

August 12, 2024

Letter of Intent - Introduction

Bruns Architecture has been commissioned by the new owners to design a single-family home for their multigenerational family on the parcel(s) known as 2121 Jefferson Street and 1007 Edgewood Avenue. A dedeed dividing line separates the original full lot into two “half-lots” where there are currently two houses built. The half-lot parcels currently do not meet the requirements for the TR-C2 zoning classification and are considered existing non-conforming.

Plan Overview – Design Goals

The design brief includes plans for a new, single-family home in the Vilas Neighborhood. Goals include building a new home that **celebrates the scale and character** of the district’s homes while also striving to achieve high levels of **energy efficiency and sustainability** – qualities that are more challenging in older structures. We feel it is critical to **maintain the fabric of the neighborhood**.

A study was conducted regarding the potential to relocate the two existing houses on the site. Both houses have structural deficiencies that introduce a risk of them surviving a move. Additionally, the utility lines and tree canopies surrounding the houses on all sides (and throughout the neighborhood) obstruct a clear path away from the site. The costs to facilitate relocation were abnormally high. As a result, relocating the houses is not reasonably feasible. Our plans include razing the two existing houses on this parcel. **We do not consider this step lightly** but feel it will allow for the best outcome for our clients’ family, the neighborhood, and the environment.

Due Consideration for the Historic District

The neighborhood carries a National Historic District designation, and we are extremely sensitive to the factors that led to this designation granted in 1999. When the application for this status was submitted in 1990, it included 297 “contributing resources”. In fact, nearly all the houses in the neighborhood that were constructed between 1891 and 1940 were included as “contributors”. There were another 23 houses that were considered non-contributing either because they were built after 1940, or because they had “unsympathetic alterations”. Alterations as simple as replaced siding led to a house being considered non-contributing.

While we understand there are different interpretations of a National Historic District designation, we refer directly to the National Register of Historic Places guidelines which specifically state that an owner is not restricted in what they do with the property. Nor are owners required to restore or preserve the property. It goes on to state that **“listing a property in the register does not impose restrictions on the private property owner. The private owner is free to sell, alter or demolish the property.”**

Sadly, the two subject houses have since had the original siding and windows replaced with inexpensive vinyl material. Both have also suffered decades of deferred maintenance and neglect prior to being sold to our clients, leading to structural and systemic damage. It is our opinion that these houses would be considered non-contributing today based on their condition, using the original metrics that were submitted in 1990.

Respectfully submitted,

Stephen Bruns, AIA, LEED AP
Principal
BRUNS ARCHITECTURE LLC