

**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**

and

**regarding 931 Chicago Avenue - proposed removal of additions
on the east and south elevations to diminish footprint and
allow for visitor flow (Frank Lloyd Wright-Prairie School of
Architecture Historic District).**

August 27, 2019

Good Evening,

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

I am here today to express our opposition to move or demolish 925 Chicago Ave. and to remove east and south additions of 931 Chicago Ave., both contributing properties 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 or removal of 925 and removal of additions at 931, which were built during the district's period of significance, sets a very bad precedent.

As we all know, demolition of a contributing property to a locally designated and protected landmark district is not permitted and can only be pursued if there is a case of demonstrated economic hardship or, according to the village's code, Section 7-9-18, if a structure "poses an immediate hazard to human health and

safety.” Neither is the case here, and needing more efficient operation of a visitor center is not a criterion for demolition of a protected historic property.

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.

Anna’s House at 931 Chicago Ave. is considered one of the oldest homes in Oak Park, built circa 1866, and was occupied by Frank Lloyd Wright’s mother from the time Wright built his home next door in 1889. The Trust proposes demolition of the east wing, which was added by 1895, and the south wing, which was added sometime between 1895-1905. The construction of both additions, built during Wright’s time at the Home & Studio, presumably would have involved his oversight if not design on behalf of his mother. In our view, the loss of these wings would eliminate another layer of Wright’s and his family’s history on this property.

The Commission’s Architectural Review Guidelines uses the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation, and Standard 4 states:

Most properties change over time; those changes that have acquired historic significance in their own right shall be retained and preserved.

We understand the incorporation and reuse of 925 Chicago Ave. and 931 Chicago Ave., with its east and south wings, may not be ideal compared to the efficiencies of new construction and obtaining additional open space. Yet it is the responsibility of the Trust, as a preservation-focused organization, not to destroy

contributing historic properties in the historic district to fulfill its mission.

To permit demolition or removal of 925 Chicago Ave. as a contributing property to the district with no evidence of a health/safety issue or economic hardship would be unprecedented. Removal of wings built during the district's period of significance at 931 Chicago Ave. would also set bad policy. For certificates of appropriateness, efficiency is not germane. The historic preservation ordinance of the village code must be followed. Permitting these changes would set back Oak Park's strong policy for protecting contributing properties in all its historic districts.

Thank you.