CITY OF ROCKVILLE HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION
STAFF REPORT
for
May 21, 2009
MEETING NO. 4-09

APPLICATION: HDC2009-00456
(Continued)

ADDRESS: 224 Elizabeth Avenue

ACCEPTED: March 26, 2009

OWNER: Iglisia De Dios
Pastor Rodriguez

REQUEST: Evaluation of Significance

STAFF: Robin D. Ziek

PROJECT SUMMARY:

The applicant requests Evaluation of Significance review by HDC, as part of the Demolition Permit application process.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends the following findings:

> The property has a significant history, associated with Lincoln Park daily life during the era of segregation; and, that the house no longer retains features associated with the seven aspects of integrity (location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling and association).

[DRAFT MOTION OF EVALUATION OF SIGNIFICANCE:]
Finding HDC2009-00456, for Evaluation of Historic Significance, that the property at 224 Elizabeth Avenue no longer retains sufficient integrity to convey its historic significance, I move to NOT recommend historic designation of the property.

BACKGROUND: A demolition permit was received at the City of Rockville on March 4, 2009. The property is located towards the east end of Elizabeth Avenue, as it approaches Westmore Avenue in Lincoln Park. Two churches sit at the corner of Westmore Avenue and Elizabeth Avenue – Iglisia De Dios on the northwest corner, and Clinton AME Zion Church on the southwest corner.

Iglisia De Dios is adjacent to, and also the owner of, 224 Elizabeth Avenue. The church building is a renovated residential property, with a large parking area behind the building. Mature evergreen

trees provide an edge for the residential properties along Elizabeth, and boundary between the church parking lot and 224 Elizabeth Avenue.

The church is taking steps toward the future demolition of the existing church building and the construction of a slightly larger new church building. Additional parking will be required with the increased square footage. The applicant has met with the Planning Division and attended a Development Review Committee meeting to review their project requirements. They will meet additional parking requirements by establishing parking on the 224 Elizabeth Avenue property.

The applicant attended an HDC meeting on April 16th, for a Courtesy Review. The HDC continued the hearing to the May 21st meeting, asking staff to provide additional historic information on the property. After the meeting, staff talked with relatives of two different past owners of the property and investigated further into the history, especially using data collected through the development of the Lincoln Park Conservation Plan in 2004-5. The property is considered a Contributing Resource in the Lincoln Park Conservation District, with a building date of 1954. It is assigned to the Third Period of Significance (post-1945).

Property Area: 9,500 sf. **Structure Area:** 782 sf.

Zone: R-60 and Lincoln Park Neighborhood Conservation District (Sec. 25.14.03)

Development Standards: Demolition is discouraged, but permitted. Parking standards for churches in new Zoning Ordinance require one space per 300 sf. of gross floor area. Lots may not be resubdivided, and may not be assembled.

City of Rockville Permits Required:

Demolition Permit
Site Plan approval for new church

Historic Significance: There is, according to oral tradition, a core part of the house that is associated with The Red Barn, a theatre building constructed by and for African-Americans in the early 1930s, on the north side of Frederick Avenue adjacent to the B&O Railroad tracks. The Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps do not, unfortunately, include the north side of Frederick Road. The information provided is summarized from staff research conducted during the development of the most recent Lincoln Park Neighborhood Plan, and from family and residents in Lincoln Park who have some family/neighborhood association with the property.

In 1930, Harrison Ricks and his wife Frances started buying up property in Block 5 of H.L. England's Second Addition to Lincoln Park. With purchases from his own family (Achseh and James Ricks) and from Harrison England (and England's company, Suburban Properties, Inc.), Mr. Ricks accumulated lots #12 – 16 and then quickly developed the property with a movie

theatre for the African-American community. While African-American people could attend the 1939 Milo theatre in downtown Rockville, they were required to enter through a back door and sit upstairs in a segregated area.

In addition to the new theatre, subsequently known as "The Red Barn, " Mr. Ricks had a small building on the property that he used as a corner grocery. By 1949, the property had accumulated several mortgages, and Mr. Ricks sold it to Oliver W. Madden. For a few years, the property was empty. When Mrs. Letha E. Payton emigrated from Greenville, North Carolina with her eight children, she moved into the old theatre building. In 1952, the property was sold to Lenmor Corporation, with Morris Stern of Stern furniture, as Secretary of the company. Mr. Stern gave the small grocery building to Mrs. Payton, on condition that she move the building. Mr. Stern then renovated the old theatre building for rental apartments.

