

Expert to field questions for proposed historic district in Downers Grove

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DOWNERS GROVE – Residents looking for more information about the creation of a proposed historic district along Maple Avenue can attend the second of two meetings at the Lincoln Center on Oct. 8.

The first meeting was held Tuesday night at Lincoln Center, 935 Maple Ave.

Neighbors and preservationists who want to create the district hope to keep the stretch of historic homes on Maple Avenue intact. The effort was spurred when the Edwards House, a Queen Anne Victorian mansion on Maple Avenue, was put up for sale. Developers have identified the lot, 942 Maple Ave., and an old but historically insignificant house next door as the potential site for a 56-unit condo building.

It would take 51 percent of the property owners in the proposed district to agree to create the distinction, which would have to be approved by a review board and then the village council.

Once created, any building permit, moving permit or demolition permit in the district would require a certificate of appropriateness granted by the review board following a hearing. Applicants denied a certificate have 30 days to appeal to the village council.

Creating a district would be the likely path to save the Edwards House, because sole, individual buildings cannot be designated as historic landmarks without the owners consent.

Downers Grove resident Tom Nybo has largely spearheaded the effort to save the home, and said they have begun passing out information packets and collecting signatures.

“I’m hoping that the village council and people in the village see that there is an aggressive amount of support in making Maple Avenue an historic district,” he said.

Doug Gilbert, an architect and former chairman of the Oak Park Historic Preservation Commission, provided information at the first of the two meeting Tuesday, and will be on-hand again at the Oct. 8 meeting.

“The key thing is we’re (going) to answer people’s questions about what an historic District is and what it would mean, what would be the implications, and why this group wants to do it,” he said.

Gilbert helped establish large historic districts in Oak Park and other communities, and served on the historic property survey team in Downers Grove last year that catalogued historic properties throughout town. The survey identified several houses on Maple Avenue as being historically

significant, including the Edwards House.

Maple Avenue “has what we call, in the business, integrity,” he said. “When you drive down Maple Avenue, it looks how it did historically. There’s not a lot of tear downs or modern buildings. It has that historic character that would be required to make it eligible as an historic district.”

The Edwards House was last used as office space, and the lot is currently zoned as downtown business. Multi-family structures like a condominium buildings are allowed as special use in downtown business districts.

For that reason, developers say their plan better fits with the village’s plans for the area. “We’ve tailored our plan to plug right into (the village’s) vision,” he said.

David Sosin, an attorney spokesman for the developers, said Monday that the group expected to file planning documents with the village Tuesday.

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