

AGENDA # 1

City of Madison, Wisconsin

REPORT OF: LANDMARKS COMMISSION

PRESENTED: June 15, 2015

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

REFERRED:

REREFERRED:

REPORTED BACK:

AUTHOR: William A. Fruhling, Acting Secretary

ADOPTED:

POF:

DATED: June 15, 2015

ID NUMBER: 37499

Members present were: Stuart Levitan, Chair; Erica Fox Gehrig, Vice Chair; Christina Slattery, David McLean, Marsha Rummel, and Michael Rosenblum.

SUMMARY:

Randy Bruce, representing Louis Fortis, registered in support. He gave a brief overview of the project, stating that the Willy Street BUILD II Plan highlights certain areas where the quality should be improved and redevelopment should occur. This site is one of those sites. He noted that the BUILD plan includes a diagram showing proposed heights allowed. He feels that they are meeting the heights within the BUILD plan and this is a site that the neighborhood had previously identified as suitable for redevelopment. The plan is substantially the same as previously presented. It's designed as three separate masses; one at the front of the building is three stories in height. The roof system is barrel shaped that connects the site through the center with a flat roof portion in the back. The rear two portions are both at four stories. The height of the building is 52' to the top of the barrel and 49' to the parapet height in the back. The only real change to the exterior of the building since last time the Landmarks Commission saw it is they've taken the front elevation and bisected it with some corrugated metal to help identify smaller store fronts and make it more compatible with the neighborhood. They have been working extensively with the neighborhood. A memo of support was received from the Marquette Neighborhood Association (MNA). They've kept open space on the front corner, minimizing the patio off to the side, giving assurances about maintaining street trees, providing a substantial green roof on the three-story elevation and committing to some affordable housing. He feels strongly that the barrel shaped roof is a strong design element and works well with the gable roof element. He said the window pattern on both the west elevation and on the Paterson Street side is kind of a non-traditional pattern, and although not strongly married to it, they feel that it adds something to the design. If the Commission feels it's inappropriate, they can look at making modifications. At the first Landmarks meeting, he did not hear that demolition was a big concern and they moved forward with design work. At that meeting they had a number of neighborhood residents who spoke in opposition to the project. He feels like they now have a consensus of support from the neighborhood, but not 100%.

Bruce said they have asserted to providing two one-bedroom apartments for affordable housing, one that would be at the 60% of Median County Income and one at 80% of Median County Income. The funding source for that has not been locked down. The developer is making that assertion as a condition of approval. It could be put into a deed restriction and limited to a 10-15 year term.

Slattery asked about the home inspection report and the demolition standards. Bruce said that a home inspection report was done to understand what it really means to bring this house up to a good standard. In terms of the number of items that need attention, some of them are really significant. There is a process that went along with that which shows the cost would be hundreds of thousands of dollars to repair. That was done by an outside contractor. In terms of demolition standards, he feels that the site and particular home cannot be maintained in its existing form and condition and the only reasonable development opportunity requires demolition.

Levitan asked about the BUILD Plan. Bruce said the Plan shows certain areas that are noted where quality needs to be improved. Levitan asked is it says redevelopment, or the quality should be improved. Those are not necessarily the same thing. It's a big difference.

John Coleman, registered in opposition. He said that the BUILD Plan takes a strong stance against demolition and should only be done under very unusual circumstances. This project does not meet the standard and demolition is not justified. This building is in better condition than a lot of the other buildings in the neighborhood. Using those criteria, we would lose a huge number of houses in the neighborhood. This project does not meet that high bar for justifying the demolition in a historic district. Gehrig asked whether there was a switch in MNA regarding demolition. It seems they were less supportive of demolition and now they are more okay with it. She asked whether this is a floating house in an otherwise commercial block.

David Lohrentz, registered in support. He stated that the developer has done a pretty good job of listening and feels it's a pretty good design. The land is assessed at \$30,000 more than the house itself, which is not typical in Madison.

Peter Wolff, registered in opposition. The BUILD plan says quality should be improved, not that it should be torn down. He talked about a survey (done in 2000 or 2001) of 87 people, 80% were residents, 20% absentee landlords. There was very little sentiment for tearing down this building or doing something more with this corner. What is this going to do for the neighborhood and the historical district? The argument for additional tax base is an argument for tearing down the whole historic district.

Lindsey Lee, registered in support. He is a small business owner and supports strategic infill development where appropriate and this is an appropriate location. This project has not been controversial in the neighborhood. Although there is some opposition. He feels that the bigger issue is whether this is an exceptional project. We should protect historic landmarks and contributing houses in historic districts, but we should also create landmarks for future generations. Given the constraints of this project, the design is pretty good. The developer has made a commitment that he will rent retail space only to local businesses. Rosenblum asked if Lee sees this project as a future landmark. Lee said it's hard to say, noting that many buildings built 100 years ago weren't viewed as future landmarks. McLean asked why this site is more appropriate for density. Lee said it is an orphaned house removed from other houses on a busy corner.

