

City of Madison, Wisconsin

REPORT OF: LANDMARKS COMMISSION

PRESENTED: July 6, 2015

TITLE: 906-910 Williamson Street – Third Lake Ridge Historic District – Demolition of existing building and construction of a new 4-story apartment building. 6<sup>th</sup> Ald. Dist. Contact: Randy Bruce

REFERRED:

REREFERRED:

REPORTED BACK:

AUTHOR: Amy Scanlon, Secretary

ADOPTED:

POF:

DATED: July 6, 2015

ID NUMBER: 37499

Members present were: Stu Levitan, Chair; Vice Chair; Christina Slattery, Jason Fowler, David McLean, and Marsha Rummel.

**SUMMARY – REQUEST FOR RECONSIDERATION REQUEST:**

Michael Christopher, representing Louis Fortis, and registering in support. Christopher explained that he believes the Commission should vote to reconsider the demolition request because the request meets standards b and c of the demolition standards. He explained that the request to demolish meets the standards in the purpose and intent section of the ordinance. Christopher explained that this proposed project will stabilize and improve property values and strengthen the economy of the city.

Lou Fortis, registering in support and wishing to speak. Fortis explained that the Commission should reconsider because this project is one that the neighborhood association supports and what the neighborhood wants.

Lawrence Hands, registering in support and available to answer questions, but choosing to speak on this item. Hands explained that the Commission should reconsider because the replacement of the gravel parking lot and obsolete single family residence with this multi unit mixed use development is better for the neighborhood and does not diminish the characteristics of the historic district. The increased tax base will benefit the schools and general services.

Anne Walker, registering in opposition and wishing to speak. Walker explained that the Commission should not reconsider their decision on the demolition. She explained that the development team worked with the neighborhood and the existing residence could use some maintenance work, but the historic fabric of the historic district is important to maintain. She also explained that this large project is not appropriate for this site as Williamson Street is a very narrow street and a large building very close to the lot line will affect the character and make the street feel even narrower.

Lynn Lee, representing the Marquette Neighborhood Association (MNA), registering in support and wishing to speak. Lee explained that the MNA voted in support of the project and would support the Commission’s decision to reconsider their previous decision on the COA.

Karen Hendrick-Hands, registering in support and wishing to speak.

Hands explained that she supports the reconsideration so the merits of the proposed project can be expanded. She submitted written comments for the record.

Jesse Pycha-Host, representing the MNA, registering in support and wishing to speak. Pycha-Host explained that he supports reconsideration and submitted written comments for the record.

Rummel explained that the developer appealed the previous decision of the Commission to the Common Council and she contemplated reconsideration to try to get closer to a compatible design that might be acceptable to the Commission.

Levitan explained the reconsideration process.

### **ACTION FOR RECONSIDERATION REQUEST:**

**A motion was made by Rummel, seconded by Slattery to reconsider the Certificate of Appropriateness for demolition of 906 Williamson. Motion passed by voice vote.**

### **SUMMARY:**

Lynn Lee, Marquette Neighborhood Association (MNA), registering in support and wishing to speak. Lee explained that the project team went through a considerable neighborhood process and they made concessions which were included in the design. The neighborhood also requested that the project team provide money toward the relocation of the existing building. The MNA believes the proposed project is a good fit of the neighborhood.

Levitan asked if part of the neighborhood support was based on the condition of the existing property. Lee explained that the support may have been partially based on the condition of the building. He explained that he walked through the building and that one of the only remaining original architectural elements was the stair railing. Lee explained that the character of the block had previously been affected and the removal of this house would not harm the character.

Levitan asked if the demolition of this building was validating demolition by neglect. Lee explained that MNA did not find that this was demolition by neglect. He explained that it was economically infeasible to make repairs and purchase the property at this location.

Rummel asked Lee if the scale of the building relates to the visually related area. Lee explained that the MNA talked about this and determined that if it works at Baldwin, it could work here.

Michael Christopher, representing Louis Fortis, registering in support and wishing to speak. Christopher explained that he would prefer that the Commission deal with this issue at this meeting instead of referring it. He explained that context must be considered and that the intent of the historic district is to live work and play in the neighborhood. The existing building is structurally unsound. He explained that the commission should consider what the existing building contributes to the historic district. Christopher explained that the neighborhood plan should be given a lot of weight in this case. He quoted Gehrig's comments from the April meeting when she said that redevelopment seemed appropriate on the north side of the 900 block of Williamson Street. Christopher explained that demolition standards b and c and f and g and the purpose and intent of the Commission should be reviewed. He explained that demolition is not inconsistent with any of the policy statements. He explained that to bring the building up to code would be economically infeasible.

