



Project Address: 17, 19, 25 North Webster Street and 201 East Mifflin Street
Application Type: Advisory recommendation for development adjacent to a designated landmark
Legistar File ID # [31119](#)
Prepared By: Amy L. Scanlon, Preservation Planner, Planning Division

Summary

Applicant/Property Owner: Fred Rouse

Requested Action/Proposal Summary: The Applicant is requesting that the Landmarks Commission provide an advisory opinion regarding the proposed new development adjacent to the designated landmark, Lamp House located at 22 N Butler Street to the Plan Commission.

Applicable Regulations & Standards: Section 28.144 of the Madison General Ordinances (see below)

Review Required By: Landmarks Commission, Plan Commission

Background Information

Parcel Location: The subject site is adjacent to the site of the designated landmark, Lamp House, designed by Frank Lloyd Wright.

Relevant Zoning Ordinance Sections:

28.144 DEVELOPMENT ADJACENT TO A LANDMARK OR LANDMARK SITE.

Any development on a zoning lot adjoining a landmark or landmark site for which Plan Commission or Urban Design Commission review is required shall be reviewed by the Landmark Commission to determine whether the proposed development is so large or visually intrusive as to adversely affect the historic character and integrity of the adjoining landmark or landmark site. Landmark Commission review shall be advisory to the Plan Commission and the Urban Design Commission.

Analysis and Conclusion

Information from the National Register nomination form and the City of Madison Landmark designation form (both by Jack Holzhueter, 1976 and 1975) have been summarized in this analysis. Please refer to these documents for more information.

The Lamp House was designed by Frank Lloyd Wright in 1902- 1903 for his boyhood friend Robert “Robie” Lamp. The Lamp House is the only Frank Lloyd Wright designed building in the Downtown of Madison and is the only Frank Lloyd Wright designed building extant on the isthmus. The Lake Mendota boathouse (1893) was located at the end of North Carroll Street, but was demolished in 1926. Monona Terrace was constructed in 1997 after Wright’s death and is therefore not considered a true Wright design.

DESIGN

The Lamp House was originally designed as a two story cream brick structure with roof garden. The third floor addition was added circa 1913. The design features a cube-shape with corner pilasters, strong horizontal elements, paired casement windows, the extension of the livable space into the landscape, and detailed entry

approach sequence. These typical Wright influences are early variations on later design principles. There are similarities between the design of the Lamp House and later works including "A Fireproof House for \$5000" as published in the April, 1907 Ladies' Home Journal which is considered a key point in transforming the popularity of the open floor plan in the American residence. There are also similarities between the Lamp House and numerous other works that were in progress at the same time.

Compared to the style of the vernacular residential structures being constructed at the same time, the Lamp House is very different. The design features (above) of the Lamp House contrast with the other styles which were largely Victorian - front porches, double hung windows, vertical expression, compartmentalized interior layout (a room for every function), pitched roofs, rectangular foot print with projections, oriented with street presence, etc.

SITE

In addition to the stylized design features, the siting of the building in a mid-block location was also different from other buildings being constructed at the same time. The building was intentionally sited in the middle of the block for numerous reasons.

First, by manipulating the topography of the site and placing the house at the highest point, Lamp could view Lake Mendota and Lake Monona from the roof garden. The view of the lakes from the roof garden is significant to the siting of the building because Wright designed this house for a dear friend with a shared interest in the lakes and lake activities. (The Capitol was also visible from the roof garden, but the retention of the Capitol view seems less important to the landmark site because there is not a known personal link to the design and the siting of the building for that view.)

Second, the design of the entry approach sequence further illustrates the importance of the unique mid-block siting. Wright typically creates a feeling of compression when approaching or entering a building and allows the physical space to open or release and impact the experience of the viewer. For the Lamp House, Wright creates a series of these experiences by entering the site from the street through a narrow uphill pathway between two residences. Once past the two residences, the viewer experiences the opening of the space and a full view of the front of the Lamp House before being compressed again up two sets of stairs that relate to garden retaining walls and along the front of the building to the side entry door. Through the entry door and the low ceiling of the vestibule, the main living space opens again.

Finally, Wright was able to create a secure and secluded place amidst the busy City. The surrounding buildings (largely extant today) provide an outer ring of sanctuary while the gardens and fences on the site further establish a feeling of isolation and privacy. The National Register nomination states, "the fortress-like quality of the dwelling...plus its relatively obscure entrance bear out the thesis that Wright's dwellings reflected his belief that a home should be a shelter from the outside world, a secure place for the family."

CONTEXT

The Lamp House was constructed after the other buildings in the context and it can be assumed that the design of the Lamp House was affected by the existing context. Placing the building on the highest portion of the site to gain views of the lakes also meant the house was pushed in very close proximity to the rear property line. This placement allowed for an extensive front and side yard which affected the entry approach sequence and the design of the surrounding landscape buffer. The placement may have also altered the design of the building by reducing the number of windows on the rear elevation or manipulating the interior configuration of spaces. One can also assume that the views of the Lamp House from the street were considered by Mr. Wright. He

Landmarks Commission should review the compilation of Sanborn maps and the date of construction map for more information about the context.

While the proposed new development is not directly impacting the Lamp House, the context in which the Lamp House has been a part is being modified. This change will affect the Lamp House context in many ways. First, the views of the Lamp House from the street are being affected and the Lamp House will no longer be visible from Webster Street. This proposal does not negatively alter the view of the Lamp House from Mifflin. Next, the height of the proposed new development is much taller than the existing residential context and staff feels that it is visually intrusive to the Lamp House. The scale of the Lamp House is negatively impacted by the height of the neighboring building proposal. Finally, the loss of the appropriate context removes the Lamp House from its intended composition and affects its historic integrity.

Integrity can be measured and weighed in many ways. A new building with fewer stories may be less visually intrusive and have a less negative impact on the integrity of the Lamp House. It is also possible that two or three buildings on the proposed development site would maintain the view of the Lamp House from Webster Street and could maintain a certain level of integrity.

It should be noted that the sites involved in the proposed development are currently zoned DR-1 and the new development will seek a rezoning to UMX which would allow for the volume of the proposed building. The DR-1 zoning would allow buildings with maximum widths of 60 feet. The DR-1 zoning may evoke a more appropriate design solution adjacent to the landmark.

The development proposal provides a significant area of green space directly to the southeast of the Lamp House which will give the Lamp House an appropriate buffer. The development proposal also provides a Lamp House Interpretive Center on the first floor of the new building which would overlook the landmark site.

Recommendation

Staff believes that the height and length of the building makes the development so large and visually intrusive that it adversely affects the historic character and integrity of the adjoining landmark.