

Landmarks Commission
Meeting of October 5, 2020
Agenda #6, Legistar 58738, Demolition of 619 and 621 N. Lake Street

MGO 28.185(7)(a)4. requires the Plan Commission to consider any report submitted by the Landmarks Commission, or preservation planner, regarding a proposed demolition. The Landmarks Commission may make any sort of report it wishes – it is not limited by the Zoning Code or by Chapter 41 to merely finding that the proposed demolition is of a building that has historic value.

The Commission could take any on the following actions.

1. Find that the buildings have historic value based on their status as a contributing structure in a National Register Historic District.
 - This may not be strong enough, particularly considering that the Langdon Street Historic District has been, and seems to still be, under consideration as a local historic district.
2. Make a stronger finding, such as it did in 2103 (Attachment A) when the Commission (1) “strongly opposed” demolition of contributing structures in the Langdon Street Historic District and (2) listed reasons for its opposition (contrary to the Downtown Plan, historic value as a contributing building, buildings appear to be structurally sound).

For example, a Landmarks Commission report for the proposed demolition of 619 and 621 N. Lake Street could read:

- The Landmarks Commission strongly opposes the demolition of the buildings at 619 and 621 N. Lake Street: they have historic value as a contributing buildings in the Langdon Street National Register Historic District; they are integral to the development of the historic Langdon neighborhood, they are valuable as part of the larger collection of buildings in context, and their loss would diminish the character of the Langdon neighborhood and erode the historic context; the Langdon Neighborhood Character Study lists these buildings as continuing to be contributing properties; demolition goes against the recommendations in the Downtown Plan which encourage preservation and rehabilitation of contributing historic buildings, and which encourage infill on non-contributing sites; demolition contravenes the expressed fundamental purpose in the Historic Preservation Plan of preserving undesignated areas with unique architectural, urban and spatial characteristics that enhance the character of the built environment, such as properties and districts listed on the National Register of Historic Places.
3. Make a full report, such as it did in 2012 (Attachment B) when the Commission submitted a 9-page report to the Plan Commission detailing the Commission’s reasons for objecting to demolition of three historic resources in the Langdon Street Historic District.
 - Based on the intended application date of October 7, the proposed demolition will not come before the Plan Commission until November 23rd (or later, if UDC review is needed). Thus, there would be time to prepare a full report, similar to that for Henry/Iota demolitions, and review at one of the November Landmarks Commission meetings.

I hope the Commission takes an action stronger than merely informing the Plan Commission that the buildings have historic value as contributing structures in the Langdon Street Historic District.

Existing Plans and Study

In August 2013, around the time that three District historic resources were up for demolition, and after three District historic resources were approved for demolition in 2012, several students requested that a local historic district be created. The Landmarks Commission approved beginning the process of creating a Langdon Historic District in 2013 (Legistar 31625). In 2017, funding was approved for a character study of the Langdon neighborhood and for a review of the national and local historic district boundaries, and to develop "implementation actions if authorized." The study, the *Langdon Neighborhood Character Study*, 2018 survey report, is dated November 30, 2018. Under the "General Recommendations" section, the report states:

"This study confirms that the essential historic character that initially warranted designation of the Langdon Street and Mansion Hill districts remains. Preservation of this character is beneficial to the neighborhood in that it:

1. Preserves essential City of Madison historic character that is unique from any other neighborhood
2. Provides a very necessary mixed-scale district that transitions taller and larger university and State Street buildings to the residential neighborhoods beyond, such as Mansion Hill
3. Provides a walkable residential-scale streetscape
4. Provides access and vistas to Lake Mendota
5. Conveys the deep history of university growth and its long-term community impact"

The *Langdon Neighborhood Character Study* lists both 619 and 621 as contributing properties and both were mapped to remain contributing properties.

Earlier this year, the *Historic Preservation Plan* was adopted as a supplement to the Comprehensive Plan. The adopting resolution also directed staff "to implement the recommendations contained in the Historic Preservation Plan, including submitting necessary staffing and other expenditure requests in annual Capital and Operating Budgets."

The *Historic Preservation Plan* introduction finds:

"Three fundamental functions of historic preservation include: ... 3) preserving undesignated areas with unique architectural, urban and spatial characteristics that enhance the character of the built environment, such as properties and districts listed on the National Register of Historic Places that do not possess the protections provided by local designation."

One of the *Historic Preservation Plan's* priority strategies is: "Consider properties with existing National Register of Historic Places designation and those identified through future survey work for local designation."

The *Downtown Plan*, adopted July 17, 2012 as a supplement to the Comprehensive Plan, also deserves mention:

“This plan recommends that a local historic district be considered to support the National Register designation and clarify the desire to preserve the historic character. Wholesale redevelopment is not the goal, but a limited amount of new development to replace non-contributing, blighted housing will benefit the area.”

Downtown Plan Objective 4.9:

The Langdon neighborhood should build on its history as a traditional student neighborhood, including a concentration of fraternities and sororities. It should continue to accommodate a limited amount of higher-density residential redevelopment on selected sites while maintaining the area’s historic and architectural integrity. Preserving and enhancing Langdon Street as the spine of the district will be key. The pedestrian walkway between the lake and Langdon Street should be formalized to enhance its aesthetics and safety and to make stronger connections to the lakefront path.

