

**Statement by Landmarks Illinois
to the Oak Park Historic Preservation Commission**

**regarding 925 Chicago Avenue - proposed move or demolition
of contributing building within the Frank Lloyd Wright-Prairie
School of Architecture Historic District**

July 11, 2019

Good Evening,

My name is Lisa DiChiera, Director of Advocacy for Landmarks Illinois.

I am here today to express our opposition to demolition of 925 Chicago Ave., a contributing property to the Frank Lloyd Wright-Prairie School of Architecture Historic District. While we understand the important educational mission of the Frank Lloyd Wright Trust and its contribution to preserving the legacy of Wright, permitting demolition of this historic property will set a very bad precedent. Relocation should only be considered as the absolute last resort if the Commission concurs that there is no other solution.

As we all know, demolition of a contributing property to a locally designated and protected landmark district is only to be permitted in the case of demonstrated economic hardship or a threat to life and safety. Neither is the case here.

925 Chicago Avenue was built prior to Wright's Home and Studio, and Wright would have undoubtedly evaluated its physical and visual relationship to his own property and the structures he intended to build there. With Anna's House at 931 Chicago Ave., 925 is an important contributor to the early settlement streetscape of Chicago Avenue. The house has excellent integrity, retaining many of its original decorative features, wood siding and wood windows, which is not common for a home of this age.

In discussions with representatives of the Frank Lloyd Wright Trust, we understand there was evaluation of how the home may be incorporated into the new visitor center. While we agree its incorporation and reuse may not be ideal compared to the efficiencies of new construction, it is the responsibility of the Trust, as a preservation-focused organization, not to destroy another historic property to fulfill its mission. In Buffalo, New York, the visitor center built for Frank Lloyd Wright's Martin House is nestled between historic buildings. The apartment buildings that were demolished to make way for this pavilion were not historic.

Looking at the overall property of 925 Chicago Ave., there appears to be additional space behind the home. Again, while we know it is not convenient to accommodate new construction around two, nineteenth-century homes, it is the reality of operating an educational institution within a dense, older residential setting that is in theory protected.

In August of last year, Landmarks Illinois wrote to this commission expressing its opposition to an owner's requested COA for demolition of 224 S. Marion in the Ridgeland/Oak Park Historic District, which was denied by the Commission as well as the Village Board on the grounds that it was a contributing building to that district. Other recent demolition requests have also been denied. To permit demolition of 925 Chicago Ave. would be unprecedented considering the home's excellent condition and there being no evidence of a life/safety issue or economic hardship case.

As stated in a past edition of the National Trust for Historic Preservation's journal *Forum*, "Local protection is the only way to preserve the ordinary, everyday properties and neighborhoods of our collective heritage." 925 Chicago Ave. epitomizes the late-nineteenth century historic fabric of Oak Park, and permitting its removal would set back Oak Park's strong policy for protecting its historic districts.