



Project Name & Address: 134-150 S Blair Street

Application Type(s): Certificate of Appropriateness for a variance, land combination, and new construction

Legistar File ID # [79566](#)

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Summary

Project Applicant/Contact: Brian Johnson, JCAP Real Estate

Requested Action: The Applicant is requesting that the Landmarks Commission approve a Certificate of Appropriateness for an Alternative Design Variance, land combination, and new construction of a principal structure

Background Information

Parcel Location/Information: The subject property is in the First Settlement historic district.

Relevant Ordinance Sections:

41.19 VARIANCES.

- (6) Alternative Design Variance. The Landmarks Commission may grant a variance allowing, in a new or altered structure, elements that are otherwise prohibited under Sec. 41.18 if all of the following apply:
 - (a) The elements will enhance the quality of the design.
 - (b) The design complies with all other applicable standards under Sec. 41.18.
 - (c) The design does not allow material deviations from historic district standards and guidelines that would undermine the character or purpose of the historic district.
 - (d) The design will have a beneficial effect on the historic character of the area within two hundred (200) feet of the subject property.

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.
- (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.

41.27 STANDARDS FOR NEW STRUCTURES.

(1) General

(a) Primary Structures

The design for a new structure in a historic district shall be visually compatible with other historic resources within two hundred (200) feet in the following ways:

1. Building Placement. When determining visual compatibility for building placement, the Landmarks Commission shall consider factors such as lot coverage, setbacks, building orientation, and historic relationships between the building and site.
2. Street Setback. When determining visual compatibility for street setbacks, the Landmarks Commission shall consider factors such as the average setback of historic resources on the same block face within two hundred (200) feet, and the setback of adjacent structures.
3. Visual Size. When determining visual compatibility for visual size, the Landmarks Commission shall consider factors such as massing, building height in feet and stories, the gross area of the front elevation (i.e., all walls facing the street), street presence, and the dominant proportion of width to height in the façade.
4. Building Form. When determining visual compatibility for building form, the Landmarks Commission shall consider factors such as building type and use, roof shape, symmetry or asymmetry, and its dominant vertical or horizontal expression.
5. Architectural Expression. When determining visual compatibility for architectural expression, the Landmarks Commission shall consider factors such as the building's modulation, articulation, building planes, proportion of building elements, and rhythm of solids to voids created by openings in the façade.

(2) Building Site

(a) General

1. New parking areas, access ramps, trash or mechanical equipment enclosures shall be designed so that they are as unobtrusive as possible, retain the historic relationship between the buildings and the building and the landscape, and are visually compatible with other historic resources in the district.

(3) Exterior Walls

(a) General

1. Materials used for new structures shall be similar in design, scale and architectural appearance to materials that date to the period of significance on historic resources within two hundred (200) feet, but differentiated enough so that it is not confused as a historic building.