Recommendations to implement Objective 4.9:

Recommendation 94: Encourage preservation and rehabilitation of contributing historic buildings.

Recommendation 95: Encourage relatively higher density infill and redevelopment that is compatible with the historic context in scale and design on non-landmark locations and sites that are not identified as contributing to the National Register Historic District.

Attachment C contains details on the buildings from the National Register nomination form, and also contains a few quotes from the nomination form that describes the district.

Respectfully Submitted,
Linda Lehnertz

ATTACHMENT A

627 North Lake Street, September 18, 2013, demolish to construct 7-story building

Staff findings:

The Langdon neighborhood has a distinctive character that is based on the development pattern of the area and the architectural trends of the time. The Langdon neighborhood was originally part of the Mansion Hill neighborhood and was home to prominent businessmen and University faculty. As the University population grew, the Langdon area became a popular neighborhood for Greek letter societies and housing for students. These Greek letter societies established chapter houses in existing stately structures or constructed new high-style period revival buildings. With significant growth in University enrollment, the neighborhood transitioned from a prestigious neighborhood of professionals to a student enclave that is known for its buildings of high-style period revival architectural styles.

The preservation file for 627 North Lake Street notes that Law and Law designed the fraternity house in 1925 as the Sigma Alpha Epsilon fraternity house and it was remodeled by Livermore & Samuelson in the 1950s. The property is located in the Langdon Street National Register Historic District.

Plans and programs including the Langdon Street National Register Historic District, the Downtown Plan and the 2006 Comprehensive Plan have been put in place to protect the context and character of the Langdon neighborhood.

The Langdon Street National Historic District was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1986. The nomination form is linked to Legistar.

The recently adopted Downtown Plan features the Langdon area in Key 4: Maintaining Strong Neighborhoods and Districts and in Key 7: Build on Historic Resources. The historic preservation related objectives, recommendations, and discussion points that relate to this proposal have not been provided for this Demolition Report, but include pages 56, 57, 92 and 93 of the draft plan. Excerpts of the 2006 Comprehensive Plan that relate to historic preservation issues have not been provided in this Demolition Report, but include Objectives 34, 40, 41, 42, 44, and 51.

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Landmarks Commission motion:

A motion was made by Slattery, seconded by Gehrig, to advise the Plan Commission that the Landmarks Commission strongly opposes the demolition of the building at 627 North Lake Street due to its historic value as a contributing building in Langdon Street National Register Historic District and as designed by master architecture firm – Law and Law, that this proposal goes against the recommendations for the area in the Downtown Plan, and that the buildings appear to be structurally sound; and therefore, the Landmarks Commission strongly opposes their demolition and the accelerated pace of redevelopment within the historic district. The motion passed by voice vote/other

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Plan Commission:

An application was not filed.

622 and 632 Howard Place, August 26, 2013, demolish to construct 5-story building

Staff Findings:

The Langdon neighborhood has a distinctive character that is based on the development pattern of the area and the architectural trends of the time. The Langdon neighborhood was originally part of the Mansion Hill neighborhood and was home to prominent businessmen and University faculty. As the University population grew, the Langdon area became a popular neighborhood for Greek letter societies and housing for students. These Greek letter societies established chapter houses in existing stately structures or constructed new high-style period revival buildings. With significant growth in University enrollment, the neighborhood transitioned from a prestigious neighborhood of professionals to a student enclave that is known for its buildings of high-style period revival architectural styles.

The building at 622 Howard Place was constructed in 1909 for owner Mary Harnden in the bungalow style. The building at 632 Howard Place was constructed in 1910 for Harry Curtis as a multi-unit rental house in the Tudor Revival style as designed by Claude and Starck. 622 and 632 Howard Place are contributing structures in the Langdon Street National Register Historic District.

Plans and programs including the Langdon Street National Register Historic District, the Downtown Plan and the 2006 Comprehensive Plan have been put in place to protect the context and character of the Langdon neighborhood.

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The recently adopted Downtown Plan features the Langdon area in Key 4: Maintaining Strong Neighborhoods and Districts and in Key 7: Build on Historic Resources. The historic preservation related objectives, recommendations, and discussion points that relate to this proposal have not been provided for this Demolition Report, but include pages 56, 57, 92 and 93 of the draft plan. Excerpts of the 2006 Comprehensive Plan that relate to historic preservation issues have not been provided in this Demolition Report, but include Objectives 34, 40, 41, 42, 44, and 51.

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Landmarks Commission motion:

A motion was made by Rosenblum, seconded by Slattery, to recommend to the Plan Commission that the buildings at 622 and 632 Howard Place are both contributing structures in the Langdon Street National Register Historic Districts, that one was designed by a master architectural firm, that one is the last bungalow in the area, that this proposal goes against the recommendations for the area in the Downtown Plan, and that the buildings appear to be structurally sound; and therefore, the Landmarks Commission strongly opposes their demolition and the accelerated pace of redevelopment within the historic district. The motion passed by voice vote/other.

