

Preservationists take aim at saving area's history

BY KENNETH L. R. PATCHEN
STAFF WRITER

Chicagoan John A. Muntean moved to Highland Park 10 years ago when his family found an old home they liked.

They had looked at several places, but this Ravinia area house was near the lake and the train station, close to a good school and the neighborhood looked welcoming. Parts of the house reminded him of designs he knew and liked.

"It was a natural house to buy," he said. "It was a well-designed home to begin with."

After 10 years in the house, his family decided to rebuild the 1960s era kitchen. Architect Louis Natenshon showed them how to incorporate improvements first in the kitchen, and later elsewhere. The too-old garage was expanded to hold two modern vehicles. Pipes and wiring were improved. Original building materials were saved to preserve the appearance of the home and blend into the neighborhood.

For the efforts, Muntean received one of the Highland Park Historic Preservation Commission's 14th annual Awards for Rehabilitation.

"The 'aesthetic continuity is what we wanted to maintain,'" he said.

Historic preservation is a part of the teardown debate.

Those who argue for preservation say older homes reflect the history of a community, its public image and the sense of neighborhoods. They say these values represent a quality of life which cannot be purchased or separated from the homes that line city streets; values created over decades.

The grand-daddy

Lake Forest and Highland Park have active programs to preserve historical homes, while Deerfield has just finished studying the topic.

"Lake Forest is the grand-daddy of the historic preservation movement," said Susan Benjamin, of Benjamin Historic Certification, LLC, in Highland Park. "Highland Park is like a daddy."

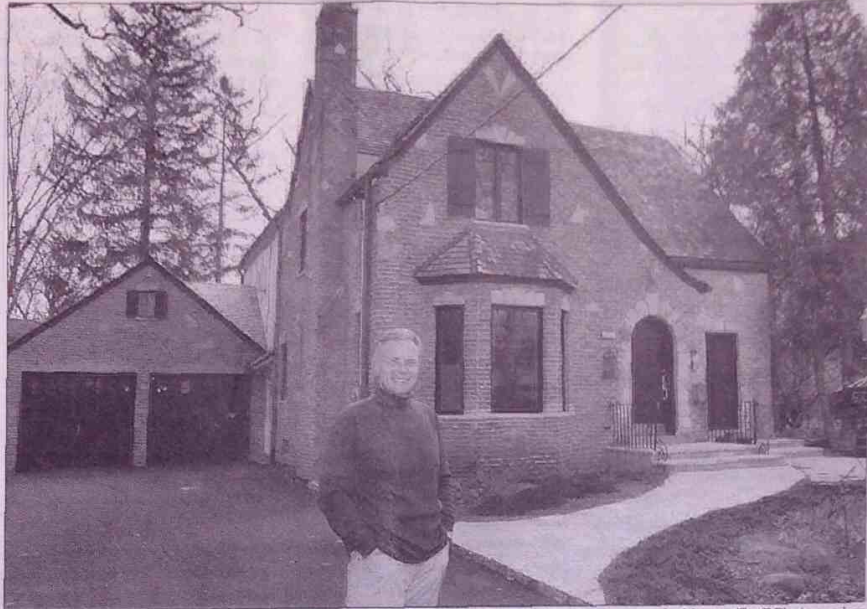
Lake Forest has three large National Historic Register Districts, a preservation foundation, a Building Review Board, preservation programs, a library with records and a historical society.

"They really have an incredible track record in historic preservation," Benjamin said.

Highland Park has designated smaller local historic districts. The preservation commission, the library, the

"There is a lot more in a house than bricks and mortar. Tear down a structure, and your history is torn down."

— Andrew Fisher, Illinois Landmarks Preservation Council



Joel Lerner/Staff Photographer

Ken Kotula in front of newly renovated English Cottage style home in Highland Park. The Kotula's won an award from the city's Historic Preservation Commission for the way they remodeled their home, preserving its original look.

Highland Park Historical Society and local development and zoning regulations all attest to the city's aggressive desire to preserve old home history.

Historically, Deerfield has not had much interest in saving the few special homes they do have, said architect Don Wroblewski, a member of the Deerfield Area Historical Society. Although community residents did save their old train station back in 1974, he said.

"Much of Deerfield is tract housing," he said. "Only a few (buildings) are very distinguished, but (those few) are important. They set the character of the town."

Andrew Fisher of the Illinois Landmarks Preservation Council, a Chicago-based statewide preservation group said, "There is a lot more in a house than bricks and mortar. Tear down a structure, and your history is torn down."

Fisher believes the old

homes worth saving should be identified and protected, and he manages programs to help people do that.

What to save

Making determinations about what to save and what to let go occupies the bulk of the work of the Highland Park Historic Preservation Commission, said its Vice President Michael Behn. He said the commission has completed surveys identifying when a home was built, who the architect and the owners were, and how the home relates to the history of the city.

The data helps commission members know when to make judgments about demolition permits. The commission can delay destruction for a few months, or even one year if necessary, while alternatives are

explored. Many times, it is a matter of finding a buyer who likes old homes.

"If a property is not fixable, we're not going to tie it around their necks for the rest of their lives," Behn said. "Our purpose is to preserve homes that are worth preserving and can be preserved."

Pauline Mohr, of the Lake Forest Preservation Foundation, said her city's two-year delay to demolish a home provides an opportunity for alternatives to be found. When the ordinance was enacted, it was sufficient to slow the process of destruction, but these days two years is no longer enough.

The delay provides the homeowner intent on taking down a home the opportunity to reconsider or to design a home that meets their own needs as well as the concerns of the community. A replacement home, if approved, requires a certificate of appropriateness from the Historic Preservation Commission. The commission uses 12 standards to assure that buildings are in context with their neighborhood.

