

Note to Commission
Pyre House
1015 Hillside Avenue

This 2200 square foot two-story frame house is proposed for demolition by a neighboring property owner, who plans to divide the 56,000 square foot lot into two parts – a small extension for their backyard and a separate lot for sale where the house is currently located. Because of the poor condition of the house, the applicant wishes to demolish it prior to marketing the site for a potential single-family development.

Historic and Architectural Significance

The house was one of the first houses built in the Highlands, a very interesting development of farm land into huge, multi-acre lots. Nationally prominent landscape designer Ossian Cole Simonds of Chicago designed the development in the Midwestern prairie style of landscape design.

The house was built for Prof. James Francis Augustine Pyre (1871-1934) and his wife Marcia. Prof. Pyre was a highly respected professor of English Literature. He wrote, often with one or more other English professors, several important books, four of which are still in print today. His most successful was probably *Students' Handbook of the Facts of English Literature*, first published in 1910 with the most recent publication dating to 2003. The other books still in print include *Formation of Tennyson's Style*, *English Poetry of the 19th Century* and *Great English Poets*. Pyre was also seminal in the development of the athletic department on campus, and was instrumental in the development of the Big Ten. He wrote a history of the University of Wisconsin in 1920 and lectured all over the state as part of the University Extension. When he died in 1934, UW President Birge stated that "Pyre represented the university as a whole in a way that no other man ever did; as no one will or can, represent it in the future."

The house is in the rare Swiss chalet style and is the earliest known representation of the style in Madison. There are three other houses in the style in Madison, all very interesting in design, although the other large house in the style, which also happens to be in the Highlands, has been quite altered. The Pyre House is clearly eligible to be a Madison Landmark.

Condition of the house

The owner has submitted a detailed report on the costs of rehabilitation (included in your packets). My husband and I have inspected the house and concur with the inspector that it is structurally sound. I think that the assessment prepared for the owner is a reasonable rough estimate of the repairs required. Although I might beg to differ on some items, such as that all of the windows need replacement rather than

refurbishment and that 100 amp service is not adequate, the kitchen definitely needs gutting, which is not included in his cost estimates and most owners would also probably want to build a larger garage. The house has a gracious floor plan and, if renovated, would be a lovely place to live.

Recommendation

I have suggested to the owner's attorney that the owner considering putting the house and lot up for sale for the value of the land. I have no doubt that the house would qualify for the Wisconsin historic homeowners' tax credit program, which would save 25% of the costs of eligible work, including exterior restoration and repairs, HVAC, structural work if needed, electrical upgrades (but not new fixtures) and plumbing upgrades (but not new fixtures). Provided that the asking price was not unreasonable, the Plan Commission could stipulate that if, after a certain time (say, one year) no one wishes to purchase the property and renovate the house, then demolition would be permitted. This would potentially save the owner the costs of demolition. It may very well be that a buyer would be forthcoming who would be able to afford the purchase of the lot and the high costs of restoration of the house.

K. H. Rankin 
10-31-07

P. S. – Color photographs of the house are available on line through the MLS. Go to a realty company's website and search for MLS number 1471791.









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Reinhart, Boener, Van Deuren S.C.
Attn: Ms. Barbara Osborne
22 East Mifflin Street Suite 600
Madison, WI 53703

Inspection Address:
1015 Hillside Avenue
Madison, WI 53705

To Whom It May Concern:

The following information is in regard to the general home inspection that I performed this morning. This single family home is old, advertised as almost 100 years of age. Included with this summary report are pictures of key areas and deficiencies (see attached.) An "estimate of cost" for repair or replacement has been included as part of this summary report. The listed monetary figures are estimates based on my 22 years of experience as a property inspector. They are not to be construed as contractor bids.

ROOF

The home has a wood shake roof covering. The wood shakes show multiple age signs including curl, wear and decay. Moss is present in many areas also. Furthermore, some visible areas of wood sheathing are decayed also. This roof covering is estimated to be thirty years or more in age. Overall, this roof covering is in poor condition. Estimated cost of replacement is \$30,000.00.

WINDOWS

The windows for this two story home are older. Wood frames show general wear and these single pane windows are very inefficient. Estimated cost of replacement is \$25,000.00.

SIDING

The vast majority of the exterior has an older wood siding. In addition, there are some areas of older stucco siding also. The siding materials show age signs including some worn and damaged areas at the overhangs. Estimated cost to replace and refurbish siding is \$20,000.00.



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CHIMNEY/FIREPLACE

There is one older wood burning fireplace present at the first floor of the home. The interior firebox shows cracked and worn bricks. The height and design of the chimney prevented the interior flue from being visibly accessible. In my opinion, this fireplace is not in a safe condition for usage. Estimated cost of repairs is \$10,000.00.

STEPS

The western wooden steps are damaged and unsafe at this time. Estimated cost of replacement is \$1,000.00.

HEATING

A natural gas fired hot water boiler provides heat for this home. The boiler's age is estimated to be about fifty years of age, which is very old. Furthermore, many areas of baseboard piping have loose or missing covers. This boiler system has exceeded its design life. Estimated cost to replace system is \$10,000.00.

ELECTRICAL

Home has a 100 AMP service, which is minimal in size for the advertised size of this home (about 2600 square feet.) Some old/original knob and tube type wiring is actively in usage in the home; visible in the attic area. This dated type of wiring poses a safety and insurability concern. Estimated cost to upgrade service and replace old wiring is \$15,000.00.

ATTIC

Water entry stains and likely damaged roof sheathing boards seen by the older masonry chimney. Minimal amount insulation is present in attic. Estimated cost to replace poor sheathing (as needed) and properly insulate attic is \$2,500.00.

FOUNDATION

Unfinished basement has poured concrete foundation walls. Cracks seen are not viewed as severe or unusual for an older home. There are many dried water entry stains present though. At exterior, there is no gutter system and the grade is questionable. Estimated cost to mitigate or prevent any active water entry is \$15,000.00.

PLUMBING

Age signs seen in plumbing and fixtures for the bathrooms and kitchen. In addition, the tile flooring for a second floor (east) bathroom is badly cracked. Estimated cost to replace outdated plumbing and replace poor tile flooring is \$20,000.00.



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INTERIOR ROOMS

In the kitchen, some ceiling plaster is cracked and shows water leakage stains. In addition, the kitchen has older nine inch square floor tile, which is known to be an asbestos type of material. Estimated cost to address these kitchen concerns is \$7,500.00.

SCOPE OF REPORT AND LIMITATIONS/EXCLUSIONS

The object of this general inspection and summary report is to provide a good faith opinion on the condition of this home on today's date. This was a visual inspection of readily accessible areas; no concealed areas were dismantled. No environmental inspections or tests were performed or charged for. This report is **not** a code or compliance inspection of any type.

THE INSPECTION AND REPORT ARE NOT INTENDED TO BE USED AS A GUARANTEE (EXPRESSED OR IMPLIED) REGARDING THE ADEQUACY, PERFORMANCE OR CONDITION OF ANY INSPECTED STRUCTURE, ITEM OR SYSTEM.

SUMMARY

This old home has had very minimal updates or significant improvements for many years. (Some improvements were apparently performed in the 1950's.) The home is semi-occupied, but it has the feel and appearance of a vacant home. Due to the lack of ongoing maintenance or improvements, a very significant monetary amount is needed for this home. The accumulative estimated cost for repair or replacement totals \$156,000.00.

THANK YOU

Please contact me with any questions that you have regarding this general inspection and summary report. I can also be reached at brianjdaley@aol.com. Thank you for your business.

Sincerely,

Brian J. Daley
National Property Inspections