(4) Roofs

(a) Form

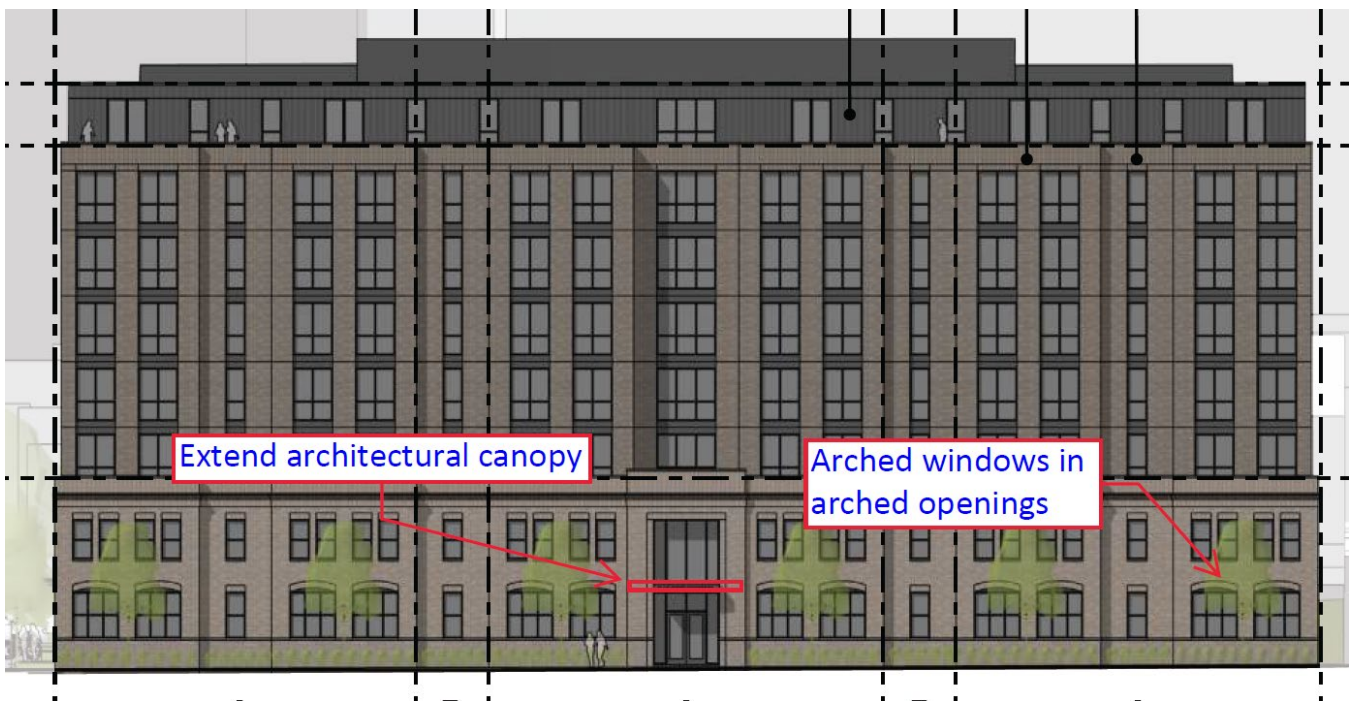
1. Roof form and pitch shall be similar to the form and pitch of the roofs on historic resources within two hundred (200) feet.

- (b) Materials
 - 2. Any roofing material shall be permitted on flat or slightly pitched roofs not visible from the developed public right-of-way.
- (e) Rooftop Features
 - 1. Rooftop decks or terraces and green roofs or other roof landscaping, railings, or furnishings shall be installed so that they are inconspicuous and minimally visible on the site and from the street.
- (5) Windows and Doors
 - (a) General
 - 1. Door and window styles should both match the style of the new structure and be compatible with those on historic resources within two hundred (200) feet.
 - (b) Windows and Storm Windows
 - 1. Multi-light windows shall have true divided lights or simulated divided lights with muntin grids on the exterior and interior with spacer bars between the panes of glass.
 - (c) Entrance Doors and Storm Doors
 - 1. Sliding glass doors shall not be installed on the ground floor elevation along any street frontage.
 - (f) Garage Doors
 - 1. Garage doors shall be similar in design, scale, architectural appearance, and other visual qualities prevalent within the historic district.
- (6) Entrances, Porches, Balconies and Decks
 - (a) Porch Elements
 - 1. Entrances and porches shall be of a size and configuration consistent with the historic resources in the district.
 - 2. The primary entrance for the structure shall be located on the front elevation, or, structures on a corner lot may have a corner entrance.
 - (b) Balconies and Decks
 - 1. Projecting, partially projecting/inset, and inset balconies are prohibited on elevations visible from the developed public right-of-way, unless there is precedent on the historic resources in the district.
- (7) Building Systems
 - (a) Mechanical Systems
 - 1. Mechanical equipment shall be screened if it is visible from the developed public right-of-way.
 - 2. Static vents, electric vents, wind turbines, and attic fans visible from the developed public right-of-way are prohibited.
 - 3. Grilles, vents, equipment, and meters shall be finished or painted to match adjacent building materials.
 - (c) Lighting and Electrical Systems
 - 1. Decorative light fixtures shall be compatible in style and location with the overall design of the building.
 - 2. Security light fixtures or security cameras shall be installed so that they are as unobtrusive as possible.
 - 3. Exterior mounted conduit on elevations visible from the developed public right-of-way is prohibited.
 - 4. Roof appurtenances such as antennas, satellite dishes, or communications equipment should be installed so that they are minimally visible from the developed public right-of-way and do not damage or obscure historic features.”