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Plan Commission:

The staff report stated: "The Plan Commission may elect to refer the proposal back to the Landmarks Commission for a formal recommendation, but their intent seems clear in the substance of this motion." The application was placed on file.

ATTACHMENT B

619-625 Henry and 140-145 Iota Court, November 26, 2012, demolish 3 contributing buildings to construct a 7-story housing development

Note: since the proposed structure was proposed to be located adjacent to a landmark, MGO 28.144 - then numbered 28.04(3)(n) – was also considered.

Staff findings:

Staff prepared a 9-page report that primarily discussed the demolition of 3 contributing buildings. The report provided numerous details, including the National Register District, the Downtown Plan, and the Comprehensive Plan, and explained how the demolition was in direct conflict with numerous historic preservation related recommendations. The report suggested reviewing demolition under historic ordinance standards, since the "Downtown Plan recommends that the Langdon neighborhood be considered for local historic district designation and the Landmarks Commission has indicated an interest in following this recommendation."

The report's concluding point was: "Because they are integral to the development of the historic Langdon neighborhood, the three buildings proposed for demolition are most valuable as part of the larger collection of buildings in context. Without these buildings, the character of the Langdon neighborhood is diminished and the historic context is eroded. The buildings proposed for demolition have individual historic value based on historic development pattern, architectural style, and being the work of master architects."

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Landmarks Commission motion:

August 13, 2012: A motion was made by Gehrig, seconded by Rummel, to recommend to the Plan Commission that the Landmarks Commission strongly opposes the proposed demolition of three contributing structures in the National Register historic district for many reasons, but most importantly due to the inconsistency with the newly adopted Downtown Plan recommendations 77, 78 and 168 as well as the concern regarding the long term implications of the health of the National Register district as a whole since every demolition request is followed by another. The motion was approved by a voice vote/other.

November 26, 2012:

A motion was made by Rosenblum, seconded by McLean, to provide the staff report of November 26, 2012 in its entirety to the Plan Commission and Urban Design Commission as the advisory opinion of the Landmarks Commission. The motion passed by voice vote/other

Plan Commission:

The staff report referenced the November 26 report several times and noted: "Although national register districts are not locally regulated, preserving the buildings identified as contributing buildings is a goal of the [Downtown] Plan, which conversely grants that non-contributing buildings should have more flexibility in their potential for redevelopment" The Plan Commission recommended re-referral for several reasons, including: "incorporate the new building into the character of the surrounding neighborhood and preserve the feeling of the existing building "landscape" in the Langdon Street National Register Historic District." The

subsequent staff report said: "However, Planning staff believes that its fundamental concerns with the proposed building are unresolved despite the changes the project team proposes. The demolition of the 3 existing buildings, which are contributing structures within the Langdon Street National Register Historic District, and the scale and mass of the new apartment building continue to be inconsistent with key recommendations of the Downtown Plan. Therefore, staff cannot recommend that the revised planned unit development and demolition permit meet the applicable standards and criteria for approval." The Plan Commission ultimately approved the project by a vote of 5-3.

ATTACHMENT C

Nomination form for the Langdon Street Historic District in the National Register of Historic Places

Property descriptions:

- 619 N. Lake St. Alpha Sigma Phi fraternity house c. 1909, Tudor/Elizabethan Revival.
This house also illustrates the half-timber interpretation of the Tudor revival style. It has a brick first story and porch, a half-timber second and third story with steeply-pitched gables, and dormers projecting from the hipped roof.

On page 6 of the historical background section: Finally, there are several houses in this district that show Tudor revival style details on a basically Queen Anne form. Probably the best example is the fraternity house at 621 N. Lake St. which has stucco walls, steeply-pitched gables with wide eaves, exposed rafters and a bargeboard.

- 621 N. Lake St. Kappa Sigma fraternity house 1909, Queen Anne.
This house also suggests the Tudor revival style with stucco walls, steeply-pitched gables and wide eaves, and exposed rafters. But its form and details such as a bay and Palladian window place it in the Queen Anne category. The massive stone porch almost overpowers the facade, but gives the house a "castle-like" effect in keeping with the emphasis on Tudor revival details.

Building Inventory

"As a group, the most outstanding architectural elements in the Langdon Street historic district are the post-1900 period revival buildings which were primarily constructed for social Greek letter societies at the University of Wisconsin."

Statement of significance

"The Langdon Street historic district is significant for its architecture because it includes a large number of outstanding architecturally high-style period revival buildings, and because it also includes a number of good examples of other architectural styles, including second empire, Queen Anne, prairie, and bungalow. The district is significant for history because its buildings represent several historical periods of Madison's history, including the early development years when the district was part of the most prestigious residential neighborhood in the city; the years of growth of the University of Wisconsin, when the district was home to prominent businessmen, prominent university faculty, and a growing number of students, particularly chapters of social Greek letter societies; and finally, the early years of the twentieth century, when the neighborhood was, in fact, taken over by the social Greek letter societies, who built most of the outstanding period revival buildings in the district. Specific areas of significance include: architecture; association with significant persons in commerce, education, and law; and social history, development of social Greek letter societies at the University of Wisconsin."

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