CITY OF EAST CHICAGO
PLAN COMMISSION MEETING
Friday, January 16, 2026

BOARD MEMBERS:
Valeriano Gomez, President
Lilia Ramos, Vice-President
Lydia Lopez, Secretary
Marino Solorio, Commissioner
Stacy Winfield, Commissioner
Jaylen Johnson, Commissioner
Grayling Gordon, Commissioner
Hashem Alhashem, Commissioner

STAFF:
Tracy Ailes
Eduardo Fontanez

Reported for Fissinger & Associates, Ltd.
By: Peggy S. LaLonde, court reporter

Call to Order: 4:30 p.m.

Pledge of Allegiance.

Roll Call: Present in Chambers: Val Gomez, Marino Solorio, Stacy Winfield, Grayling Gordon, Lydia Lopez, Lilia Ramos, Hashem Alhashem

STAFF - Present in Chambers: Tracy Ailes

MR. GOMEZ: Good afternoon everyone. We do have a quorum. I would like to call to order the Plan Commission meeting for Friday, January 16th, 2026.

I would make a motion for approval of the minutes of the regular meeting of January 5th, 2026 as written.

MR. GORDON: Second.

MR. GOMEZ: All in favor?

(All signify aye.)

MR. GOMEZ: Motion carries.

We have no Old Business.

Next we have Commissioners Comments, City of East Chicago Comprehensive Plan Section 5: Historic Properties. Marino, you have the floor.

MR. SOLORIO: Yes, thank you. So part of Section 5, I'm not sure how many of you know what that

means. It means literally what it sounds like, preserving the history of the space for the building to the orientation of streets, etcetera, etcetera.

One perfect example that is actually in the registra, historic registra, is Marktown. So if anyone has been there, the streets are smaller than normal streets. The cars technically now park on the sidewalk. That's specific neighborhood was designated as historical, and as such the character of the neighborhood streets, like I said, along with the buildings, they are historic. Those duplexes were originally built by the Clay Architects. The boundaries there are for what is now ArclerMittal or Cleveland Cliffs.

And one of the things about historic preservation is that it has to go through -- we used to have a historic board. Actually we don't have it now. Normally anything, everything that you would like to maintain as history, that would go to that board, and you get that approval from the City. And then you take it a further step, you go through the National Register. Then those type of places are protected by law for, like, if someone wants to come in with a wrecking ball, they wouldn't necessarily be able to do it as easily because it's designated as such.

Part of the limitations of historic preservation a lot of people feel is that the rules try to improve a historic house or building, which requires that materials, the type of material and aesthetic be consistent with what the structure was. A lot of times those materials don't exist anymore. For example, the paint doesn't exist.

Or perfect example here, the Carnegie Library on Grant Street, which is now the Performing Arts Center. In order for us to redevelop that space, they wanted it to be historical character. As such the City called for copper downspouts, what would be your gutters for your home, and the gutters got stolen at the time. So it obviously cost more money than your normal gutters, aluminum or galvanized steel.

Marktown is a perfect example. The City just started a facade program to help fix the houses over there. And the biggest point of contention was the historic preservation with, like, no, you can't do that, that's not stucco. That's not the original material. You have to use the original material. And as they are fighting, the original material is falling apart. So they came to a compromise.

An example of a compromise is to

say, okay, well, aesthetically it looks like stucco, even though the material is not stucco. So it does still meet the character, even though it's not the material, because if we were to get that material it would cost three times the amount of money to rehab the house.

So, those conversations were had and they came down to the conclusion, like, we are willing to sacrifice original material for original aesthetics, and that's how a lot of homes we rehabbed in Marktown successfully. Two houses have sold already.

Another part was that, they were duplexes, and the houses that were sold have actually -- they have opened them up from duplexes and made them into single family homes, which would not be in character in what it was preserved as, but it is now being rehabbed as such.

So those are the type of questions that you sometimes have to ask yourself. And a lot of the reason why these buildings don't go into these registers because if you try to use the original material, it cost more money to rehab or fix, and a lot of times they don't do it. Or they are in the register and people chose to demolish them, even though it calls for rehab. It has changed where the society and these rules have been kind of a little bit more lax now to allow a little bit of compromise because of those issues.

MR. GORDON: Now, I think I might be partially right on this, but you can withdraw a building from the historic society, right?

MR. SOLORIO: You can. That's also a process where you can say, we are not going to do this because it's legally binding to put it under the National Register. Here's the issue. If you don't have a historic board, that's one. Who then, who is the governing body that decides whether something is historic or non-historical. If you want to deal with historical, it falls on the local city to then tell the national organization, hey, someone is infringing on this. Because there isn't that -- technically we don't have any board, although there could be repercussions from the local board, which would be the one responsible to take that to the next level to either stop the demolition or to put stop orders in if someone is starting to fix the house.

For example, in Marktown a lot of

people have put siding on the building and that's out of character of what it is. So they put a stop work order on the project, but the board has that authority to do that. Unfortunately there is no local governing board that now does that. But it also goes to point out, even physically sometimes bringing these up and bringing them in saying, we did have a board for a different building. Such as like the PNC Bank, for example.