Analysis and Conclusion

At the April 15, 2024, Landmarks Commission meeting, the commission approved the Certificate of Appropriateness for the land combination, but referred consideration of the variance and new construction to a future meeting with guidance to the applicant on how to meet the standards for new construction within the parameters of the variance request. The new design makes strong references to the architectural vocabulary of the buildings within 200 feet that are in the Third Lake Ridge historic district, including wall-cladding materials, window configurations, and cornice style for the base level of the building. There is now a 10-foot step back from the two-story base to the four-story middle portion of the building, and then another 10-foot step back to the top story. Masonry is the wall cladding for all of the visible areas on the front façade with metal serving as a decorative element in the spandrel panels of the middle section of the building and the architectural canopy for the front entrance. Masonry is also the predominant material for the sides of the building visible from the developed public right-of-way with the standing-seam metal panels serving as the wall cladding on the inset areas, making them minimally visible.

There is no information on the locations of utilities on the building and staff will need specifications on the windows, doors, railings, and the fencing on the rear of the property. For the windows on the building, the first floor has arched window openings, but it appears that there are rectangular windows with metal filling in at the head. These need to be arched windows that fit the opening. The architectural canopy on the main entrance should span the central bay that contains that entrance rather than just being located within the window/door opening in order to better reference the style of this feature on the historic depot across the street.



A discussion of relevant standards follows:

41.19 VARIANCES.

- (6) Alternative Design Variance. The Landmarks Commission may grant a variance allowing, in a new or altered structure, elements that are otherwise prohibited under Sec. 41.18 if all of the following apply:
 - (a) The concept of referencing the historic resources within 200 feet from the Third Lake Ridge Historic District will enhance the quality of the design. The design team tried

designs that referenced the smaller residential styles that are within 200 feet in the First Settlement District and they did not work for this lot which had such a different development history. The current concept is a design that will allow this infill building to serve as a bridge between the First Settlement and the Third Lake Ridge historic districts.

- (b) The proposed design now appears to meet the standards in MGO 41.18 because the new construction appears to meet the historic district standards.
- (c) This is an unusual situation in that a lot at the edge of the First Settlement Historic District has a different lot development pattern and history from the other residential properties within 200 feet of that district. The historic properties within 200 feet of the subject property in the adjacent Third Lake Ridge Historic District provide a reference where the character and purpose of the historic district standards could be met and an infill structure that could be visually compatible with historic resources within 200 feet if taking into context the properties that have a similar commercial development history. This is also the largest legal lot of record within 200 feet, so the visual size of any building within this property is going to be larger than those on other properties. The variance request asks for relief from the visual size, form, and setback standards. However, they make a solid case for how they are matching the setbacks and historic form of the historic resources in Third Lake Ridge within 200 feet. The variance request for the visual size is related to the large size of the existing surface parking lot, which has operated as a single lot of record for an extended period of time. The new structure is designed in a way to mitigate the much larger visual size with the articulation along the more historic appearing base course, and the step backs between the middle and upper levels of the building. The result is a building design that fits the lot and still architecturally ties to the First Settlement and Third Lake Ridge historic districts.
- (d) The variance request takes into account all of the historic resources within 200 feet, beyond the boundaries of the First Settlement Historic District, which would result in the beneficial effect of an infill building that is in keeping with the architectural character of historic resources within 200 feet of the subject property, which is how pedestrians will be experiencing this space from the developed public right-of-way.

41.27 STANDARDS FOR NEW STRUCTURES.

(1) General

(a) Primary Structures

The design for a new structure in a historic district shall be visually compatible with other historic resources within two hundred (200) feet in the following ways:

[with the variance request, the historic resources within 200 feet include those in the Third Lake Ridge Historic District]

1. Building Placement. The lot coverage, setbacks and building orientation are visually compatible with the historic resources within 200 feet.
2. Street Setback. The proposed building is visually compatible with the street setbacks of historic resources within 200 feet, particularly the commercial properties.
3. Visual Size. This will be a substantially larger building than the historic resources within 200 feet, but does mimic the volume of building that is typical of the historic commercial properties within 200 feet, which fill the volume of their lots. The historic passenger and freight depots across the street are hyphenated to the larger MG&E building, which rises behind them. The proposed design with a two-story podium level, with the 10 foot step back mimics the pedestrian experience of the historic commercial buildings in the vicinity. The articulation on the street level of

the base of the building provides the sense of there being separate façades that more closely approximate the width of the street façades of historic resources.

