

Landmarks Commission
October 17, 2011
Proposed Demolition of 1112 Spaight Street

I am against demolition of 1112 Spaight Street.

Sec 33.19(5)(c)3.f., MGO provides:

“Whether the building or structure is in such a deteriorated condition that it is not structurally or economically feasible to preserve or restore it, provided that any hardship or difficulty claimed by the owner which is self-created or which is the result of any failure to maintain the property in good repair cannot qualify as a basis for the issuance of a Certificate of Appropriateness.”

An owner cannot demolish a property just because the owner allows the property to deteriorate. Similarly, an owner cannot be allowed to sell a deteriorated property contingent upon demolition. If this is allowed, the intent of this ordinance section would be gutted: an owner could let a property deteriorate, knowing that it could be sold contingent upon demolition.

The current owner is a member of the Olson family. Members of the Olson family have owned this property since 1974, the last time the property sold for a price via a warranty deed. If the Olsons were requesting a Certificate of Appropriateness, the above ordinance would, most likely, prohibit its issuance.

Several other properties that the Landmarks Commission has permitted to be demolished and rebuilt include 731 Williamson, 14 S Franklin, and 517 S Baldwin (partial demolition). In all of these cases the person(s) requesting the Certificate owned the property. They were not owners who had allowed property to deteriorate and who were indirectly benefiting from that self-created hardship through sale of a property contingent upon demolition.

In one case where the Commission denied a Certificate, 1015 Hillside, the owners claimed the home was in poor condition and they wanted to demolish the home before selling the lot for a single-family development. The home sold a month later for \$475,000.

There seem to be conflicting reports whether this house can be reasonably renovated. In talking with the prospective owners, my understanding of what made renovation unreasonable was their needs – not the overall condition of the house. Many houses in this neighborhood need work, and a few cannot be saved. It does not seem that this house cannot be saved.

The prospective owners are nice people and the house they propose to build looks good. I can understand why Orton Park neighbors support this proposal. But just because a house does not match neighboring homes in terms of quality does not mean it should be torn down. This modest home is also one of the few on Orton Park that is close to the median price in Madison.

Sincerely,
Linda Lehnertz