

History of the Approvals of Grenada Court

Page 42: http://www.cityofwinterpark.org/Docs/Departments/NRHP_Nomination.pdf

Built in two phases and consisting of three buildings, the development of Grenada Court at 110-118 Park Avenue South initially unfolded smoothly. Completed in 1946, the first phase consisted of the design and construction of the two westernmost buildings fronting on Park Avenue South. Only nineteen feet wide each, the two-story buildings were divided by a narrow brick walkway and displayed clipped corners and wrought-iron balconies. The buildings contained retail entrances on Park Avenue, along the walkway, and at the rear clipped corners. Second-floor apartments were reached by separate entrances on Park Avenue and exterior staircases at the rear. But, the project encountered resistance during its final phase, which sought to develop a third building across the rear of the lot and its fifty foot width, but only thirty feet deep and set on the rear property line to make an interior courtyard. Winter Park's building inspector, E. Y. Harpole, a retired army officer, denied the permit request in early 1947 because its design features conflicted with the city's downtown zoning ordinance. Established in 1933 and modified in 1939, Winter Park's commercial zoning code required that courtyards be located at the rear of a property and called for the rear building line to be ten feet from the west side of Center Street, which was really little more than a narrow brick-paved alley that ran parallel to and east of Park Avenue. As designed by Rogers, the final phase of Grenada Court consisted of a building that set on the rear property line rather than conforming to the ten foot setback. The design also included an interior courtyard, rather than a rear courtyard, formed by the three buildings. To help maximize his client's investment, Rogers placed the building on the rear property line, which corresponded with abutting the street's right-of-way and five feet from the physical west line of Center Street. More residential in character than its earlier companions, the final building contemplated for Grenada Court contained a central pointed arch that provided access between the courtyard and Center Street (Minutes, Winter Park City Commission, 17 February, 11, 17 March 1947).

Harpole denied the permit for the building, citing incompatible design features associated with the courtyard and building rear setback. Greene and Rogers appealed to the city commission, requesting that the city amend its commercial zoning ordinance to allow the creative plan. But, at the February 1947 meeting, the city commission deferred Rogers and Greene's request, directing the planning department to prepare a new zoning ordinance to permit Greene's building. At the March 1947 city commission meeting, property owners and residents lined up to support and object to the change, a process that spilled over into a larger zoning fray associated with changing the building line along the length of Center Street. Rogers addressed concerns about parking and apartment tenants, reminding the commissioners and audience that "...a great number of people living in apartments in town do not own cars, therefore, would not require parking space." Mayor Coleman sided with proponents of the ten-foot setback while Greene, Rogers, and H. W. Barnum of the Winter Park Land Company were willing to settle for a five-foot setback. Opponents cited the need to provide parking spaces and unloading areas east of Park Avenue, as well as planning for future vehicle congestion. Proponents for change cited efficient use of expensive privately-held real estate along Park Avenue and in the downtown. Initiated by a simple request that began with a single property, the issue expanded into an entire street full of buildings. At its initial vote, the city commission split over the zoning change, two voting in favor and three against. Frustrated by the delay and expanded agenda and anxious to complete his development, Greene requested that the city commission approve his permit, using spot zoning for the approval. But, city attorney Waldo Plympton demurred, indicating that approval could not be legally granted. Over the following month, Greene applied sufficient political pressure upon the mayor and commissioners and in May 1947 the city commission approved a zoning change, albeit another split vote of three-to-two. But this time, the zoning change eliminated setbacks altogether on both sides of Center Street between Canton Avenue and New England Avenue. The development of Grenada Court ushered in a postwar era of fashionable buildings along Park Avenue, but also introduced zoning and building setbacks in the downtown as controversial issues at city commission meetings. At the May 1947 meeting, planning director Simons explained that setback lines "...are not necessary a part of zoning and may be regulated by a separate building line or setback line ordinance" (Minutes, City of Winter Park, 11 March, 7 April, 8 May 1947).