4. Building Form. The flat roof and symmetrical configuration is in keeping with the commercial forms of the historic resources within 200 feet.
5. Architectural Expression. The architectural expression largely aligns with the architectural vocabulary of the historic commercial resources within 200 feet. To better align with that aesthetic, the windows within the arched openings should be arched to fit the opening and the architectural canopy should span the center bay/entry surround rather than just being located within the door/window opening.

(2) Building Site

(a) General

1. All parking will be interior structure parking, but the access ramp is located on the back (southwest) of the lot on the end of the south façade furthest from the street and nested behind a projecting bay to further help to limit its visibility from the developed public right-of-way, making it as unobtrusive as possible. The rest of the hardscaped site leading to the drive aisle appears to be compatible with the design of the building.

(3) Exterior Walls

(a) General

1. The materials on the proposed building exterior are a mix of masonry and metal panels. The front façade has masonry in the areas visible from the developed public right-of-way and the sides have standing seam metal panels in the recessed areas that would be minimally visible from the developed public right-of-way, which will allow this building to blend with the historic resources in the vicinity. The more contemporary appearance is on the rear side of the building. The style of masonry on the mid-level of the building has a more contemporary character and will help this building read as a product of its time.

(4) Roofs

(a) Form

1. The flat roof form is found on historic resources within two hundred feet.

(b) Materials

2. Any roofing material shall be permitted on flat or slightly pitched roofs not visible from the developed public right-of-way.

(e) Rooftop Features

1. The front of the building includes rooftop decks that are nested behind the parapets of the level below for each step back. There is also a larger rooftop deck that is located on the rear of the building, and that will not be visible from the street. All are implemented in a way that they are minimally visible from the developed public-right-of-way.

(5) Windows and Doors

(a) General

1. The proposed doors shown in the renderings appear to match the styles on historic resources within 200 feet. The arched window openings on the front of the building need to contain arched windows. There are no specifications provided for any of the windows and doors.

(b) Windows and Storm Windows

1. There are no specifications for the proposed windows included in the submittal. Other than the rectangular windows in the arched openings, the form of the proposed windows appear to meet the standards of the approval. Specifications will be required to ensure that the materials meet the standards. The larger window

openings on the middle portion of the building are a more contemporary interpretation of the rhythm of solids and voids and further helps to differentiate that the building is a product of its time, while still keeping a similar pattern to the historic.

(c) Entrance Doors and Storm Doors

1. There are sliding glass doors on the rear of the structure, but none are visible from the developed public right-of-way. There are no specifications included for any of the doors.

(f) Garage Doors

1. There are no specifications included for the proposed garage door, but the design included in the rendering will allow that space to read as a void.

(6) Entrances, Porches, Balconies and Decks

(a) Porch Elements

1. The proposed entrances to the building are in keeping with the character of the entrances of historic resources in the vicinity, including an architectural canopy as found on the Beaux Arts Depot across the street. To better speak to that architectural reference, the architectural canopy should span the central bay of the front entrance rather than just being located within the glazing area. The side entrance along the living street has an architectural canopy located within the recessed bay, which helps to specify that this is a secondary entrance while still reading as a means to enter the building.
2. The primary entrance is on the front of the building.

(b) Balconies and Decks

1. The projecting balconies are located on elevations that are not visible from the developed public right-of-way. There are no specifications provided for the style of railings.

(7) Building Systems

(a) Mechanical Systems

1. Mechanical equipment shall be screened if it is visible from the developed public right-of-way. There is currently no information on the mechanical equipment that will serve this building.
2. The vents shown on the building are not on the front of the building and where they are located on the sides of the structure, they are at the edge that is furthest from the front and are therefore minimally, if at all visible from the developed public right-of-way.
3. Grilles, vents, equipment, and meters shall be finished or painted to match adjacent building materials.

(c) Lighting and Electrical Systems

1. The proposed decorative light fixtures appear to be compatible in style and location with the overall design of the building.
2. Security light fixtures or security cameras shall be installed so that they are as unobtrusive as possible.
3. Exterior mounted conduit on elevations visible from the developed public right-of-way is prohibited.
4. Roof appurtenances such as antennas, satellite dishes, or communications equipment should be installed so that they are minimally visible from the developed public right-of-way and do not damage or obscure historic features.

Recommendation

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

1. Redesign the front entry to include an architectural canopy that spans the central bay of the building
2. Final door, window, railing, and fencing specifications to be administratively approved by staff. Arched windows need to be in the arched openings on the front façade
3. Information on mechanicals and utility locations on the building to be administratively approved by staff