
Regarding: 5117 University Avenue – Marshall Erdman & Associates Office and Shop Landmark Nomination
(Legistar #23432)
PUBLIC HEARING

Date: September 19, 2011
Prepared By: Amy Scanlon

General Information:

On July 13, 2011, a nomination was filed by Ms. Amy Kinast of 5018 Tomahawk Trail to designate the Marshall Erdman & Associates Office and Shop located at 5117 University Avenue a local historic landmark. Staff is aware that the property owner, Erdman Holdings, LLC, does not support this nomination.

On August 8, 2011, the Landmarks Commission determined that the nomination should be considered and a public hearing scheduled. The Landmarks Commission will hold the public hearing at its September 19, 2011 meeting. Following the public hearing, the Commission may act on the nomination. If the Commission decides to make a recommendation, it shall forward its recommendation to the Common Council including the reasons for the recommendation.

Relevant Ordinance Sections:

33.19 (6) Procedures.

(a) Designation Of Landmarks and Landmark Sites.

The Landmarks Commission and the Common Council may consider nominations for landmark status. An individual or group may nominate a property for consideration. If a complete, accurate application is submitted and the Commission decides to consider the nomination, a public hearing shall be scheduled. At least ten (10) days prior to such hearing, the commission shall notify the owners of record, as listed in the office of the City Assessor, who are owners of property in whole or in part situated within two hundred (200) feet of the boundaries of the property affected. Notice of such hearing shall also be published as a Class 1 Notice, under the Wisconsin Statutes. The commission shall also notify the following: Department of Public Works, Parks Division, Fire and Police Departments, Health Division, Department of Planning and Community and Economic Development and Plan Commission. Each such department shall respond to the commission within thirty (30) days of notification with its comments on the proposed designation or rescission. The commission shall then conduct such public hearing and, in addition to the notified persons, may hear expert witnesses, and shall have the power to subpoena such witnesses and records as it deems necessary. The commission may conduct an independent investigation into the proposed designation or rescission. Within ten (10) days after the close of the public hearing, and after application of the criteria in Subsection (4), above, the commission may recommend the designation of the property as either a landmark or a landmark site or recommend the rescission of such designation. After such recommendation has been made, notification shall be sent to the property owner or owners. The commission shall report its recommendation, along with the reasons for it, to the Common Council. After considering the

commission's report, and considering the standards contained in this ordinance, the Common Council may designate the property as either a landmark or a landmark site or rescind such designation. The City Clerk shall notify the Director of the Building Inspection Division and the City Assessor. The City Clerk shall cause such designation or rescission to be recorded, at City expense, in the Dane County Register of Deeds office.

If the Commission decides not to consider a nomination, the property owner or alderperson may request that the Common Council consider the nomination. The Common Council shall then refer the nomination to the Landmarks Commission for a recommendation. (Am. by Ord. 11,983, 12-12-97; Ord. 12,302, 1-15-99; ORD-08-00109, 10-7-08)

33.19(4) Landmarks and Landmark Sites Designation Criteria.

- (a) For purposes of this ordinance, a landmark or landmark site designation may be placed on any site, natural or improved, including any building, improvement or structure located thereon, or any area of particular historic, architectural or cultural significance to the City of Madison, such as historic structures or sites which:
1. Exemplify or reflect the broad cultural, political, economic or social history of the nation, state or community; or
 2. Are identified with historic personages or with important events in national, state or local history; or
 3. Embody the distinguishing characteristics of an architectural type specimen, inherently valuable for a study of a period, style, method of construction, or of indigenous materials or craftsmanship or
 4. Are representative of the notable work of a master builder, designer or architect whose individual genius influences his age.

Staff Comments:

1. Following the August 8, 2011 Landmarks Commission meeting, Staff met with and provided the Applicant with comments and recommended revisions to the nomination. As noted in the staff report prepared for that meeting, while the nomination was sufficiently complete to be considered at that time, it needed to be revised to specifically note the criteria for significance and include bibliographical references before being reviewed for public hearing. Staff met with the Applicant to review the requested revisions. The revised nomination does not adequately address the majority of the recommended revisions. While the nomination continues to contain interesting information, Staff believes that much of it is not directly relevant to the specific criteria for designating a landmark.

2. At the August 8, 2011 meeting, the Landmarks Commission directed the Applicant to focus the nomination's statement of significance on criteria 2, and to touch on criteria 1. Because the revised nomination continues to name all four criteria in the significance statement, Staff will comment on each criterion for discussion.

Criteria 1 Staff does not believe that this particular building exemplifies or reflects the broad cultural, political, economic or social history of the nation, state or community. Although Marshall Erdman is associated with providing post World War II housing in Madison, his contribution was part of a national trend in responding to the housing deficiencies. There are clusters of Erdman

prefabricated homes that better embody Marshall Erdman's contributions to the post World War II housing development than this building.

Criteria 2 While Marshall Erdman's contributions to the community are noteworthy as discussed above; there are numerous buildings in the area that better embody and identify these significant contributions than the building that served as his office and shop.

Criteria 3 Staff does not believe that this building is an architectural specimen. The current building at 5117 University is a meandering collage of building styles that evolved over time out of necessity for a growing company. Buildings have been adapted through expansion for centuries. This evolution is not a characteristic of organic architecture espoused by Frank Lloyd Wright. Rather, it is the sign of a building that has outgrown its original function.

Criteria 4 Staff does not agree that this building is a notable work of a master architect or builder. Although William Kaeser is considered a master architect and Marshall Erdman a master builder by standards established by the National Register, the building must be found to be a notable work or a masterpiece of the master to meet this criteria. While the nomination states that Kaeser was the architect, Staff can find no documentation proving that Kaeser was responsible for designing the original building. It is possible that there was an existing building on the site when the property was purchased by the Erdmans and that Kaeser was the architect for some renovations and later additions. The entire complex of linked buildings is not proven in the nomination to be attributable to Kaeser.

3. Staff recommended on August 8, 2011 that the consideration of this nomination not proceed to public hearing for the reasons noted in the attached report dated August 8, 2011.

Staff Recommendation:

Staff recommends that the Landmarks Commission not make a recommendation to designate the building at 5117 University Avenue a landmark or a landmark site.