When PNC Bank, on Chicago and Indianapolis Boulevard, that was put into the historical register so they would not bulldoze the building. And then two days later there was a wrecking ball for a portion of it and because it wasn't protected. There was nothing to be done at that point, even though there was a wrecking ball already that demolished half the building. So it's a very, kind of tedious process.

I would say that it's an important process to keep the character of the neighborhood and for our city. A lot of times there's a lot of things changing, but before -- the reason this came up was because older cities, like ourselves, have architecturally great facades that you want to salvage. The question ultimately comes down now, that's a legacy issue that we are trying to make sure you maintain it.

The real question comes down, do we have the money to maintain as such. If not, the good thing is that organization now have become more lax to allow people that may not be exactly to the historical context, but keep it as close to and we'll allow you to salvage the building. But if it is not, they won't.

MR. GORDON: Two or three months ago there was a house that was in the newspapers, I think it was a home. It would have been around Halloween or Thanksgiving, an older house, and they were talking about --

MR. SOLORIO: The one right here on 145th and Olcott.

MR. GORDON: Because I drove by and seen it. And this thing, I saw it, like I said, in the newspapers or something, and I never knew about it. So when that happens, maybe say something about it. I don't know the whole story, but I wanted to visit. So since we don't have a board, who actually makes that decision now when it needs repairs or whatever, because I know they had been working on it. I know that part of it they were trying to refurbish somewhat to where it

was, but it was too costly and they stopped. So who makes the decision if you went to go in and try to refurbish it?

MR. SOLORIO: So if it is under the National Historic Register, your local historic board is the one that identifies that. We don't have one. At that point it would fall under the Building Department, who covers the permits, to decide whether if they want to push that envelope. Meaning they find out, is it under the National Historic Register? If it is, what are the materials you are using.

But knowing the Building Department, I would say today they are very well versed with those type of things to know what can be used. So at this point, that house specifically, it's whether the person that owns it wants to rehab it the way that it was existing before.

MR. GORDON: Because they tried.

MR. SOLORIO: Right now they are rehabbing with siding. This is the third time for them. That's one of the original Victorian houses in the city that were built. One of the original, like, first houses in the city that were built here. So whether they are in the register or not, it would be interesting to find out if it is.

MR. GORDON: It is.

MR. SOLORIO: Then they should technically be following the codes that are given by the National authority, even if there is not a historical board. When they come to the point of putting it under the National Register, that's saying that you are accepting the fact if you are going to rehab, you have to follow these certain rules. Whether they chose to follow it or not is a whole other conversation.

Normally, again, the local board would again identify that situation. Now if you can't do that, stop. So why I say this all is to say that preservation is very important, but it has complexity and it has kind of conflicts. A lot of times now they are working on compromise and what is the best way to salvage houses.

So, for example, in Tennessee, instead of fixing the whole building, what they did is they took the facade, gutted the rest of the building,

took out all the walls of the regular building that existed, kept the facade, and installed literally, like, the one wall, kept it installed until they rebuild again the rest of the building against the facade. So it was a creative way of salvaging a base, even though the rest of the building was in complete disrepair. It's kind of merging the new with the old.

And, again, the question that you have to ask yourself is, okay, so they did not fulfill the rest of it, of the building, historically. What is more important, the way that it looks to give it the same character or rehab the building? And so the question that you kind of ask yourself is the means and method of how you go about preserving history. Ultimately it's an important component and important component to the Comprehensive Plan. When we start the new Comprehensive Plan we'll identify one historical structure we are looking to preserve and what historical structures are gone.

One perfect example of this situation is the Fitzsimmons Building. At the time we were looking to rehab the Fitzsimmons Building. It's going to cost 3 to 4 million dollars to rehab versus if we just build new, the cost will be two million dollars. So two million dollars additional cost for salvage is pretty costly. When you make that decision to put things in the historical register, you also are understanding that it comes with that complexity.

Do you have any questions?

MS. AILES: We do put restrictions. We have restrictions on some structures. Like you can't put a modular home in those areas, that's to keep the character of the neighborhood.

MR. GOMEZ: Any other questions or comments? (None)

Thank you. Any comments from the public? (None)

Our next meeting will be Monday, February 2, 2026, at 4:30.

That concludes all items on the agenda for tonight.

I'd like to make a motion for adjournment.

MR. GORDON: Second.

MR. GOMEZ: All in favor?

(All signify aye.)
MR. GOMEZ: Motion carries.
Thank you. Meeting adjourned.

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Approval of the Meeting Minutes of Friday, January 16th, 2026

Approved and signed FEBRUARY 2, 2026

Valeriano Gomez, President

Lilia Ramos, Vice-President

Lydia Lopez, Secretary

Marino Solorio, Commissioner

Stacy Winfield, Commissioner

Jaylen Johnson, Commissioner

Grayling Gordon, Commissioner

Hashem Alhashem, Commissioner

Tracy Ailes, Recording Secretary

C E R T I F I C A T E

I, Peggy S. LaLonde, a competent and duly qualified court reporter, do hereby certify that I did report in machine shorthand the foregoing proceedings and that my shorthand notes so taken at said time and place were thereafter reduced to typewriting under my personal direction.

I further certify that the foregoing typewritten transcript constitutes minutes of the said proceedings taken at said time and place, so ordered to be transcribed.

Dated at Munster, Indiana, this 22nd day of January 2026.



Peggy S. LaLonde