mostly covered porches, or the less common stoop, but no decks that are typical to the historic era (1880s through 1940s). This is a Frame Vernacular-style home built between 1909 and 1915. The amended and proposed design presents the visual of a smaller roofed front porch, with a shed roof that continues the downward angle of the existing roofline, so as not to interrupt that roofline. The ramp would extend along the side of the building from the rear, making a 90-degree turn at the front corner of the building and continuing to the central porch. The new porch would not be a full front porch but a partial porch around the entrance, and then a ramp connected to the south end of the porch, screened by landscaping. The ramp will start descending along the building front, and then bending and descending around the side. Staff involved the Building Official to make sure ADA issues would be met as well. The church is trying to be proactive and accommodate the elderly parishioners and disabled, so Staff wanted to work with the church as much as possible to accommodate the request and of course still meet the historic district standards. Staff recommends the COA approval for the front porch and ramp as presented with the following conditions that work to not call attention to the new feature: porch supports and spindles shall be simple and unadorned and shall be painted white or a color resembling the next exterior blue/grey color; and a hedge shall be planted on each side of the porch and front sidewalk, grown to a height of around four feet, so as to provide a level of screening for the porch and ramp.

Public Comments

Tony Harwell, 322 Madison St, spoke in favor of denying the request. He noted that the master site file stated there is a possibility that this house was probably older than 1884. He said he wasn't able to get access underneath and on top of the house to assess its age. He advised the Board to not allow a "Home Depot" porch and ramp on such a valuable historical structure, as it would look like materials purchased at that store. It's

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going to look like a trailer part. He agreed that the porch/deck should not be open (unroofed). He said there are other configuration alternatives for the ramp that have been explored. There was consideration of placing the handicap ramp by the side door but the Applicant said the side door was too small. He said it was better to make a side door bigger than to ruin 100-year old (or more) architecture. Chairperson Correa thanked Mr. Harwell for his comments.

The Chairperson then closed the public comments portion of this item.

Board Discussion

Chairperson Correa advised that historic structures to some degree are exempted from ADA requirement but, the church wants to provide accessibility to some degree for the parishioners. However, she partly agreed with Mr. Harwell in not particularly liking the design, finding it not in keeping with the architecture. She asked if it was possible to get some other designs from Mr. Mack. Mr. Crowe responded that the former front porch, which covered to whole front façade of the building, had been inappropriately converted to habitable space in the modern era. Staff did suggest going back to the original porch, but the Applicant did not want to do this as they needed the space for office use. The Board cannot force an action like this as it would not represent reasonable justice and equity, per the historic preservation ordinance. However Staff and the Applicant did come to a reasonable compromise in the form of a central front porch with a metal roof that continues the line and appearance of the porch roof. As the enclosed porch is an later add-on, this porch addition does not harm or hide significant historic features. Mr. Crowe said that churches do not have to adhere to the ADA requirements for the handicap ramp, but once they make ADA renovations then staff has to ensure that they do abide by ADA standards. Staff believes this will be a simple and attractive in functional porch, and the hedge will soften the appearance of the ramp.

Chairperson Correa spoke in agreement with staff, noting that the board likes to be proactive and come up with solutions with the applicants. She said she does not want this to be an onerous process. She said that it is also important to protect the integrity of the building, so a compromise situation is preferred.

Ms. Crabill asked if there was a back door to the building. Mr. Beaton answered there a side door. Ms. Scheonberger asked if the side door was on the parking lot side. Mr. Crowe said yes, the side door is in the rear of the building on the south side of the building. Mr. Beaton said that if you go in that door the kitchen is to the left and the offices are to the right, up an incline. He added that there was an attached garage that's being used for the food pantry. Mr. Crowe said that because the required gradual elevation of the ramp the rear door would come down in the parking lot and they would lose most parking, including the most important handicap parking. Mr. Harwell said that the shed roof in no way fit in with the architecture of building as it stands out with a bracketed horizontal overhang. An alternative would be to link the ramp with the front sidewalk. He said if this ramp does need to be ADA compatible there are incorrect elements in the drawings that need to be addressed.

Mr. Crowe reminded the Board that this is an application to improve and utilize an historic building as opposed to some of the recent demolition requests.

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At this time Steven Mack, Y2K Construction, arrived at the meeting and spoke on behalf of the Applicant, St. Monica's Catholic Church. Mr. Mack said the Church was trying hard with the porch and ramp to match the existing building, using similar materials and lines of the building. Ms. Crabill what was the cost differential between enlarging the door and placing the handicap ramp on the side and rear. Mr. Mack replied this would displace the parking, including handicap parking. This will be the front of the building and people will park and enter this way. The handicap parking is where the handicap ramp is going to be leading from.

Ms. Crabill asked Staff if a cost analysis was done comparing the cost of enlarging the side door and a handicap ramp as opposed to adding the porch and ramp in the front. Mr. Crowe answered that a cost analysis was not done that he knew of. Ms. Crabill said enlarging the door would probably cost less than adding a front porch.

Mr. Beaton said, for the record, that he is a parishioner at the Church but is not in any decision-making capacity. He passed around some old photos of the building. Mr. Beaton asked Staff to re-state the request. Mr. Crowe answered that the porch is being built on the front of the existing closed in porch. Chairperson Correa asked in the future should building not be used by the church can this porch addition be removed. Mr. Crowe answered yes, it is not a substantial investment and is something that can be removed fairly easily.

