



**Agenda Item #:** 2  
**Project Title:** 134-150 S Blair-Land Combination & New Construction in the First Settlement historic district (District 6)  
**Legistar File ID #:** 79566  
**Prepared By:** Heather Bailey, Preservation Planner  
**Members:** Present: Edna Ely-Ledesma, Molly Harris, Katie Kaliszewski, Jacob Morrison, and Maurice Taylor  
Excused: Richard Arnesen and Ald. Amani Latimer Burris

## Summary

*Brian Munson, registering in support and wishing to speak*  
*Joel Koeppen, registering in support and wishing to speak*  
*Trina Sandschafer, registering in support and wishing to speak*  
*Jillian Skrentny, registering neither in support nor in opposition and wishing to speak*  
*Griffin Lowmaster, registering in opposition and available to answer questions*

Bailey provided background information on the project and noted comments from the staff report for the commission to consider in their review.

Taylor asked about the architectural expression part of the standards. Bailey read the ordinance, 41.27(1)(a)5, and said that the building elements weren't aligning here. She said the rhythm is fine with strong references, but we don't see any arched openings as seen on nearby historic resources. She said that it needs to look like it belongs. Taylor asked for clarification on building elements and whether that includes materials or architecture. Bailey said that it is both, and there are more detailed standards related to the materials. She said that it is also the style itself, and they need something unified that speaks the same language. It needs to be a new interpretation of that style of architecture, which we have seen done successfully in Third Lake Ridge where it still looks like a new building but has strong references to the historic resources and ends up blending in as a new building in the historic district. She said that this building is close but not there yet. Taylor asked if the proposed building was brick masonry and stone. Bailey said there was brick on the front, along with cast stone and metal paneling. She said the metal paneling works for the side and rear, but there doesn't seem to be other historic resources within 200' that have metal paneling as part of front façade.

Harris asked if the variance means that when the commission evaluates this, when considering historic resources within 200', they consider those within First Settlement and Third Lake Ridge? Bailey confirmed this was true.

Kaliszewski asked if this was just a parking lot when the historic district was created. Bailey said that was correct; the property was in its current configuration at that time. Kaliszewski asked when the fire truck repair building was demolished, and Bailey said that it was there in 1995 but not in 2000 and suggested it could have been demolished as part of the 1998 Planned Development.

Kaliszewski opened the public hearing.

Brian Munson, Trina Sandschafer, and Joel Koeppen, members of the project team, presented their proposed plans to the commission.

Jim Skrentny, who has lived in First Settlement for more than 20 years, said they were concerned about the project's visual compatibility. They agreed with staff comments to redesign the front façade and use consistent architectural

expressions. They said the middle part of the building is so massive, and they need to reduce the visual feel of the huge middle section. Regarding the land combination and underlying lot lines, they asked how many similar parcels exist in the local historic districts and how unique this property is. They expressed concern about the broader impact of this project and appreciated the commission's careful consideration.

Kaliszewski asked Griffin Lowmaster why they were opposed, and Lowmaster said they were opposed to the development as a whole because of tearing down the historic properties along E Wilson Street.

Kaliszewski closed the public hearing.

Harris referenced Skrentny's comments about the lot lines and asked if there were other similar situations. Bailey said she didn't know the number of similar properties, but there have been similar projects reviewed at 817-821 Williamson Street, 826 Williamson Street, and 654 Williamson Street. She said they were similar in overall size and in resolving underlying lot lines. She said that the commission had previously denied land combinations that would have expanded the lot of record for this site and for 826 Williamson as that was not in keeping with the standards of approval. She said that the commission's precedent has been looking at the legal lot of record, how it has operated over an extended period of time, and looking at the overall history of the property.

