



Agenda Item #: 10

Project Title: 433 W Gilman Street - Consideration of a demolition permit to demolish a commercial building (District 2)

Legistar File ID #: 91236

Prepared By: Heather Bailey, Preservation Planner

Members: Present: Richard Arnesen, Ald. John Duncan, Edna Ely-Ledesma, Molly Harris, Katie Kaliszewski, Jacob Morrison, and Maurice Taylor
Excused: None

Summary

John Myefski, registering neither in support nor in opposition and wishing to speak

Josh Dawson, registering in support and wishing to speak

John Rolling, registering in opposition and wishing to speak

John Myefski presented on the redevelopment proposed at 411-433 W Gilman Street, specifically regarding the recreation of the 433 W Gilman Street façade. They said that once an existing structure is altered, they are not permitted to go over four stories, per the City's zoning code. Therefore they were not able to keep the existing façade and they represented that the zoning code required them to demolish the building and bring it down to four stories. On the existing structure, they noted the half story that is below grade, which they represented was a challenge to make accessible. They are proposing to rebuild the façade as a four-story building with a slightly higher first floor and no exposed basement level. They pointed out a proposed change to move from white windows to black. They said they will salvage what they can from the existing building and recreate aspects that are not salvageable, including recasting any stone elements that cannot be reused. They believe the central element of the existing building with small windows was previously altered, so they are proposing single, larger windows in that area to be in keeping with other windows on the building.

Bailey provided information on the building, noting that the 1998 Downtown Preservation Plan and 2012 Downtown Plan identified this building as a potential landmark because of its Prairie-style commercial architecture. It is a good example of that type and a rare form of building. She pointed out a loss of integrity with the bricked-in windows on the front. She said that the applicant's approach for addressing the building's historic value is to investigate architectural salvage in order to reinterpret what is there and tie in that history. She gave the example of The Hub redevelopment where the Landmarks Commission concluded there was historic value but that it was addressed in the way the new construction interpreted the architecture of the historic building. In that case, they could only salvage the historic cast stone pieces for the new building.

John Rolling said that if the Plan Commission approves the demolition, they recommended they require documentation of the building through photographs and measured drawings of the exterior, in addition to the reuse of salvaged materials.

Kaliszewski said that when mitigating the loss of a structure, it is not enough to say you will make the new building kind of like what it was before, and additional mitigation is usually needed. She encouraged the commission to consider whether that was enough. The applicants might find that nothing is salvageable, and then what does that look like? Is it even mitigation? She said that preservationists typically hate façadectomies, but asked if there was potential to keep the façade in place and build behind it. She thought that would be more successful than fake rebuilding.

Arnesen agreed. He said the rendering was fine, and the recreation of the building doesn't look bad, but if it is supposed to address the loss of history, he did not find that compelling. He pointed out that if nothing is salvageable, they are just going to build a new building that looks like an old building. He said that the existing building seems like it could be listed in the National Register of Historic Places or as a local landmark. Kaliszewski reiterated staff's comments that the building was identified as a potential landmark. Arnesen emphasized that there are two properties in this proposed redevelopment that are potential landmarks and/or National Register properties that could be rehabilitated using preservation tax credits.

Morrison largely agreed with Arnesen. He said that the building proposed by the applicant is not the same as the existing historic building, and it creates a false sense of history. The details and construction types are different. If the building gets demolished, the applicant should not rely on absolution from the Landmarks Commission saying that it is a recreation of the original to make it okay. If it is demolished, it would be for other reasons, to make way for something better, which is not up to the Landmarks Commission. He didn't want the commission's comments on the applicant's presentation to be used as a reason to justify the demolition. Kaliszewski and Harris agreed.

Myefski said that their intentions were sincere, but they were trapped by the City's zoning code; which they stated cannot save the façade and it will have to come down.

Arnesen said that the issue of recreating the façade is not the main point here, it is the loss of the buildings. The buildings at 415 W Gilman and 433 W Gilman Street are both reusable and could be renovated and put back to use.

Kaliszewski said the commission's job is to comment on whether this is mitigation. She said that this would not be accepted by our State Historic Preservation Office as the only mitigation because it is not mitigating the loss of the historic building, it is just making it nice. It's not that the commission doesn't appreciate the applicant's time and what the proposal looks like, but the commission does not have the ability to comment on the proposed architecture because it is not in a local historic district.

Duncan asked why the building had not been landmarked yet if it was identified in the 2012 Downtown Plan as a potential landmark. Bailey said that the City identifies properties of historic interest in each area plan, then it is up to the property owner or members of the public to move forward with the designations. Kaliszewski added that completing the landmark nomination process requires time, effort, and funding to pay for the research and writing. City staff does not have the capacity to take this on, so it falls to the public. Harris said that this part of the city is often occupied by renters and students who are transient. Part of the Landmarks Commission's obligation is to represent all the constituents within the city, even those who are not able to put together a landmark nomination. Arnesen said that was a great point and added that a property is typically listed in the National Register by an owner who wants historic tax credits.

Kaliszewski said there seems to be consensus on a finding and how successful the proposed mitigation is. She asked if there was any other mitigation they'd like to see other than documenting the building. She provided an example from her job where if they were demolishing a building, they would have to agree to list another similar resource. She asked if it was possible to have the developer give money to landmark something else in the city as part of the mitigation.

Action

A motion was made by Morrison, seconded by Duncan, to recommend a finding of (a) historic value for its architectural significance and potential eligibility for listing on the National Register of Historic Places or as a local landmark. If the demolition is approved, the Landmarks Commission recommends that the Plan Commission require documentation of the exterior of the building through photographs and measured drawings. The motion passed by voice vote/other.