John Coleman, registering in opposition. Not present to provide comments.

Peter Wolff, registering in opposition and wishing to speak. Wolff explained that the costs to rehabilitate the building are unknown and that the current owner could make the repairs or reduce the price due to the demolition by neglect that has taken place. The developer's own professionals describe the poor condition of the building. He explained that the example of the downspouts draining directly toward the foundation, Wolff explained that the commission made the right decision at the previous meeting and the appeal should be discussed at the Common Council.

David Lohrentz, registering in support and wishing to speak. Lohrentz explained that he supports the proposed project and that it is unfortunate that landlords do not take care of their properties, but that is irrelevant at this point. Given the situation and the condition, this is the best option for the site.

Anne Walker, registering in opposition and wishing to speak. Walker explained that she is speaking as an individual. She explained that she appreciates the historic district and the commercial area along Williamson. She explained that she does not support the demolition of the existing building or the proposed project. Walker explained that the existing building could be charming and if it had been well maintained it would be seen as an integral part of the district. She explained that Williamson is a narrow street and the proposed building is tall and right against the sidewalk which will affect the character. She is concerned about the size of the proposed building and the lack of green space. Walker explained that currently the green space is at the street level and is appreciated by the public and that the proposed roof top green space will have a different feeling.

Janine Glaeser, registering in support and available to answer questions. Glaeser showed images of buildings in the historic district and explained that the district preservation plan states, "The Third Lake Ridge is a study in diversity and agglomeration of many themes, ethnic settlements, development, urbanization, civic improvement; it's architecture reflects this diversity of development and change..." She explained that the existing building is not contributing and that the area of consideration extends through the entire district.

Levitan asked why Glaeser would call a 110-year old building non-contributing to the historic district. Glaeser explained that the building has lost integrity due to later additions and modifications.

Randy Bruce, representing Louis, Fortis, registering in support and wishing to speak. Bruce explained that the neighborhood plan designated certain sites for development and this is one of those sites. He explained that the proposed development is compatible with the visually related area. Bruce explained that the scale and massing and rhythm of the proposed building is consistent with the context. He explained that step backs and articulation and materials are being used to make the building compatible with the district.

Rummel asked Bruce if other designs were developed for discussion. Bruce showed the proposed design and discussed the window pattern, the simplification of materials, and the curved roof form. Rummel explained that she also requested a reduction in volume and lot coverage. Bruce explained that the building size could not be reduced due to the affordable housing that was trying to be achieved in the project. He showed a revised design that aligned the windows, simplified the materials, and removed the curved roof form.

Peter Bock, registering neither in support nor opposition, and wishing to speak. Bock explained that the existing building is an outlier and an orphan. He explained that there is another house on the block and that demolition of this building will not affect the neighborhood. Bock explained that he is speaking to a landmarks commission and that Merriam Webster defines a landmark as a structure of unusual

historic and unusually aesthetic interest. He explained that the existing building is not a landmark as it does not meet the definition.

Levitan explained that this building is not a designated landmark and that it is in a historic district.

Rummel explained that there are residences across the street in the visually related area and that there are many houses in the district like the existing building. She asked Bock if he was suggesting that all of the residences should be demolished. Bock explained that a mixed use building seems appropriate for this lot.

Scott Freeman, registering in support and wishing to speak. Freeman explained that he is speaking as an individual. He explained that this particular building does not need to be retained for the sake of the historic district. He appreciates that the project team worked with the neighborhood to improve the project. He explained that this project will continue to reduce urban sprawl and allow more people to enjoy the neighborhood.

Steve Gallo, registering in support.

Kassandra Neff, registering in support and wishing to speak. Neff explained that the variety of the neighborhood attracted her to the area. She explained that the existing building is not what brings people to the area.

Karen Kendrick-Hands, registering in support and wishing to speak. Kendrick-Hands explained that she appreciates the stamina and commitment of the commissioners. She explained that she also appreciates the character of the historic district, but that character is missing from this block of Williamson Street. She explained that the condition of the house has continued to decline since she moved to the neighborhood in 2009. She explained that the neighborhood is in transition and that the proposed project is consistent with that transition. She explained that the project will increase the tax base and may create jobs and affordable housing. She explained that the Commission should embrace a project like this.

Louis Fortis, registering in support and wishing to speak. Fortis explained that he lives in the neighborhood and that while this building has been neglected; the structural issues are a concern. He explained that the building has lost its integrity. Fortis explained that Central Park a few blocks away will compensate for the loss of green space. He explained that he worked with MNA and was guided by the neighborhood plan recommendation to redevelop the site. He explained that he met with staff and Alder to discuss revisions to the design.