In 1946, Jack Ernest Hall purchased the subject property from Harrison England (Suburban Properties). Mr. England platted H.L. England's Second Addition to Lincoln Park in 1926. and sold lots as well as built homes for sale. The house at 213 Lincoln Avenue is currently known as "The Hall House" and may be associated with Jack Ernest Hall. In 1954, Mr. Hall, who was unmarried at the time, sold the subject property to Mrs. Payton as a site for her new home. Mrs. Virginia Cooper, her daughter, said that Mrs. Payton had a lot of community help and the building was moved to the site using a tractor. At the time, the address was 222 Elizabeth Avenue. It had two rooms and no running water.

In 1959, Mrs. Payton sold the property to Mr. Robert L. Snowden, and she moved in with a brother in Baltimore. According to Ms. Anita Summerour, Mr. Snowden enlarged the house. His daughter, Irene, married Rupert G. Curry, and they lived in the property on Elizabeth Avenue as a young married couple. In 1963, Mr. Curry purchased the property from Mr. Snowden, and in 1966, he sold the property to Mr. Charles Edmunds.

Mr. Rupert Curry was born in St. Louis, MO, and graduated from West Virginia State College in 1953. He spent two years in the United States Army, and began his professional career as a schoolteacher in the Montgomery County Public School system (1955 – 1965). After 1965, he went to work for IBM, working in personnel and management. In 1968, he was elected Rockville City Councilman. He was the first African-American to be elected to the City Council. He was also the first African-American to be appointed to the Board of Trustees of St. Mary's College, where he served from 1973 to 1990, including service as Chairman of the Board. Mr. Curry retired from IBM in 1986.

The Edmunds Family has the longest association with 224 Elizabeth Avenue (1966 – 1995). Purchased by Mr. Charles Edmunds, the property became the home of his son, Charles Rudolf Edmunds and wife, Viola Betty Ann Edmunds. According to their great-granddaughter, Betty Edmunds, the Edmunds added a back porch, a back bedroom, a bathroom, and the front porch.

DISCUSSION OF THE PROPOSED PROJECT and MATERIALS:

The house at 224 Elizabeth Avenue has two significant associations – as a small grocery store operating in conjunction with the Red Barn movie theatre built by Mr. Harrison Ricks; and, its associated with Mr. Curry and, through his wife, with the Snowden family (Snowden Funeral Home).

As a small grocery in Lincoln Park, it was associated with Mr. Harrison Ricks, a successful African-American businessman with community-oriented ideas. During this period of association, the building was apparently a small 2-room structure located at 200 Frederick Avenue in close proximity to the railroad tracks, with no interior plumbing

The second significant association is with Rupert Curry. Through his wife, Irene Snowden, there is also an association with the Snowden family (Snowden Funeral Home). Mr. Curry made significant contributions to his community, and in particular, was ground-breaking in his public service, being the first African-American to serve on the Rockville City Council, as well as being the first African-American to serve on the Board, and as Chairman, of Trustees of St. Mary's College. During his years of public service, however, he had already sold this property and no longer lived at 224 Elizabeth Avenue. The Snowden Family has longterm associations with Rockville history and is well-known for the operation of the Snowden Funeral Home, which provides funeral services for African-Americans throughout the county.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS:

Criteria Consideration:

A. Event: a specific event, or a pattern of events can qualify.

The property has significance in its association with economic patterns associated with the era of segregation, and specifically as it applied in Lincoln Park. However, over time, the building has been altered with additions (interior and exterior), so that the original two-room structure no longer is recognizable.

B. Person: generally restricted to those properties that illustrate (rather than commemorate) a person's important achievements.

The property at 224 Elizabeth Avenue is associated with Mr. Rupert Curry, a significant person in Rockville's political history. However, the events for which he is particularly known happened after he moved from this house. His political achievements are not associated with 224 Elizabeth Avenue. The association with the Snowden Family points to the significance of the Funeral Home itself, rather than a particular person in the family, in this case, Mrs. Irene Snowden Curry.

Criteria Consideration B: Moved Properties: a property moved after its period of significance has to retain enough historic features to convey its architectural values and retain integrity of design, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association.

Integrity: According to the National Register, "Integrity" is the ability of a property to convey its significance. A simple test is whether someone of that day would recognize the building for what it had been.

In this case, would someone recognize that the house at 224 Elizabeth Avenue had been the two-room store on Frederick Avenue? Does the building retain the identity for which it is significant?

COMPLIANCE WITH GUIDELINES:

In terms of Criterion A (Events), staff finds that the subject property has cultural significance in Lincoln Park, based on the recollections of several residents who have longterm association with the property. Staff notes, however, that the property no longer retains integrity to the period of significance, as it was altered and modified over the past fifty years as its use changed from commercial to residential.

In terms of Criterion B (Person), staff finds that the subject property does not meet this Criterion because the events associated with the period of significance for Mr. Curry occurred after he sold the property. With regard to Mrs. Snowden, the family significance relates more clearly to the Snowden Funeral Home rather than a particular house associated with a family member.