



Project Name/Address: 906-910 Williamson

Application Type: Demolition of existing building and new development in historic district
(POSSIBLE RECONSIDERATION)

Legistar File ID # [37499](#)

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Date Prepared: July 1, 2015

Summary

Project Applicant/Contact: Randy Bruce

Requested Action: The Applicant is requesting a Certificates of Appropriateness for demolition and new development in a historic district.

Previous Actions:

This request was initially reviewed by the Landmarks Commission on April 27, 2015. At that meeting, the applicant requested referral to a future meeting. The proposal was reviewed by the Landmarks Commission on June 15, 2015 and the Commission denied the Certificate of Appropriateness for the demolition of the building at 906-910 Williamson. The applicant filed for an appeal of the Landmarks Commission denial on June 17, 2015. The appeal will be introduced on July 7, 2015 and will be before the Common Council on July 21, 2015. Alder Rummel requested that the Commission reconsider the previously made recommendation. Please refer to the Reconsideration Process on page 4.

Background Information

Parcel Location: The subject site is located on Williamson Street 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)(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)(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.

Analysis and Conclusion

This request requires two Certificates of Appropriateness from the Landmarks Commission. The first Certificate of Appropriateness relates to the demolition of the existing building. The second relates to the construction of the new development. The Visually Related Area map is attached to this report.

Demolition

A brief discussion of the demolition standards 33.19(5)(c)3 follows:

- 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 vernacular structures in the district, this structure represents vernacular working class housing intermixed with commercial structures along Williamson Street that establishes the historic character and significance of the historic district.
- b. The vernacular building contributes to the distinctive architectural and historic character of the historic district as a whole and therefore should be preserved for the benefit of the people of the City and the State;
- c. The Landmarks Commission is charged with protecting and enhancing the perpetuation of historic districts and the City's cultural heritage. The demolition of any period appropriate structure would be contrary to the purpose and intent of this Ordinance and the objectives of the preservation plan for the district. The Third Lake Ridge Historic District Plan states, "The Third Lake Ridge is a study in diversity, an agglomeration of many themes: ethnic settlement, railroad development, urbanization, civic improvement. Its architecture reflects this diversity of development and change."
- d. The existing building does not meet the intent of this standard, though it is a vernacular structure. The structure could be repaired or reconstructed using common materials and market rate costs.
- e. The building does not meet the intent of this standard. However, the general welfare of the public is promoted by the retention of the City's cultural resources and historic identity.
- f. A property owner in a historic district is charged with keeping their property in good repair. The intent of this provision is to maintain the building stock in good condition so that demolition by neglect cannot be used to damage the essence of the historic district. The current owner has owned the property since 1989. Given the recent submission of the home inspection and the cost estimate, it seems the applicant is claiming that the building condition is the reason for the demolition request. In the previous review, the applicant was only claiming that the maintenance issues may "be financially significant." (see discussion below.)
- g. The compatibility of the proposed new structure is discussed in more detail in the next section.

A home inspection is different than a condition assessment. The most common use of a home inspection is to provide a potential property owner with knowledge of all of the deficiencies and defects in the building and is often used to negotiate the terms of the sale. The home inspector does not necessarily have experience in historic preservation or construction methods. On the other hand, a condition assessment is an analysis of the condition of the systems of a building performed by professionals in the industry (historic preservation consultants, architects, engineers, etc.). The submission materials include a brief condition assessment report by architect Charles Quagliana. The condition assessment report is the preferred document to evaluate a historic building.

The cost estimate that was provided in the submission materials was based on the home inspection report and claims that "every building component has reached its useful life and is in desperate need of replacement." The cost estimate also indicates that the figures are based on the removal and replacement of all interior finishes and the replacement of all mechanical, plumbing and electrical systems. The cost estimate does not provide information about assumptions made or the scope of the work involved.

Every building requires maintenance. Routine maintenance and system upgrades are the responsibility of the property owner. Numerous houses of the same age as the existing building require maintenance and system upgrades. This situation is not unique to this existing building.

New Construction

If demolition is approved, please refer to the discussion of the standards for new construction 33.19(11)(f) that follows:

1. Any new structures shall be evaluated according to both of the criteria listed in Sec. 33.01(11)(d) which follow:
 1. The gross volume of the proposed development is mathematically larger than the gross volume of the majority of the other buildings in the visually related area; however, the massing of that volume has been visually reduced by changes in material and step backs which make the building's gross volume visually compatible with the buildings and environment within its visually related area.
 2. The actual height of the proposed development is taller than the actual height of the buildings in the immediate context and may be taller than the buildings in the visually related area; however, the building height varies related to the massing, step backs and material changes which makes the height visually compatible with the buildings and environment within its visually related area.
2. The rhythm of solids and voids in the Williamson Street facade of the new development is compatible with the buildings within its visually related area; however, the rhythm of solids and voids in the Paterson Street facade of the new development is not compatible. Aligning the windows of the western most portion of the Paterson Street facade would make the rhythm compatible.
3. The exterior materials of the proposed development will include cast stone base, brick, horizontal metal siding and vertical metal panels. The proposed street facade materials may be compatible with materials used in the buildings and environment within its visually related area; however, the material use could be simplified to be more compatible with the buildings in the visually related area.
4. The Applicant has previously explained that the curved roof elements speak to the Quonset hut/Trachte building curved roofs that existed in the industrial corridor, but those structures are not in the visually related area. A curved roof is a striking form that is not compatible with the flat and pitched roofs of the buildings in the visually related area.
5. The rhythm of building masses and spaces created by the new development is generally compatible with the existing rhythm of masses and spaces for those sites within its visually related area. The majority of the buildings in the visually related area have a smaller scale and establish a pattern of "building-space-building-space" that a larger building does not allow.

Recommendation

RECONSIDERATION PROCESS

According to MGO 33.01(9)(b), all boards, commissions, committees and subcommittees are obligated to follow MGO 2.21, and may not modify that rule. MGO 2.21 says:

2.21 RECONSIDERATION OF QUESTION.

It shall be in order for any member who voted in the affirmative on any question which was adopted, or for any member who voted in the negative when the number of affirmative votes was insufficient for adoption to move a reconsideration of such vote, at the same or next succeeding regular meeting of the Council. It shall be in order for any member who was, due to an excused absence, not present at the time the question was considered to move reconsideration of such vote at the next succeeding regular

meeting of the Council. A motion to reconsider having been lost shall not be again in order. A motion to reconsider shall not be in order when the same result can be obtained by another motion.

Alder Rummel requested that the Landmarks Commission reconsider this issue and the item has been placed on the agenda. The Landmarks Commission may take up the motion to reconsider by requesting a second and a vote. After an affirmative vote to reconsider, the item would be formally before the Commission for review. The Commission is able to take up the item at the current meeting or at a future meeting. If the vote on the motion to reconsider was not affirmative, the item would not be reconsidered and the recommendation from the June 15, 2015 meeting would remain the action of the Landmarks Commission on the item.

Revisions to the proposed project have not been submitted so the staff recommendation remains as previously stated.

Demolition

Staff believes that the standards for granting a Certificate of Appropriateness are not met and recommends that the Landmarks Commission deny the request for demolition.

New Construction

If the Landmarks Commission finds that the demolition standards are met, staff believes the standards for granting a Certificate of Appropriateness for the new development may be met and recommends approval with the following conditions of approval:

1. Align windows on Paterson Street façade (south elevation) and then follow that same design vocabulary to the west and north elevations.
2. Simplify the materials.
3. Remove the curved roof elements and provide new roof design for staff review.