Gail Hodges is past president of the Lake Forest Preservation Foundation and chair-

man of the Building Review Board. "We're trying to be servive on smaller neighborhoods to protect them," said.

Soon after Lake Forest chartered in 1861, it became a planned community to res its landscape of ravines building boom in the 1980s capitulated development com which help regulators today.

"We were one of the communities in the United States (1962) to have an Architecture Review Board," Mohr said. "It helped us control of bad architecture."

Multiple groups work to keep old homes alive in Lake Forest. Hodges listed the Lake Forest Historical Society, the Historic Preservation Commission, the Open Land Association and the building review board as all working from a similar value system. Newsletters and public information programs reinforce ethic.

Mohr said there have been losses. "The biggest threat we're getting to the historic look of our community is the infill construction we're getting," she said. "You're driving down the street and suddenly there's a poke in the eye."

Kenneth Kotula and his wife needed to renovate their year old home to make room for their children and grandchildren to visit. Tearing down the house to rebuild was never an option.

The work to update the house eventually won them an award for housing rehabilitation. "The city worked with us," he said.

Too far?

But developer David Fetter of Fetter Development and Construction says the notion of preservation can sometimes keep housing stock from being refreshed.

Fetter, a lifelong Highland Park resident, said his company has never been denied a building permit, but the company has had some close calls.

Developers have to present their plans to Highland Park Historic Preservation Commission before a permit can be approved.

Problems can develop with the appearance of homes because their structural or other problems, he said.

In Deerfield, historic preservation has not been a part of the teardown debate until recently.

Bill Seiden, chairman of the village's residential redevelopment panel, said they have just completed a study of historic

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— Pauline Mohr, Lake Forest Preservation Foundation

Villages have various tools at their disposal

By LINDSAY BELLER
STAFF WRITER

When town officials consider teardown regulations, they all agree that balancing the needs of their communities with the rights of property owners is a priority.

But how Lake Forest, Highland Park and Deerfield strike that balance varies.

Each community — unique in history, housing stock, property values and population — employs different ways to control teardowns. From zoning regulations to historic preservation commissions, these local governments have tailored their methods to keep intact the individuality of their communities.

Lake Forest

Lake Forest has rigid measures designed to regulate teardowns and preserve its distinguishing streetscapes and architecture. The city requires review processes that may result in lengthy permit delays and offers density bonuses to encourage renovations and additions.

City officials, local Realtors and developers each recommend that buyers meet with the city at the beginning of the planning process.

"We want, upfront, for people to have realistic expectations," said Cathy Czerniak, community development director for the city of Lake Forest.

When the number of teardowns began to climb in 1997, the city established four historic districts and increased the review standards for teardowns. The Historic Preservation Commission must review and approve both the demolition and replacement structure for homes within these dis-

tricts. The Commission can delay a permit for up to two years.

The Building Review Board considers homes outside the historic districts in the same way, by reviewing both the demolition and replacement structure plans. The process discourages the building of speculation homes.

But Czerniak said the City offers bonuses for building elements like open porches or dormers that reduce the bulk of a home. These additions don't count against the maximum square footage requirement.

Lake Bluff Village Administrator Kent Street said the village's Historic Preservation Commission plans to examine the issue in the future. The annual teardown numbers in his village are between 15 and 20.

Highland Park

Highland Park's chief focus has been on maintaining diversity. The city developed an affordable housing plan, adopted an inclusionary zoning policy and passed other zoning regulations after seeing teardowns increase to 50 or 60 a year while the affordable housing stock was decreasing in the late 1990s.

In May 2002, the city instituted a \$10,000 demolition tax and put the money into the Affordable Housing Trust Fund, which supports public and private efforts to build affordable housing. The tax has generated \$550,000 to date.

"If you're going to remove housing, you should give back," said Howard Wender, chairman of the Highland Park Housing Commission, which oversees the Trust Fund, the Highland Park Illinois Community Land Trust and Single Family Home Ownership Pilot Program.



The Land Trust allows residents to buy an affordable housing unit on city-owned land. By having the resident lease the land from the city, the cost of the home remains affordable for qualified owners.

The program led to the development of Sunset Woods, a 60-unit senior housing project, and a current project of six three-bedroom townhouses that will range from \$132,000 to \$217,000.

This is significant considering that homes costing between \$300,000 and \$350,000 are being torn down and replaced with \$1 million homes, said Michael Blue, Highland Park's community development director.

In August the city council voted to adopt inclusionary zoning, which requires specific numbers of affordable units to be built in new housing developments.

Similar to Lake Forest, Highland Park offers bonuses of up to 200 square feet for additions to the property to prevent teardowns and retain the character of the neighborhood.

"The idea is to create incentive not to tear down but to do an addition," said Michael Blue, Highland Park's community development director.

Both Highland Park and Deerfield have passed zoning regulations to address issues like bulk, height and floor area (Continued on next page)

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preservation and is prepared to make recommendations to the board in May. Seiden said he believes Deerfield has homes many people would like to save.

Wroblewski thinks preservation will become more important to people as they see things torn down.

Frank Lloyd Wright's last house, "in perfect condition," almost was torn down, he said. The new owner made a telephone call to make sure he could get a demolition permit for the home before he bought it. Chicago and national news media reported about the possible loss, prompting another buyer forward to save the

home. The Deerfield Train Station was saved in the mid-1970s when the Jaycees organized to paint it in its historical colors.

"It's become probably the most symbolic building in town," he said.

But not every home is saved. Wroblewski said the Rappaport House, also known as the Seth Gooder home, was the most important home lost in the Deerfield and Bannockburn area last year. The home was built by Earle Rappaport, a Civil Engineer in the early 1900s famous for building the caissons used in the foundations for most of the Loop's buildings.

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