

June 15th, 2006

Dear Neighbor,

The Village of Kenilworth Community Affairs Committee of the Village Board recently sponsored a community forum on National Register Historic Districts. The information on this complex topic is difficult to cover in one session, and there have been many questions about the topic. As a result, we are sending this letter to all residents. It is intended to inform you of where we are in the process of responding to the village survey results, and what options we are considering as a response to the strong appeal by survey respondents for preservation of community character.

Preservation is often perceived to be restrictive; historic districts are often perceived as places where a committee decides what color a homeowner may paint his or her house or whether or not an addition may be constructed. However, this concept of preservation is more apt to apply to places like Williamsburg, Virginia, or to a gated community. **The truth is, there are preservation options available to us as a village that will help us to celebrate the treasure trove of architecture in Kenilworth, without restricting or requiring regulative review of what a homeowner can do with their home.** Historic preservation, as recommended by the Ad Hoc Committee, can be a nonrestrictive, “win-win” proposition for individual residents and the Village as a whole. Please take a minute to familiarize yourself with the facts of what is being considered and visit the village website to see the Ad Hoc Historic Preservation Recommendation at www.villageofkenilworth.org.

What led to this recommendation?

As a result of community concern about increased teardowns and changing community character, the Ad Hoc Committee for Community Planning was created by the Village Board in January, 2004 as a committee of seven with up to three Village Trustees and at least four residents. The Committee distributed a community survey in May, 2004, and from the survey results developed a matrix of key issues of concern to residents, and potential tools to address them, as well as the following vision statement, which was adopted by the Board of Trustees:

**PROTECT THE VILLAGE OF KENILWORTH’S CHARACTER AS A
COMMUNITY OF THE HIGHEST QUALITY, THROUGH PRESERVATION
OF THE BUILT AND NATURAL ENVIRONMENT, AND THE MAINTENANCE
OF HOMES, NEIGHBORHOODS AND SPECIAL PLACES THAT LEND
SIGNIFICANT AESTHETIC AND CULTURAL VALUE TO THE COMMUNITY.**

What has been done so far?

The Ad Hoc Committee has sent several recommendations to the Village Board including a six month demolition permit moratorium during which zoning issues were studied, changes to the Village's Zoning Ordinance creating “neighborhood specific” dimensional standards (building heights, building coverage, setbacks, etc.), construction site standards and regulations (aimed at public safety and construction related “nuisances”), tree preservation, design review of new homes, zoning credits for existing homes and preservation. Some of these recommendations have been implemented by the Village Board, and some are currently under consideration. The comprehensive plan, which will be created in conjunction with the Plan Commission, is the last item planned to be addressed by the Ad Hoc Committee.

How has the public been involved in and informed about these issues?

The Village has hosted a variety of public forums and hearings, written a number of articles and letters, posted all recommendations on the village website and made them available for residents in written format, and hosted at least of 40 public meetings over a period of over 2 ½ years.

Why Historic Preservation?

The Ad Hoc Committee, in response to very strong village survey results, recommended historic preservation to the Village Board, as a valuable tool to encourage renovation of existing homes without infringing on property owners flexibility or choice. Such a tool was strongly supported in our village survey:

- 73% of Village Survey respondents marked six or higher (scale of 1- 10) that they want Historic Districts that encourage preserving or renovating existing homes.

As a result, the Ad Hoc Committee carefully researched and discussed the preservation options available to the Village, and the benefits associated with each, as well as heard testimony from representatives from the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency and Landmarks Preservation Council of Illinois. After careful consideration of many options, **the Committee concluded that a nonrestrictive, no-review historic preservation/education program, tailored to the needs of Kenilworth, could be an acceptable and effective tool to achieve the goals and objectives derived from the community survey.**

Kenilworth doesn't have a resource survey defining the architectural significance and characteristics of our historic homes and public spaces, and we are the only north shore community except Northfield without a Preservation Commission. However, our "treasure trove" of significant homes and public spaces is being recognized and featured on numerous architectural walking tours this year, including those led by the Chicago Architecture Foundation

Why was listing on the National Register of Historic Places recommended?

The Ad Hoc Committee for Community Planning carefully considered all the options available and recommended National Register designation because:

- it is solely honorary and **DOES NOT RESTRICT** an owner's ability to modify or even demolish his/her home, and requires **NO REVIEW** of changes to a home;
- National Register districts can encompass the greatest number of Kenilworth properties, and districts can make National Register eligibility easier for some homes to attain;
- Listing can provide owners attractive voluntary financial incentive options that could encourage renovation of existing homes by both residents and developers; and
- It will increase awareness of residents, students, realtors, and prospective residents regarding our significant architectural and planning history

What is the National Register of Historic Places?

