

# LANDMARKS COMMISSION MEETING REPORT

May 19, 2025



**Agenda Item #:** 4

**Project Title:** 124 E Gorham Street - Land Combination and New Construction in the Mansion Hill Historic District (District 2)

**Legistar File ID #:** 87103

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

**Members:** Present: Richard Arnesen, Ald. John Duncan, Edna Ely-Ledesma, Molly Harris, Katie Kaliszewski, and Jacob Morrison  
Excused: Maurice Taylor

## Summary

*Sandra Ward, registering in opposition and wishing to speak*  
*John Rolling, registering in opposition and wishing to speak*  
*Kurt Stege, registering in opposition and wishing to speak*  
*Bruce Bosben, registering in support and wishing to speak*  
*Joel Koeppen, registering in support and wishing to speak*  
*Bob Klebba, registering in opposition and wishing to speak*  
*Jean Parks, registering in opposition and not wishing to speak*

Kaliszewski opened the public hearing.

Sandra Ward, John Rolling, Kurt Stege, and Bob Klebba spoke in opposition.

Bruce Bosben, applicant, and Joel Koeppen, representing the applicant, spoke in support.

Kaliszewski closed the public hearing.

Bailey provided background information on the project, noting staff comments regarding building and fire code, zoning code, and Landmarks Commission standards that were included in the staff report. She said that there is room for a viable project on this site where they could see infill in Mansion Hill; however, the project as proposed does not meet the standards.

Morrison said they appreciated the work the development team has done to move in the right direction and recognized there were a lot of variables on this tricky site. He said it is important for the applicant to make sure the proposal meets building, fire, and zoning code requirements before it is reviewed by the Landmarks Commission. He said the changes made to lower the building by a floor and hide the top floor under the roof were improvements. He said that removing another floor would make the height approvable, but he was on the fence about it being approvable as proposed. He said that it was more about how the height is articulated and the articulation of the front of the building. As others noted, the building entrance looks like a basement entrance in a backyard; there is no sensitivity to the neighboring context about what a building should look like in the historic district. This is critically important because if the applicants can articulate the front and visible sides of the building, that will get closer to an approval. Currently the building entrance looks like an afterthought. Overall, the direction has improved and Morrison agreed with staff's assessment that they should be able to get to an approvable proposal in the future.

Ely-Ledesma agreed with Morrison. She appreciated the level of detail included since the last time they reviewed the project, as well as the materiality applied in the renderings. She said that she had no problem with the scale and would

be comfortable with it as proposed, but they will need to see a revised proposal that meets building, fire, and zoning code, which will have implications. She said that rearticulating the street façade and ground level will help ground it in the historic context. She added that the connection between the carriage house and the new construction will need to be resolved.

Arnesen agreed with Morrison. He said the building is too massive and needs to be reduced in magnitude a fair amount. He would like to see some infill development here, but on this scale, it is not approvable.

Harris agreed with Arnesen on the scaling and spatial relationships between the buildings. She said that the massing is too large.

Kaliszewski agreed with other commissioners' comments. She was conflicted on the size of the building, both agreeing with those who found it too large but also with Ely-Ledesma's thought that there was potential for it to work. She said that it still feels very solid and massive. However, she appreciated the applicant listening to previous comments and adding bay windows to give it dimensionality. She hoped there was a way to keep that dimensionality while working through the zoning and setback requirements because it gives the building more character, which is what it needs. She agreed with concerns about the porch coming down over the entrance; she thought it looked cheap and didn't echo anything on the historic building. She said that additional detail is needed on the porch to make it work and suggested they not have the porch columns come down around the entrance because it makes it look like a rear balcony that has been put on a historic building as a fire exit. She hoped that with some additional tweaks, they could find something that would work for this site.

Arnesen agreed with comments about the balcony. He said that if they took the step to remove the balconies, it would provide flexibility in design so they can meet the other suggestions that have been brought up. They could create an entrance that is more in keeping with the historic character of the building and the one next door. The balconies are a good portion of what is wrong with how the building is designed and the way it works in front.

Morrison recommended the applicants look in the neighborhood to find a precedent of the entrance of a building. It doesn't need to be replicated, but if the design is based on something local, it can go a long way to making the building look better.

Harris said that while she felt okay about the land combination, she would like to keep all requests for this project together. If they refer the request for new construction, they should refer the land combination as well. She suggested the applicants provide evidence for suggesting the land combination in their submittal materials.

## Action

**A motion was made by Arnesen, seconded by Harris, to Refer the item to a future meeting. The motion passed by voice vote/other.**