Ms. Scheonberger asked if anyone knows what this building will be used for, how often it would be used and how many people use the building. Mr. Crowe answered he knows the building is used for offices and counseling and added that the elderly parishioners have a difficult time getting in and out of the building's steps. He added that Staff didn't get in detail about the church's internal workings that is not staff's purview. Mr. Beaton said is was his understanding is the church has flipped building usage, moving the offices from the newer "prefab" building to this old rectory, as the other building did not work well for offices since the upstairs area was used for sleeping rooms for visiting clergy.

Motion made by Ms. Crabill to table the item and have Staff look at an alternative based on cost analysts for building the handicap ramp to the back door. The motion died for lack of a second.

Motion to Mr. Beaton made a motion to approve add a front porch and handicap ramp as staff recommends. This motion also died for lack of a second.

Chairperson Correa advised the board that it needed to take some type of action and someone can make a motion to provide some direction to the applicant.

Ms. Scheonberger asked Mr. Crowe if he asked the Applicant about placing the handicap ramp at the side door. Mr. Crowe answered yes and that the applicants are adamant about placing the handicap ramp in the rear. The building official and staff meet with the applicant to work out a solution that would meet the Church's needs while also meeting the historic preservation ordinance criteria. Chairperson Correa said she is willing to compromise, but had not received enough compelling information to be convinced to not locate the ramp on the side. Mr. Crowe said he agreed, but was concerned about the Church's property rights as well. He said that it was the Board's job to review the designs, not tell property owners how to design it.

Ms. Scheonberger asked if the porch will be built on a block foundation. Mr. Crowe said that the porch will be built on concrete piers. Ms. Crabill noted that the steps are painted brick and asked will the handicap ramp be

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painted brick as well. Mr. Crowe answered it would be a concrete ramp, which would be hidden behind a hedge. He added that the church like the more permanent concrete ramp, with concerns about maintenance ruling out a wood ramp.

Mr. Beaton said that he does not like the present appearance of the building's converted front porch, but it has been that way for quite some time. Putting an additional porch on the front and handicap ramp isn't going to make the building look worse than it does already, especially if it's done in a way that it doesn't call attention to the ramp and the addition. The preference would be to put the porch back the way it was originally to make the church look more historic, because you have a church right next to that was built in 1897 and a mural on the other side. He said that the flip side is the church does need this space for offices, and the staff recommendations do somewhat work to blend the ramp and porch in.

Addressing the issue of the failed motions, Mr. Crowe advised the board that the ordinance states that if the Board takes no action, the item is automatically approved. Mr. Beaton asked staff how quickly does the church want to add the porch and handicap ramp, because he would feel more comfortable if the item was tabled and the Board could get a more detailed explanation on type type of material and appearance of the addition. The example in the packet is just not well defined. Mr. Crowe answered that Staff has tried to expedite this application by meeting quickly with the applicant on site, and outside of the normal Board schedule does not feel it is appropriate to prolong the matter. He said that Staff has the ability to work with the Applicant during the process to make sure the materials blend in and look good. The Board recommendation would be more general and Staff could get more specific on the ground.

Motion by Mr. Beaton to approve adding a front porch and handicap ramp as recommended by Staff, with staff working closely with the applicant to make the improvement blend in as much as possible. The motion was seconded by Ms. Schoenberger. Motion passed 3-1, with Chairperson Correa voting no.

OTHER BUSINESS –

Certified Local Government Grant Opportunities

Mr. Crowe advised the board that staff is ready to proceed with the grant opportunities. Staff is requesting that the Board direction on CLG grant opportunities including re-surveys, educational projects, etc. Chairperson Correa said that while some of the educational and signage projects that Mr. Zimny showcased were pretty intriguing, however she believed the surveying of the City's historic resources including Palatka Heights would be a preferred option. The last survey update was in 2012 of downtown core, and before that it was the South and North Historic District surveys of 1981. Chairperson Correa added that there were a handful of site files outside of the historic districts and downtown area. She added that the Putnam County Historical Society was active in getting historic markers, so they should focus on this area. Mr. Beaton agreed, saying that the South and North Historic Districts need to be resurveyed as there are a number of structures that are gone, or altered. Palatka Heights has many historic structures that was not covered in the original surveys. He noted also that the historical society is interested in getting the John W. Campbell building on the National Register and he has started accumulating information on this building. Another request was to get the Lawson Funeral Home, operating for 100 years, on the National Register. He said that it was important for the City to get the downtown area on the National and local register. Mr. Crowe said that Staff has enough information to procede with a downtown historic district in terms of inventory, assessment and updated master site file for each building. He

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noted that previous efforts to do this have not been successful due to the resistance of property owners to more regulations. Chairperson Correa agreed, but also said that now many of the owners are in favor of the historic district now then in the past. Mr. Crowe advised the board that staff has spoken with the Division of Historic Resources about the Century Block/100 Block as a “mini-district” and they have so far supported such a district.

Mr. Crowe said that Staff would proceed with lining up a CLG grant for re-survey and survey purposes based on the Board input. He clarified that the Campbell Building is already on the National Register as a contributing building in the South Historic District, and was not sure if individual listing would be worth a lot of extra effort due to this.

ADJOURNMENT - Motion to adjourn made by Ms. Crabill to adjourn the meeting, seconded by Mr. Beaton and meeting was adjourned at 4:45 pm.