The National Register of Historic Places is the inventory of buildings, districts and sites that are significant to the history of our nation. The Register includes many thousands of properties representing every state in the nation; Illinois has 1500 listings on the National Register, many of which are districts.

Do only sites of national significance, or related to famous people or events get registered?

No. The register criteria apply to places of local as well as of statewide or national significance. Many places are listed because they exemplify themes or architectural styles important in local history.

How are National Register districts determined?

Districts must have a large percentage of original homes, consistent quality, distinction, a unifying theme, and boundaries. (Some parts of the North Shore are no longer eligible for listing due to the significant loss of original structures.) An architectural survey is necessary to determine which areas of Kenilworth would logically comprise districts, and the unifying theme of those districts.

Will I be able to alter or tear down my property if it's on the National Register?

Yes, National Register listing does not restrict in any way what a property owner can do to his or her home, or require any type of review of proposed changes. It is purely honorary.

What are the benefits of being listed on the National Register?

Because the National Register is the country's official list of historically significant properties, listing carries considerable prestige. It recognizes the historic value of a property or neighborhood, can inspire community pride, and can encourage present and future owners to continue to exercise responsible stewardship. In addition, residents and/or developers may be eligible for tax credits and receive technical assistance for maintenance and rehabilitation projects. (See next question.)

More importantly, increased knowledge of the significance of Village architecture could result in more appreciation for, and rehabilitation of existing homes. Realtors in other communities have also used National Register designation as a successful marketing tool. Many studies suggest National Register designation preserves or enhances property values. (See below.)

What exactly are the tax benefits?

There are bona fide tax credits, which will be discussed in greater detail at a future Village Forum, available only to homeowners in a historic district. Owners of National Register properties may nominate a qualified renovation project for the state property tax assessment freeze program, which enables a homeowner or developer to "freeze" the increase in property assessment for eight years, with a subsequent four year period of increasing assessments to full assessment level. An approved renovation project totaling 25% of the Assessor's fair market value for the property must be completed to qualify. This requires review of proposed interior and exterior work, and is transferable from a developer to a resident, providing the developer did not inhabit the home. See www.illinoishistory.gov/ps/index.htm for more information.

Owners of National Register properties may donate a historic preservation "façade easement" to the Landmarks Preservation Council of Illinois, "LPCI". Conceptually this is a donation of part of the façade of a home, and is viewed as a charitable donation on a homeowner's Federal Income Tax. Please see the LPCI website for more information at www.landmarks.org.

Will National Register designation affect the value of my property?

Although Kenilworth is unique in many respects, and there are many factors that influence property values, many of studies have shown that property values in historic districts have risen faster than nearby properties outside historic districts. The following sources offer more information:

www.brookings.edu/metro/pubs/20050926_preservation.pdf, Search for “dollars and sense” and “Economics” at www.preservationbooks.org, and www.laconservancy.org/preservation/benefits.php4

What is the best source of information about the National Register of Historic Places?

The National Register is maintained by the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, and is administered in each state by a State Historic Preservation Office. For information about the National Register: www.cr.nps.gov/nr/index.htm, for Illinois: www.illinoishistory.gov/ps/index.htm.

What other North Shore Communities have National Register Districts or properties?

Virtually all of our neighboring north lakeshore communities have districts or properties listed on the National Register. Wilmette’s Ouilmette North Historic District of almost 800 homes was listed on the National Register in December, 2005, and is one of the largest districts in the state.

Why would I want National Register listing for Kenilworth if my home is not “historic”?

Almost 50 homes have been built in Kenilworth over the past ten years, and many more have been extensively renovated, because Kenilworth is a desirable place to live, and has a distinctive community character. National Register designation recognizes the historic value of an area, and can inspire pride in the community as a whole. Your home doesn’t have to be historic for you to appreciate and be proud of our historic architecture. Homeowners who don’t want to have their home listed as part of a historic district will have the option “opt out”.

Can National Register listing lead to other preservation efforts?

Whether or Kenilworth is nominated for the National Register, we will still have the same architectural character, which many think is worth learning more about. The National Register process is a state and federal process. Local landmark designation, which often affords greater protection to homes, is a local decision completely unrelated to the National Register process, and would be considered by the Village Board in a public process with community involvement.

Next Steps

There will be at least two more educational forums on the topic of preservation, most likely “The Economic Incentives of Historic Preservation” and “Historic Preservation Commissions”.