

PLANNING DIVISION STAFF REPORT

July 7, 2025

PREPARED FOR THE LANDMARKS COMMISSION



Project Name & Address: 656 Williamson Street

Application Type(s): Certificate of Approval for new construction

Legistar File ID # [88693](#)

Prepared By: Heather Bailey, Preservation Planner, Planning Division

Date Prepared: July 1, 2025

Summary

Project Applicant/Contact: Kevin Burow, Knothe & Bruce Architects

Requested Action: The Applicant is requesting that the Landmarks Commission approve a Certificate of Approval to construct a new mixed-use structure.

Background Information

Parcel Location/Information: The subject property is located in the Third Lake Ridge local historic district.

Relevant Ordinance Sections:

41.18 STANDARDS FOR GRANTING A CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

A Certificate of Approval 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 Approval 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 Approval 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.

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.
- (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.
 - (e) Awnings.
 1. Awnings will be of a configuration and form consistent with the awnings in the district.
 2. Awning materials shall have the appearance of the materials found on historic resources with awnings.
 - (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. Balconies that are not on elevations facing the developed public right-of-way shall be minimally visible when there is not precedent on 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.
 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.

Analysis and Conclusion

The proposed project to redevelop the subject property received approvals from the Landmarks Commission in 2023 to demolish the existing structure, complete a land combination, and construct a new building. The applicants are returning to the Landmarks Commission with a new design for the infill structure.

The original design had a significant stepback after the third floor in order to comply with the design recommendations from the 2004 Williamson Street Design Guidelines. While those design guidelines are a factor that Plan Commission must take into consideration, the historic district standards are what the Landmarks Commission must use for its review.

This part of the historic district features larger historic resources. The application materials cite the historic structures in the vicinity, which are of a comparable height and massing. The design presents a mostly masonry building with cast stone detailing in reference to the architectural vocabulary of the nearby historic structures. The design largely replicates the original approval, but is now a five-story building without the stepback, which is compatible with the design of the larger historic resources within 200 feet. A staff review of the design standards finds that this new design also meets the historic district standards for new construction. The Certificates of Approval for the demolition and the land combination remain in effect.

A discussion of the relevant ordinance sections follows:

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. The proposed new building will largely fill the property, which is in line with the historic commercial resources in the vicinity.
 2. Street Setback. The building comes up to the front property lines, which is in keeping with the commercial historic resources.
 3. Visual Size. The application materials detail the large historic commercial buildings in the vicinity.
 4. Building Form. The largely rectangular building with a flat roof is the predominant form for historic commercial buildings within 200 feet.

5. Architectural Expression. The application materials specify the design references for the architectural detailing of this structure, which will both read as a new structure but uses a similar architectural vocabulary to the historic resources in the vicinity.
- (3) Exterior Walls.
 - (a) General.
 1. The masonry appears to replicate the appearance of the historic masonry structures in the vicinity.
- (4) Roofs.
 - (a) Form.
 1. Flat roofs are common for the larger historic commercial and industrial buildings within 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. There is a rooftop deck located atop the corner entrance. It is nested down behind a parapet wall, making it inconspicuous and minimally visible on the site and from the street.
- (5) Windows and Doors.
 - (a) General.
 1. The door and window styles appear to 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. The included window specifications show that the multi-light windows are true-divided lights.
 - (c) Entrance Doors and Storm Doors.
 1. While there are sliding glass doors on the rear of the building, they are located in inset bays to access balcony entrances, which meets this standard.
 - (e) Awnings.
 1. There are metal architectural canopies proposed above the entrances. This is consistent with entrance features in the district.
 2. Metal is a common entrance feature in the district.
 - (f) Garage Doors.
 1. The garage doors on this structure will allow those openings to read as voids.
- (6) Entrances, Porches, Balconies and Decks.
 - (a) Porch Elements.
 1. The entrances are of a size and configuration consistent with the historic resources in the district.
 2. There are two entrances for the building: one on the front and one on the corner. The separate entrances will serve the residential and commercial uses in the building. Both locations are common for commercial structures in the historic district.
 - (b) Balconies and Decks.
 1. The balconies on this building are located on the back of the structure, significantly stepped back from the street frontage in order to make them minimally visible from the developed public right-of-way.
- (7) Building Systems.
 - (a) Mechanical Systems.
 1. The rooftop mechanicals are set back from the front edge of the roof to limit their visibility and the utility meters are located on the interior lot line, on the back corner of the building.
 3. Grilles, vents, equipment, and meters shall be finished or painted to match adjacent building materials.
 - (c) Lighting and Electrical Systems.

1. The 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.

Recommendation

Staff believes that the standards for granting a Certificate of Approval are met and recommends the Landmarks Commission approve the project as proposed.