

PLANNING DIVISION STAFF REPORT

March 10, 2025

PREPARED FOR THE LANDMARKS COMMISSION



Project Name & Address: 2450 Atwood Avenue

Application Type(s): Certificate of Appropriateness for alterations

Legistar File ID # [86668](#)

Prepared By: Heather Bailey, Preservation Planner, Planning Division

Date Prepared: March 6, 2025

Summary

Project Applicant/Contact: Father Michael Radowicz, St. Bernard Parish

Requested Action: The Applicant is requesting that the Landmarks Commission approve a Certificate of Appropriateness to make alterations to a designated landmark

Background Information

Parcel Location/Information: The subject property is a designated landmark, St. Bernard's Catholic Church

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.

Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation

1. A property will be used as it was historically or be given a new use that requires minimal change to its distinctive materials, features, spaces and spatial relationships.
2. The historic character of a property will be retained and preserved. The removal of distinctive materials or alteration of features, spaces and spatial relationships that characterize a property will be avoided.
3. Each property will be recognized as a physical record of its time, place and use. Changes that create a false sense of historical development, such as adding conjectural features or elements from other historic properties, will not be undertaken.
4. Changes to a property that have acquired historic significance in their own right will be retained and preserved.

5. Distinctive materials, features, finishes, and construction techniques or examples of craftsmanship that characterize a property will be preserved.
6. Deteriorated historic features will be repaired rather than replaced. Where the severity of deterioration requires replacement of a distinctive feature, the new feature will match the old in design, color, texture and, where possible, materials. Replacement of missing features will be substantiated by documentary and physical evidence.
7. Chemical or physical treatments, if appropriate, will be undertaken using the gentlest means possible. Treatments that cause damage to historic materials will not be used.
8. Archeological resources will be protected and preserved in place. If such resources must be disturbed, mitigation measures will be undertaken.
9. New additions, exterior alterations, or related new construction will not destroy historic materials, features, and spatial relationships that characterize the property. The new work will be differentiated from the old and will be compatible with the historic materials, features, size, scale and proportion, and massing to protect the integrity of the property and its environment.
10. New additions and adjacent or related new construction will be undertaken in such a manner that, if removed in the future, the essential form and integrity of the historic property and its environment would be unimpaired.

Analysis and Conclusion

The proposed project is to construct an addition to the church, which would contain a crypt, in the area that is currently a courtyard between the church structure and the rectory. The church was constructed in 1926 and designed by JJ Flad in the Late Gothic Revival style and designated a landmark in 1981. The church is undergoing remodeling as part of its transition to serving as the cathedral for Madison. Last year the Landmarks Commission approved a reconfiguration of the parking lot and the construction of a porte cochere.

The crypt is proposed as a single-story gabled structure, attached to the church, but separated from the historic structure by a smaller addition that serves as an architectural hyphen between this addition and larger building. The courtyard space where this addition would be constructed was bounded by the church on the east, an enclosed walkway on the south, the rectory on the west, and an ornamental concrete block privacy wall on the north. The ornamental concrete block privacy wall dated to the period of construction of the rectory. The current proposal is to replace those decorative blocks with a decorative metal fence. While the ornamental fencing appears in the renderings, there are no specifications.

The addition appears to be in keeping with the architectural character of the historic building, and is proposing to use materials to match those approved for the porte cochere and on the rest of the building as it is being rehabilitated. The addition uses a similar architectural vocabulary, but in a much simplified form. While the Landmarks Commission should not review the artistic content of the proposed stained glass windows (which is a First Amendment issue), the inclusion of stained glass for the windows on the addition is in keeping with the types of windows on the church. Staff would like more details on the window openings, including information on the profiles for the stone tracery as rendered.

A discussion of the relevant ordinance sections follows:

Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation

1. The property is being adaptively reused to increase its capacity to serve as the cathedral for Madison. The work will make minimal changes to the distinctive materials, features, spaces and spatial relationships of the historic property.

2. The addition will not remove any distinctive materials or features. The current courtyard space between the rectory and the church was developed in 1968, which is after the period of significance for the landmark (1926). There will still be a remaining courtyard area that separates the Midcentury-Modern rectory from the Gothic Revival church.
3. Details about the proposed decorative fencing on the north side of the courtyard will help to confirm if this fencing would create a false sense of historical development. While decorative as rendered, the new fencing could still read as new, but more in keeping with the architectural style of the church than the previous Midcentury-Modern architectural vocabulary that was meant to connect with the rectory's character.
4. The landmark nomination specifies that the nomination is only for the church building and that the other elements of the site are outside of the period and areas of significance. Therefore, the courtyard and its fence have no acquired significance in their own right.
5. No distinctive materials or finishes to the property will be impacted.
6. N/A
7. N/A
8. N/A
9. The crypt addition into the nonhistoric courtyard will not destroy historic materials, features, and spatial relationships that characterize the property. The simple ornamentation and use of building materials found elsewhere on the structure will allow it to read as a product of its time, but compatible with the historic structure. Specifications for the proposed new fencing are needed in order to confirm that it will read as a product of its time.
10. The new addition and alteration to the fence appear that they will be undertaken in such a manner that, if removed in the future, the essential form and integrity of the historic property and its environment would be unimpaired.

Recommendation

Staff believes that the standards for granting a Certificate of Appropriateness are met and recommends the Landmarks Commission approve the project with the following conditions:

1. Specifications for the new fencing to be approved by staff
2. Window details to be approved by staff