Morrison said he thought the issue of lot size had been addressed in terms of why they are considering what has happened on the property over the last 70 years versus what was on the Sanborn map in 1895. He said there were architectural issues he wanted to discuss, including the base/middle/top. He said the base is 2 ½ stories, and making it three stories would be too tall next to the adjacent houses. He said that at 2 ½ stories, it is relatively close to the massing of 602 Railroad Street. He said that if the base is too tall, it muddles the building, and he didn't think making the base taller would help with street activation because when one is walking or driving down the street, they experience the first two stories of the building, so that is where it matters. He began discussion the articulation of the masonry, referencing staff comments about the style being internally consistent within the building. He said the base should have more architectural detail, including jack arches or maybe a rounded arch over the entrance that speaks more to the buildings on S Blair Street and Williamson Street. He said that the middle section could have less architectural detail; it could be of a similar nature, just less articulated because it is harder to see and it is more appropriate to make the base more prominent. He said that height-wise, it seems fine. He thought the project was headed in a great direction and that the team could get there. He said that he had less issue with the metal panels, but if they were exclusively used as a more secondary item like spandrels between the windows, it would be fine. He said that the amount of metal panels currently used is a lot and could be cut down, especially in the first two floors where we see it up close. He said that he supported the two items at issue, combining lots and the variance. He said the architectural language issue that staff noted is what can bring this across the finish line. He suggested they look at the architectural detailing and masonry detailing on the buildings on S Blair and Williamson Streets for references to use. Lastly, he noted the UDC comments about the back of the building having blank walls. He said that while the Landmarks Commission's focus is on the street façade and pedestrian experience, if there were a living street put in, they would have to consider the side of the building, so in a future design, he would like to see some articulation on the side of the building as you go back.

Kaliszewski said she was agnostic on making the base taller, but she thinks it needs something additional. She said that it feels very solid still and there isn't enough articulation both at the street level and moving up. She agreed with public comment that the one-story stepback at the top is not enough. She asked about the current stepback from the bottom two stories to the middle and said that it reads as flat at the moment. Bailey said that it is a 10-foot stepback from the base to the middle level, then another 10-foot stepback from the middle to the top. Kaliszewski said that having the higher stepback brought down to be a story or two lower would help give definition to the building. She said that it is essentially a big monolith we are adding here.

Ely-Ledesma said she agreed with Morrison that the pedestrian experience is the important part. She said that the drawings are not how they will be experiencing the building, so while looking directly at the elevation, it might appear to

be monolithic, but she thought the 10-foot stepback would allow it to break down that visibility. She said that increasing the height of the base from 2 ½ to a third story might be detrimental to the scaling of that experience. She said that the architectural language and cohesiveness has more room for interpretation and she deferred to staff on what they would like to see as more cohesive in that.

Harris said that she was comfortable with the variance and using properties within 200' in adjacent historic districts as references. She agreed with Morrison and Ely-Ledesma about the base height and not making it a full three stories. She said that overall, she agreed with Morrison's assessment. She said that she was less comfortable with the quantify of metal surface. She agreed to prioritize the bottom section of the building. She asked the applicants if they were comfortable with the suggestions on the architectural vocabulary or if they needed more guidance. Munson said they have heard that they should look at the first-floor windows to include arches and remove metal panels from the lower-level elements and reduce quantities elsewhere. Munson agreed that 2.5 stories is a better expression at the street level and appreciated the discussion about the alternative design variance and lot combination.

Morrison said that for the lower levels, he recommended using the detail on the masonry at the Hotel Ruby Marie as specific guidance for the detailing of the base. He said that they are smaller areas, but they are important because people can see them up close. Munson asked if the architectural details could be resolved with staff or if they would come back to the commission, and Morrison said they should come back for review by the commission.

Morrison asked if they should approve the variance tonight. Bailey said that if the commission was going to refer, she recommended referral of both the variance and new construction proposals together because moving to take in historic resources within 200' in First Settlement and Third Lake Ridge is the concept, but it is also related to the design itself so those two pieces should stay together to potentially be approved in the future. Morrison noted that based on tonight's discussion, the commission was willing and open to consider historic resources within 200' in both First Settlement and Third Lake Ridge, pending the future design that they see from the applicants.

## **Action**

**A motion was made by Harris, seconded by Morrison, to Approve the request for the Certificate of Appropriateness for the land combination. The motion passed by voice vote/other.**

**A motion was made by Morrison, seconded by Harris, to Refer review of the alternative design variance and new construction of a principal structure to a future Landmarks Commission meeting. The motion passed by voice vote/other.**