

AGENDA # 6

City of Madison, Wisconsin

REPORT OF: LANDMARKS COMMISSION

PRESENTED: 10/5/20

TITLE: Buildings Proposed for Demolition - 2020

REFERRED:

REREFERRED:

REPORTED BACK:

AUTHOR: Heather Bailey, Preservation Planner

ADOPTED:

POF:

DATED: 10/8/20

ID NUMBER: 58738

Members present were: Anna Andrzejewski, Richard Arnesen, Katie Kaliszewski, David McLean, and Maurice Taylor. Excused were Betty Banks and Arvina Martin.

SUMMARY:

Jay Sekhon, registering in support and wishing to speak
Kurt Stege, registering in opposition and wishing to speak
Bob Klebba, registering in opposition and wishing to speak
Josh Wilcox, registering in support and available to answer questions

Bailey discussed the buildings at 619 N Lake Street and 621 N Lake Street. She said that the Langdon Street National Register Historic District was listed in 1986, and the 2018 Langdon Neighborhood Character Study concluded that the neighborhood still retains its historic character and would also qualify as a potential local historic district. In the study, both of these properties were found to have a level of historic integrity and historic and architectural significance to still be considered contributing to the National Register Historic District and a potential local historic district. She said that staff recommends that the commission find that the buildings at 619 N Lake Street and 621 N Lake Street have historic value based on architectural and historic significance, and their status as contributing structures in the Langdon Street National Register Historic District.

Jay Sekhon, a representative of current property owner Alpha Chi Sigma, explained that the coed chemical fraternity has owned and occupied the buildings for decades, and the space is a valuable part of members' environment for meetings and social events. However, they now consider the buildings unsafe to occupy and see their only option to move forward as a partnership with a real estate developer in order to ensure their organization has a home in the future. Taylor asked what is preventing the fraternity from doing the necessary updates to the property to make it safer. Sekhon said that it is money; maintenance is expensive and they have tried to raise funds but this is the solution they have come to. Taylor asked if the real estate developer would be the landlord for the fraternity. Sekhon said that it is a partnership and the fraternity would have a condo unit within the new building for their organization space. McLean asked about there being money for a new building but not to fix the existing buildings. Sekhon said that they have an arrangement with their development partner who is providing expertise, sweat equity, and funds to get the project off the ground. He emphasized that the fraternity does not have any money and said they had to sell one of the two houses to the developer as a bailout. McLean asked if the developer would do the same with the second house in order to save it. Sekhon said that it came down to economic viability, and they completed studies before engaging the developer to understand rehab costs, which came out to \$1.5 million.

Kurt Stege spoke in opposition as a private citizen, not a representative of the Madison Trust. He said that the status of 619 N Lake Street and 621 N Lake Street as contributing buildings in a National Register Historic District is evidence of their historic value. He referenced Lehnertz' letter and called for the commission to convey additional information regarding the historic value in their recommendation to the Plan Commission. He pointed out that these buildings are the first one sees in the historic district, and they are surrounded by other contributing buildings. He asked what the tipping point was for the Langdon Street National Register Historic District and whether the demolition of these two structures would take the number of contributing buildings below the threshold, causing them to lose an entire historic district.

Bob Klebba said that maintenance and rehabilitation costs should never be an issue when it comes to the demolition of the historic fabric of our city, and a developer should not be allowed to cite a previous lack of maintenance as justification for demolition. He said that these two buildings contribute significantly to and define the boundary of the historic district. He mentioned that they haven't seen thorough research on the properties, and he thinks that it is disingenuous for the commission to address the demolition of a historic contributing building without seeing the development plans. He encouraged the commission to review Lehnertz' letter, which suggested language the commission could use to communicate how important it is to preserve the historic fabric of Madison.

Bailey clarified that the Landmarks Commission policy manual states that the determination of historic value does not look at the proposed project for the site, only the historic value of existing buildings. She noted that the commission also received public comment letters today from Linda Lehnertz, the Madison Trust for Historic Preservation, and Franny Ingebritson.

McLean referenced Lehnertz' letter and pointed out that for previous development projects, they tried to bring the importance of the historic properties forward to other commissions by providing additional reports. Bailey said that they now have the 2018 Langdon area study, which identified properties that have historic value and retain integrity. McLean suggested they reference the study and Lehnertz' letter and include them as attachments to the commission's motion. Andrzejewski suggested they reference the property files at the State Historic Preservation Office as well, and pointed out that 619 N Lake Street has an architect name attached. Kaliszewski agreed and said they could also include the National Register nomination information.

Taylor asked about the National Register and local historic district. Bailey said that the properties are both already part of the Langdon Street National Register Historic District, and the Langdon Neighborhood Character Study from 2018 determined that they would be eligible as part of a local historic district if one were created.

McLean referenced earlier public comments and said that he liked the idea of these buildings being the front door of the historic district; it is important that this area be preserved because these side street houses are a gateway to the district. Taylor said that he agreed with others' comments regarding the historic value based upon the age of the buildings, their architecture, and where they stand in the district.

Bailey said that the buildings at 1355 Fish Hatchery Road and 1359 Fish Hatchery Road are located within the boundaries of two archaeological sites, the Wingra Creek Burials and the Powers village/campsite, which will require a Request to Disturb from the state.

Andrzejewski said that even though there are state statutes with certain requirements, the commission should make it clear that they are doing their due diligence in terms of consulting with tribal nations as appropriate and making sure they do the right thing. She said that this is very important and she intends to continue working on a solution for dealing with the redevelopment of archaeological sites.

ACTION:

A motion was made by Kaliszewski, seconded by Arnesen, to recommend to the Plan Commission that the buildings at 619 N Lake Street and 621 N Lake Street have very significant historic value based on architectural and historic significance as noted in the 2018 Langdon Neighborhood Character Study and property files at the State Historic Preservation Office, the significant integrity they retain, their status as contributing structures in the Langdon Street National Register Historic District, and their serving as a gateway to the Langdon Street National Register Historic District and therefore having prominence in the overall district. The motion passed by the following vote:

Ayes: 5 - Anna Andrzejewski, Richard Arnesen, Katie Kaliszewski, David McLean, and Maurice Taylor

Noes: 0

Excused: 2 - Betty Banks and Arvina Martin

A motion was made by Arnesen, seconded by Kaliszewski, to recommend to the Plan Commission that the buildings at 1355 Fish Hatchery Road and 1359 Fish Hatchery Road have no known historic value, but the sites are culturally significant due to their cultural affiliation with the Ho-Chunk people and warrant careful consideration during redevelopment. The motion passed by voice vote/other.