

## PLANNING DIVISION STAFF REPORT

April 1, 2014

PREPARED FOR THE LANDMARKS COMMISSION



**Project Name/Address:** 702-706 Williamson Street

**Application Type:** PUBLIC HEARING  
Certificate of Appropriateness for demolition of existing building and construction of new development in a historic district

**Legistar File ID #** [32584](#)

**Prepared By:** Amy L. Scanlon, Preservation Planner, Planning Division

### Summary

**Project Applicant/Contact:** Martin Rifken

**Requested Action/Proposal Summary:** The Applicant is requesting a Certificate of Appropriateness for the demolition of the existing building and a Certificate of Appropriateness for the new construction. A public hearing is required for this review due to the demolition of a building in a historic district.

The Applicant requested that the public hearing be referred to April 7 and provided the Landmarks Commission with an Informational Presentation on March 17. The Applicant also extended the determination period (in writing) of the Landmarks Commission on the demolition request by 30 days from the original submission date of February 17, 2014.

### Background Information

**Parcel Location:** The subject site is located in the Third Lake Ridge Historic District

#### Relevant Landmarks Ordinance Sections:

##### 33.19(5)(c)3. Standards. (for Demolition)

In determining whether to issue a Certificate of Appropriateness for any demolition, the Landmarks Commission shall consider and may give decisive weight to any or all of the following:

- a. Whether the building or structure 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;
- 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;
- 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;
- d. Whether the building or structure is of such old and unusual or uncommon design, texture and/or material that it could not be reproduced or be reproduced only with great difficulty and/or expense;
- e. Whether retention of the building or structure would promote the general welfare of the people of the City and the State by encouraging study of American history, architecture and design or by developing an understanding of American culture and heritage;
- f. Whether the building or structure is in such a deteriorated condition that it is not structurally or economically feasible to preserve or restore it, provided that any hardship or difficulty claimed by the

owner which is self-created or which is the result of any failure to maintain the property in good repair cannot qualify as a basis for the issuance of a Certificate of Appropriateness;

- 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.

33.19(1) Purpose and Intent It is hereby declared a matter of public policy that the protection, enhancement, perpetuation and use of improvements of special character or special historical interest or value is a public necessity and is required in the interest of health, prosperity, safety and welfare of the people. The purpose of this section is to:

- (a) Effect and accomplish the protection, enhancement and perpetuation of such improvements and of districts which represent or reflect elements of the City's cultural, social, economic, political and architectural history.
- (b) Safeguard the City's historic and cultural heritage, as embodied and reflected in such landmarks and historic districts.
- (c) Stabilize and improve property values.
- (d) Foster civic pride in the beauty and noble accomplishments of the past.
- (e) Protect and enhance the City's attractions to residents, tourists and visitors, and serve as a support and stimulus to business and industry.
- (f) Strengthen the economy of the City.
- (g) Promote the use of historic districts and landmarks for the education, pleasure and welfare of the people of the City.

33.19(11)(d) Guideline Criteria for new Development in the Third Lake Ridge Historic District - Parcels Zoned for Manufacturing Use.

- 1. The gross volume of any new structure shall be visually compatible with the buildings and environment within its visually related area.
- 2. The height of any new structure shall be visually compatible with the buildings and environment within its visually related area.

33.19(11)(f) Guideline Criteria for new Development in the Third Lake Ridge Historic District - Parcels Zoned for Commercial Use.

- 1. Any new structures shall be evaluated according to both of the criteria listed in Sec. 33.01(11)(d); that is, compatibility of gross volume and height.
- 2. The rhythm of solids and voids in the street facade(s) of any new structure shall be compatible with the buildings within its visually related area.
- 3. The materials used in the street facade(s) of any new structure shall be compatible with those used in the buildings and environment within its visually related area.
- 4. The design of the roof of any new structure shall be compatible with those of the buildings and environment within its visually related area.
- 5. The rhythm of building masses and spaces created by the construction of a new structure shall be compatible with the existing rhythm of masses and spaces for those sites within its visually related area.

33.19(11)(h) Guideline Criteria for new Development in the Third Lake Ridge Historic District - Parcels Zoned for Residential Use.

- 1. Any new structure shall be evaluated according to all criteria listed in Sec.33.01(11)(f).
- 2. The directional expression of any new structure shall be compatible with those of the buildings and environment within its visually related area.
- 3. The materials, patterns and textures of any new structure shall be compatible with those of the buildings and environment within its visually related area.
- 4. The landscape plan of any new structure shall be compatible with that of the buildings and environment within its visually related area.

## Analysis and Conclusion

The building being proposed for demolition was constructed in 1926. The building has brick walls and a curved roof structure. There is not a history of the original building provided in the preservation file. The addition at the Williamson Street frontage was probably constructed in the 1950s and is also being proposed for demolition. It has synthetic stucco walls and a flat roof structure. The street façades have been modified numerous times.