Anne Walker registered in opposition. She said that although she is not representing the MNA Board, they seemed to support this based primarily on affordability. She does not support the demolition of the building. It could be a business; it doesn't have to be used as a home. She also expressed concern about providing room to plant canopy trees and for them to thrive.

Peter Bock registered in support. He said the proposed site is a single-family home with two vacant lots on either side. It's run down.

Janine Glaser, representing Louis Fortis, registered in support and available to answer questions.

Bruce clarified that the language in the BUILD doesn't clearly say it's okay for development, but it gives us the impression that redevelopment is an available option.

Bruce said that in terms of the standards for demolition, the building is not an unusual or uncommon design. It does not have special historical significance. The building is in such a condition that it is not economically feasible to preserve it. The proposed redevelopment will be a positive addition to the neighborhood.

Levitan asked of the \$385,000 estimate from the home inspection report, what Bruce believes is necessary to bring it up to code vs. making it perfect. Bruce said he could not answer that. The structural and electrical systems are two items that would need immediate attention and are probably code related. The roof is another item.

Levitan mentioned that Lindsey Lee said the developer will only rent commercial space to local businesses. How will that work? Bruce said the language will be no chain businesses. He didn't think there was an actual definition yet.

Levitan said the points in the purpose and intent section of the ordinance to strengthen the economy of the city and to stabilize property values seem most applicable.

Rummel said the report made her think the house was neglected. She asked if the Commission treats orphaned houses differently. McLean said its part of the fabric – not an orphan – it's a district. Rosenblum said he can see the argument for orphan house where much of the context has been lost, but he comes back to what is the owner's responsibility, in a historic district, to maintain a property? What alternatives have been looked at? Slattery stated that the house is part of the character/fabric/rhythm of the district and she doesn't see it as an orphan. She is having a hard time seeing how to weigh the criteria and whether it contributes to the character of the neighborhood.

Levitan asked about the demolition standards and whether the Commission could agree that the building is not of such historical or architectural significance to trigger Section 33.915(5)(c)3.a. (Whether the building is of such architectural or historic significance that its demolition would be detrimental to the public interest and contrary to the general welfare of the people of the City and the State.)

He said it seems the most relevant criteria might be Section 33.915(5)(c)3.b. (Whether the building or structure, although not itself a landmark building, contributes to the distinctive architectural or historic character of the District as a whole and therefore should be preserved for the benefit of the people of the City and the State) and 33.915(5)(c)3.c. (Whether demolition of the subject property would be contrary to the purpose and intent of this chapter as set forth in Sec. 33.19 and to the objectives of the historic preservation plan for the applicable district as duly adopted by the Common Council.)

He suggested the Commission also weigh Section 33.915(5)(c)3.g. (Whether any new structure proposed to be constructed or change in use proposed to be made is compatible with the buildings and environment of the district in which the subject property is located.)

Levitan stated that's why he asked about the affordability and the agreement regarding the retail because that goes to the benefits of the property. Ultimately he feels the decision has to balance b. and c. vs. g.

Slattery noted that the MNA supports, but they don't necessarily have to address the same standards as the Landmarks Commission.

Levitan asked what will happen if the demolition is denied. Slattery said only the owner can answer that, but it might continue on as is. McLean asked if that is a bad thing.

Rummel said the new development fills up the entire lot and she thinks that open space is part of the historic context and asked how the Commission can find that is consistent of this historic district. McLean stated it is not. Levitan asked if that implies if a better building was proposed, demolition could be okay. Rummel replied yes, maybe.

Levitan asked if the design were better or different or smaller if that could justify demolition. Gehrig said no. Rosenblum said yes, noting that one thing is the loss of open space and rhythm of solids and voids and the voids are being lost. McLean said yes and the rhythm of solids and voids are part of the whole block historically. He doesn't think he can see an appropriate new building, but he can't commit at this time. Slattery said it would need to be a drastic change, not a tweak. It is a building in two historic districts. Its size and open space are major issues.

Levitan asked Bruce if he wanted a motion or a referral. Bruce said they won't change it significantly. He said he understood from the last meeting that they were on the right track and worked with the neighborhood.

ACTION:

A motion was made by Gehrig, seconded by Rummel to deny the Certificate of Appropriateness for the demolition of the existing building based on Section 33.19(5)(c)3b., c. and g. as the new building is not compatible with the historic district. **The motion passed by the following vote:**

Ayes: 4 – Marsha A. Rummel; David W.J. McLean; Christina Slattery and Erica Fog Gehrig

Noes: 1 – Michael J. Rosenblum

Excused: 2 – Jason T. Fowler

Non Voting: 1 – Stuart Levitan

A motion was made by Rummel, seconded by McLean, to table the certificate of appropriateness for new construction. Motion passed by voice vote.