



**Project Name & Address:** 817-821 Williamson Street

**Application Type(s):** Certificate of Appropriateness for demolition, new construction, and a land combination in the Third Lake Ridge historic district

**Legistar File ID #** [59708](#)

**Prepared By:** Heather Bailey, Preservation Planner, Planning Division

**Date Prepared:** March 10, 2020

## Summary

**Project Applicant/Contact:** Brandon Cook, John Fontain Realty

**Requested Action:** The Applicant is requesting that the Landmarks Commission approve a Certificate of Appropriateness for the demolition of an existing commercial structure, construction of a new mixed-use structure, and a land combination.

## Background Information

**Parcel Location/Information:** The subject site is located in the Third Lake Ridge Local Historic District.

### Relevant State Statute Section:

**Wisc SS 62.23(7)(em)2m.** In the repair or replacement of a property that is designated as a historic landmark or included within a historic district or neighborhood conservation district under this paragraph, a city shall allow an owner to use materials that are similar in design, color, scale, architectural appearance, and other visual qualities.

### Relevant Ordinance Sections:

- 41.18 STANDARDS FOR GRANTING A CERTIFICATE OF APPROPRIATENESS.** A certificate of appropriateness shall be granted only if the proposed project complies with this chapter, including all of the following standards that apply.
- (1) New construction or exterior alteration. The Landmarks Commission shall approve a certificate of appropriateness for exterior alteration or construction only if:
    - (a) In the case of exterior alteration to a designated landmark, the proposed work would meet the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation.
    - (b) In the case of exterior alteration or construction of a structure on a landmark site, the proposed work would meet the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation.
    - (c) In the case of exterior alteration or construction on any property located in a historic district, the proposed exterior alteration or construction meets the adopted standards and guidelines for that district.
    - (d) In the case of any exterior alteration or construction for which a certificate of appropriateness is required, the proposed work will not frustrate the public interest expressed in this ordinance for protecting, promoting, conserving, and using the City’s historic resources.
  - (2) Demolition or Removal. In determining whether to approve a certificate of appropriateness for any demolition or removal of any landmark or structure within a historic district, the Landmarks

Commission shall consider all of the following, and may give decisive weight to any or all of the following:

- (a) Whether the structure is of such architectural or historic significance that its demolition or removal would be detrimental to the public interest and contrary to the general welfare of the people of the City and the State.
- (b) Whether a landmark's designation has been rescinded.
- (c) Whether the structure, although not itself a landmark structure, contributes to the distinctive architectural or historic character of the historic district as a whole and therefore should be preserved for the benefit of the people of the City and the State.
- (d) Whether demolition or removal of the subject property would be contrary to the policy and purpose of this ordinance and/or to the objectives of the historic preservation plan for the applicable historic district as duly adopted by the Common Council.
- (e) Whether the structure is of such old and unusual or uncommon design, method of construction, or material that it could not be reproduced or be reproduced only with great difficulty and/or expense.
- (f) Whether retention of the structure would promote the general welfare of the people of the City and the State by encouraging study of American history, architecture and design or by developing an understanding of American culture and heritage.
- (g) The condition of the property, provided that any deterioration of the property which is self-created or which is the result of a failure to maintain the property as required by this chapter cannot qualify as a basis for the issuance of a certificate of appropriateness for demolition or removal.
- (h) Whether any new structure proposed to be constructed or change in use proposed to be made is compatible with the historic resources of the historic district in which the subject property is located, or if outside a historic district, compatible with the mass and scale of buildings within two hundred (200) feet of the boundary of the landmark site.

Prior to approving a certificate of appropriateness for demolition, the Landmarks Commission may require the applicant to provide documentation of the structure. Documentation shall be in the form required by the Commission.

- (4) Land Divisions and Combinations. The commission shall approve a certificate of appropriateness for land divisions, combinations, and subdivision plats of landmark sites and properties in historic districts, unless it finds that the proposed lot sizes adversely impact the historic character or significance of a landmark, are incompatible with adjacent lot sizes, or fail to maintain the general lot size pattern of the historic district.

#### **41.23 THIRD LAKE RIDGE HISTORIC DISTRICT.**

- (6) Standards for New Structures in the Third Lake Ridge Historic District - Parcels Zoned for Mixed-Use and Commercial Use. Any new structures on parcels zoned for mixed-use and commercial use that are located within two hundred (200) feet of other historic resources shall be visually compatible with those historic resources in the following ways:
  - (a) Gross Volume.
  - (b) Height.
  - (c) The proportion and rhythm of solids to voids in the street facade(s).
  - (d) The materials used in the street facade(s).
  - (e) The design of the roof.
  - (f) The rhythm of buildings masses and spaces.

## Analysis and Conclusion

The applicant is requesting a Certificate of Appropriateness to demolish an existing commercial structure, resolve the underlying lot line for a land combination to create one lot, and construct a new three-story mixed-use structure. The existing building was constructed in 1966 for the Gilman Press and housed their shop. The single-story International-style brick building crosses the lot lines for 817 and 821 Williamson. The remainder of the existing lot contains a surface parking lot.

### Demolition

The narrative in the applicant's letter of interest details how they believe that they meet the criteria for demolition. The existing building is well outside of the period of significance for Third Lake Ridge. Both its architectural style and form are out of character with the historic resources in the district.