A discussion of the demolition standards 33.19(5)(c)3 is below:

- a. This specific structure is not of such architectural or historic significance that it meets standards for landmark designation as the language of this standard suggests. Instead, with the other commercial and industrial structures in the district, this structure better relates to standard b.
- b. The building contributes to the commercial and industrial character of this area of the District. The loss of this structure will diminish the number of structures in this area that communicate this architectural and historic character.
- c. The Landmarks Commission is charged with protecting and enhancing the perpetuation of historic districts and the City's cultural heritage. The purpose and intent of the Landmarks Ordinance also focuses on stabilizing and improving property values, and strengthening the economy of the City as it concerns the architectural quality and historic significance of the city.
- d. The existing building is a structure that conveys the commercial and industrial growth of the City and the area. The building is not of such extraordinary value that it could not be replaced without great difficulty or expense.
- e. The retention of the existing building would probably not promote the general welfare of the people of the City and the State by encouraging study of American history, architecture and design or by developing an understanding of American culture and heritage; however, the general welfare of the public is promoted by the retention of the City's cultural resources and historic identity, as well as high quality design and construction of new development.
- f. The condition of the building is not being claimed as a hardship.
- g. The new structure proposed to be constructed is largely compatible with the buildings and environment of the district.

A discussion of the new development standards 33.19(11)(f) is below. The Visually Related Area (VRA) map is attached to this report.

1. Review Sec. 33.01(11)(d):
  1. The gross volume of the proposed building is of a similar gross volume to other buildings in the VRA, but the design should be modified to be more visually compatible with the buildings in the VRA. These modifications may include providing a building "top" at the upper story, stepping the building mass down toward the adjacent buildings leaving the corner element at the proposed height, and/or providing horizontal elements to offset the vertical design vocabulary.
  2. The proposed building is taller than the neighboring buildings and the other buildings in the VRA, but is relatively consistent with the heights. The standard relates to visual compatibility of the height and therefore, the design of the proposed building should be modified so that the height is more visually compatible as described above.
2. The rhythm of solids and voids in the street façade(s) of the proposed building are generally compatible with the buildings in the VRA. To improve compatibility, the proposed building should take more design cues from the adjacent buildings. The adjacent buildings have grouped windows with larger expanses of wall area. The proposed building window design and placement within the areas of White Modular Masonry results in a random appearance. Staff suggests that the windows be grouped to regularize the appearance and make the treatment more compatible with other buildings in the VRA. Staff noted that the windows of the 5<sup>th</sup> floor on the Blount Street elevation are taller than other windows and suggests

that the windows be changed so that they all have a consistent height and proportion. The windows of the corner element “storefront” are part of the design and can remain as submitted.

3. The materials used in the street façade(s) of the proposed building are not compatible with those used in the buildings and environment within the visually related area. The size of the White Modular Masonry and the Dark Masonry Base are not noted. Instead of large format unit masonry, the building should be brick (standard or queen size) to relate to the materials of the buildings in the VRA. In order to maximize the compatibility, staff suggests that the Applicant consider a brick material that is more historic in appearance than the white. For example, a glazed terra-cotta colored brick, a cream city brick, or a standard red clay brick laid with interesting coursing would provide an immediate compatibility to other buildings in the VRA based on color, material scale and texture. The brick areas that hover over the glass storefront should be visually linked to the ground to better relate to the material treatments of the other buildings in the VRA. The first level glass storefront walls should die into a low solid wall or base instead of going to grade. The materials proposed for the following elements are not noted in the submission materials: window heads and sills, the guard rail panels, the balcony floor structure, the low wall at the storefront, and the return walls in the balcony areas. The building details, while not noted or shown in the submission materials, should be compatible with other buildings in the VRA. While not specified in the Ordinance, staff suggests that the Nichiha fiber cement material in the non-street façades be changed to the same brick material used on the street facing façades or a large format unit masonry.
4. The proposed building has a flat roof which is compatible with other buildings in the VRA.
5. The rhythm of building masses and spaces created by the construction of the proposed building is compatible with the existing rhythm of masses and spaces within the VRA.

Because this building is a mixed use building (retail and residential) and zoned TSS, it is technically a commercial building and is located in a context of historically commercial buildings. The Third Lake Ridge Ordinance specifies standards for different zoning types: commercial buildings, residential buildings and employment buildings. Because this building is zoned for commercial use, the appropriate section of the Ordinance about properties zoned for commercial uses is discussed above. Because residential uses are also allowed in this zoning district, the residential standards for new construction are included above, but not discussed in detail.

## Recommendation

Staff believes the standards for granting the Certificate of Appropriateness for the demolition may be met and recommends that the Landmarks Commission approve the request contingent on the approval of the Certificate of Appropriateness for the new construction. If the Commission is not able to grant or deny the Certificate of Appropriateness for the demolition, the Commission shall request another 30 day extension of the determination period from the Applicant.

Staff believes the standards for granting the Certificate of Appropriateness for the new construction may be met and recommends that the Landmarks Commission approve the request with the following conditions of approval:

1. The Applicant shall bring material and color samples to the meeting for review. The material selections shall be determined by the discussion of the Commission or by the final review and approval of staff or at her discretion, the Landmarks Commission.
2. The Applicant shall confirm that the White Modular Masonry and the Dark Masonry Base materials are standard or queen brick sizes.
3. The brick material shall wrap onto the side elevations. The use of large format unit masonry may be acceptable on the east elevation that is concealed by the Olds Building. Staff strongly suggests that the building have brick masonry on four sides with minimal use of metal or fiber cement products as accents.

4. The design shall be modified as described in this staff report and discussed by the Landmarks Commission to be more compatible with buildings in the VRA.
5. The windows shall be grouped to regularize the appearance and make their treatment more compatible with other buildings in the VRA.
6. The windows of the 5<sup>th</sup> floor on the Blount Street elevation are taller than the windows on the other elevations and shall be changed to a consistent size and proportion.
7. The final elements shall be reviewed and finalized by staff or at her discretion, the Landmarks Commission.