Rummel explained that she struggles with mass and volume of the proposed building and how that relates to the pro forma and the visually related area. She asked Fortis how the price of the property affects what he can do with the mass and volume. Fortis explained that he cannot provide an analysis of how the size would affect the project financials.

Levitan asked Fortis how affordable units would be provided. Fortis explained that one unit will be 80% rate and one will be 60% rate based on the City's new affordable housing program. Rummel explained that the affordable housing program was not a formal plan yet.

Levitan explained that he was not familiar with the addition to this building and that if the addition was constructed in 1980's, it would have been before the Landmarks Commission for a COA.

Slattery explained that local historic districts do not differentiate between contributing and non-contributing buildings, but as an architectural historian who does this professionally, the National Register would consider

the existing building a contributing building because overall mass and scale are intact and it has relevant integrity.

Levitan explained the ordinance language and the charge of the Commission.

Rummel explained that the neighborhood needs to learn about historic districts and that each building in the district is part of the fabric of the district. She explained that having a diverse and lively neighborhood is important, but those issues and the creation of new buildings are not the obligation of the Landmarks Commission. The commission must preserve and perpetuate and honor the historic fabric. She explained that lack of maintenance brings issues where people see an ugly building when really the building may need new siding or some paint, but not demolition. People live in the area so the existing building is not isolated. The new structure must be compatible with the visually related area and the standards of the district. She explained that the scale of the building is a concern. Rummel explained that the structural issues are a concern, but most buildings of this age would have the need for upgrades and repairs and it is the responsibility of the property owner to make those repairs. Rummel explained that the building could be a single family residence, a multi-family residence, a restaurant, and other options.

Levitan asked Rummel if the building contributes to the distinctive architectural character of the district. Rummel explained that the building does contribute to the architectural character.

McLean explained that he agreed with the things that Rummel said. He explained that there are many options for the property and this would be an interesting place for a garden to table restaurant. He explained that the loss of green space will harm the character of the historic district. McLean explained that the East Washington corridor is an appropriate place to develop residential density, but the purpose of the historic district is to preserve the historic fabric and that the neighborhood is strong and eclectic because it is a historic district. When you take away the historic fabric, the neighborhood will suffer. McLean explained that if the neighborhood is in transition, then the historic district standards are not doing what they are supposed to be doing since the historic district is supposed to remain historic. The tax base can be grown outside the historic district. The district was created for preservation not for redevelopment.

Levitan explained that the ordinance enumerates stabilizing the economy and increasing the tax base as the purpose. The rehabilitation of this property is not economically feasible. He explained that he could make an argument for why this project should be denied, but historic districts are not museums. He explained that there are numerous points in the purpose and intent that support redevelopment.

McLean explained that the 1980s addition approval and the climate of preservation and the historic district was different than the current view.

Slattery explained that the purpose and intent should be read differently – that you would enhance the economy of the city by preserving the building not by allowing demolition for development. She explained that the broader issues are not the purview or the responsibility of the Landmarks Commission. Slattery explained that the condition issues have become the reason for demolition when that wasn't the reason for demolition during the previous discussion.

There was general discussion about the revised designs. Staff explained that the alignment of the windows and the simplified materials are improvements. Staff explained that the curved roof element should be more integral to the overall design composition.

Rummel explained that the proposed lot coverage is not compatible with the visually related area. She also explained that there is a hierarchy of buildings in historic districts – some that were constructed during the period of significance and others that were not – and those that were not would have an easier time being demolished.

Levitan explained that staff would recommend approval of the redesigned building. Slattery explained that staff also recommended denial of the COA for demolition. Slattery asked staff if any of the testimony or discussion had changed staff's recommendation. Staff explained that it had not.

Levitan explained his concerns about the reputation of the Landmarks Commission and the perception by others that historic districts are museums. He explained that politically he would rather have a local Langdon historic district than retain 906 Williamson.

Slattery explained that the reputation of the Landmarks Commission is not a standard in the ordinance. The appeal to Council would allow for all of the broader issues to be taken into consideration. The politics of the situation are outside of the ordinance.

There was general discussion about the issue. Fowler explained that the demolition should be based on an approved design of the new building.

**ACTION:**

**A motion was made by Rummel, seconded by Slattery, to approve the COA for demolition contingent on the approval of COA for new development. The motion was approved 3:2 (Ayes: Fowler, Rummel. Noes: McLean, Slattery. Levitan voted Aye to break the tie).**

**A motion was made by Rummel, seconded by McLean, to refer the discussion of the new development to a future meeting. The motion was approved 4:0 (Levitan does not vote).**