A discussion of the relevant ordinance sections follows:

#### **41.18 STANDARDS FOR GRANTING A CERTIFICATE OF APPROPRIATENESS.**

- (2) Demolition or Removal. In determining whether to approve a certificate of appropriateness for any demolition or removal of any landmark or structure within a historic district, the Landmarks Commission shall consider all of the following, and may give decisive weight to any or all of the following:
  - (a) While we know the name of the original business in the existing structure, it does not appear to be affiliated with the historic Gilman Press (located at 301 N Hamilton), and rather was an operation that reprinted historic materials. Review of building permit files did not reveal other significant details. This building does not appear to be architecturally or historically significant.
  - (b) N/A
  - (c) Rather than contributing to the architectural or historic character of the district, the existing building is a visual intrusion to the district.
  - (d) The demolition would not be contrary to the policy and purpose of this ordinance.
  - (e) The existing building is not of an unusual or uncommon design.
  - (f) Retaining the structure would not promote the general welfare of the city or state.
  - (g) The property is not deteriorated.
  - (h) The compatibility of the proposed new structure is discussed in a following section of this staff report.

Staff does not believe that the existing structure requires additional documentation prior to demolition.

### Land Combination

While there were originally two buildings on this parcel (one on each lot), those were torn down due to their deteriorated condition in 1966 and 1978. The current building was constructed so that it cross the lot line and the rest of the property functioned as a surface parking lot. The result is that the parcel has functioned as a single lot and the current proposal is more of a platting process to address an unresolved underlying lot line.

A discussion of the relevant ordinance sections follows:

#### **41.18 STANDARDS FOR GRANTING A CERTIFICATE OF APPROPRIATENESS.**

- (4) Land Divisions and Combinations. The proposed combination of the two underlying lots would not adversely impact the character of the Third Lake Ridge Historic District. There are a variety of lot sizes adjacent to the property, one of which (800 Jenifer) is of a comparable size. There is

a varied lot size pattern in this district, including several that are of a similar configuration and size on this block as the proposed combined lot.

### New Structure

While the proposed new structure is comparable to nonhistoric structures across the street, it differs from the historic resources within 200 feet in several ways. Overall, the character of the building is in keeping with appropriate infill to the historic district by using building materials found on historic resources within the vicinity and having a form that is in keeping with the historic commercial buildings in the vicinity while not creating a false sense of history by incorporating elements that make it clearly a new building. However, the gross volume, height, and proportion and rhythm of solids to voids in the street façade differs substantially from the historic resources within 200 feet.

A discussion of the relevant ordinance sections follows:

#### **41.23 THIRD LAKE RIDGE HISTORIC DISTRICT.**

- (6) Standards for New Structures in the Third Lake Ridge Historic District - Parcels Zoned for Mixed-Use and Commercial Use. Any new structures on parcels zoned for mixed-use and commercial use that are located within two hundred (200) feet of other historic resources shall be visually compatible with those historic resources in the following ways:
- (a) The application does not provide an analysis of the gross volume of the proposed building as compared to the gross volume of the historic resources within 200 feet. Most of the volume of the new building is nested into the back of the lot, which lessens the appearance of the volume on the street façade. The entrance to the garage in the back can read like a separate garage in the back of the lot, which is a feature of other historic resources in the vicinity. However, of the historic resources on that block face, the widest is 30' and the new structure is proposed at approximately 65' wide. Both the actual gross volume and the apparent volume of the building will be substantially larger than the historic resources within 200 feet.
  - (b) The submission provides information on the height of the building from the adjacent grade to the top of the roof, but not to the top of the parapet. It appears that this height is 43'. The submission also provides heights for adjacent historic resources, but those numbers are approximately 10' taller than city data for those structures. The historic resources on that street segment range from 23.4' to 32.5'. The taller buildings are gable roofs, which lessens the appearance of their overall height. Some of those historic resources are located further back on the lot, which locates the structure at a grade much higher than the street level, which would put the overall height of those resources at approximately the same level as the proposed new structure. As a flat roofed building that is over 10' taller than historic resources in the vicinity, that is sited 2' off the front property line, this building will appear to be much taller than the historic resources in the vicinity.
  - (c) The application speaks to porches being a feature on other historic resources in the vicinity. Of the historic resources that are of a similar style to this building, none of them have balconies on the front. The pattern of solids to voids on the historic resources in the vicinity show a regular pattern of windows on the upper stories, with a variety of configurations at the street level. There is precedent for storefront windows and a symmetrical configuration at 831 Williamson and to a lesser extent at 802, 805, and 811 Williamson. The proposals inclusion of large voids in the center of the street façade for balconies on the second and third floors of the new building is out of character with the similar historic resources in the vicinity.
  - (d) The use of brick and cast stone on the street façade is in keeping with the historic resources in the vicinity. If the balconies remain on the upper floors of the street façade,

there is not a precedent for a mix of masonry and clapboard on street facades on historic resources within 200’.

- (e) The flat roof design with a simple parapet on the street façade is a form found on historic resources within 200’.
- (f) The other buildings that were originally designed to be commercial buildings are all located up against the front property line. They tend to have some space on the sides of the building to allow access to the rear of the principal structure, and then feature garages at the back of the property. While the current proposal is for one building, its configuration will read like a traditional commercial building occupying most of the front of the property, and a garage accessed from the side.

## **Recommendation**

Staff believes that the standards for granting a Certificate of Appropriateness are not met at this time and recommends that the Landmarks Commission provide detailed feedback to the applicant and refer the item to a future meeting.