

Ad Hoc Landmarks Ordinance Review Committee
Meeting of December 18, 2017

The Summary Meeting Outcomes & Findings for the August 14th and September 14th meetings, and the summary of the neighborhood ordinance meetings substantially cover my concerns, but I have several additional comments.

1. There has been discussion of making historic district boundaries match National Register boundaries. While this may make sense for some districts, the Third Lake Ridge district is much larger than the National Register district.
2. Williamson Street is primarily zoned as a commercial street. It should have a separate set of standards.
3. The current standards focus on the street façades. It seems that the “street façade” is just the side facing the street (since MGO 41.24(5)(f) distinguishes between alterations visible from the street and alterations to the street façade). Although, perhaps, some leeway should be granted for non-street facades, too much variation could result in a district resembling a Hollywood stage set. Also, one participant at the recent meeting questioned why the standards apply to her home since she is not sited on a street. Perhaps this should read “public-right-of-way” rather than “street.”
4. Hardscaping elements should be addressed, such as fencing, retaining walls, decks, accessibility ramps, and sheds.
5. Non-contributing buildings should not be exempt from the standards. At the Third Lake Ridge meeting, more than one person thought the ordinance should not apply to them because their homes were built in the 1930’s (and the period of significance is 1850-1929). Perhaps the period of significance should be relevant for the historic designation, but not be part of the ordinance.
6. The Elk’s sale of the small parcel was discussed as an example of how lot divisions should match the pattern of the neighborhood. This same level of attention should be given to lot combinations. For example, the Elks combined 3¼ parcels into one lot, resulting in a lot which is not compatible with other lot sizes.
7. And then there is the issue of height, particularly along Williamson. A discussion item was that zoning allows for taller buildings than the historic ordinance. For the most part, in the Third Lake Ridge district, the zoning ordinance and neighborhood plan are within ½ story. However, there are two main problems: (1) additional height is easily obtained from the Plan Commission through conditional use approval; and, (2) “visually compatible” in terms of height (and gross volume or massing) is ambiguous. An example is 702-706 Williamson, next to the Olds Building and the Harvester Building. 702-706 Williamson was approved at about 37 feet higher than the Harvester (almost double the height of the Harvester), and about 17 feet higher than the Olds (or about 32% higher). And that was before a rooftop patio was added (which counts as an additional story under the Zoning Code, see Legistar 31440).

This problem could be addressed by:

- Using a quantitative standard rather than a qualitative standard. For example, new construction cannot be more than 10% higher than the tallest historic resource in the visually related area.
- Making Landmarks Commission approval mandatory for Plan Commission conditional use approval rather than merely advisory. If the City is committed to

- maintaining historic resources, then Landmarks Commission approval, appealable to the Council, would demonstrate that commitment. Alternatively, the zoning code could be modified to exclude height as a conditional use in historic districts (though this would not address any future increases in height that the zoning code may be changed to allow).
8. The Draft Future Land Use Map is rather frightening in some of its potential implications. Areas of Williamson are identified as “Medium Residential” which is 2-5 stories and 20-90 units/acre. Five stories is generally incompatible with the historic character of Williamson. Other areas are currently Community Mixed Use and will continue to be CMU. However, in the future CMU may allow for larger buildings on Williamson: “[r]elatively high-intensity mix of residential, retail, office, institutional, and civic uses, generally located adjacent to a major transportation corridor (2-6 stories; up to 130 du/acre).” May 2017, *Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)*.

Respectfully Submitted,
Linda Lehnertz