



**Project Name & Address:** 817-821 Williamson Street

**Application Type(s):** Certificates of Appropriateness for demolition, new construction, and a land combination in the Third Lake Ridge historic district

**Legistar File ID #** [59708](#)

**Prepared By:** Heather Bailey, Preservation Planner, Planning Division

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## Summary

**Project Applicant/Contact:** Brandon Cook, John Fontain Realty

**Requested Action:** The Applicant is requesting that the Landmarks Commission approve Certificates of Appropriateness for the demolition of an existing commercial structure, construction of a new mixed-use structure, and a land combination.

## Background Information

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

### Relevant State Statute Section:

**Wisc SS 62.23(7)(em)2m.** In the repair or replacement of a property that is designated as a historic landmark or included within a historic district or neighborhood conservation district under this paragraph, a city shall allow an owner to use materials that are similar in design, color, scale, architectural appearance, and other visual qualities.

### Relevant Ordinance Sections:

- 41.18 STANDARDS FOR GRANTING A CERTIFICATE OF APPROPRIATENESS.** A certificate of appropriateness shall be granted only if the proposed project complies with this chapter, including all of the following standards that apply.
- (1) New construction or exterior alteration. The Landmarks Commission shall approve a certificate of appropriateness for exterior alteration or construction only if:
    - (a) In the case of exterior alteration to a designated landmark, the proposed work would meet the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation.
    - (b) In the case of exterior alteration or construction of a structure on a landmark site, the proposed work would meet the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation.
    - (c) In the case of exterior alteration or construction on any property located in a historic district, the proposed exterior alteration or construction meets the adopted standards and guidelines for that district.
    - (d) In the case of any exterior alteration or construction for which a certificate of appropriateness is required, the proposed work will not frustrate the public interest expressed in this ordinance for protecting, promoting, conserving, and using the City’s historic resources.
  - (2) Demolition or Removal. In determining whether to approve a certificate of appropriateness for any demolition or removal of any landmark or structure within a historic district, the Landmarks

Commission shall consider all of the following, and may give decisive weight to any or all of the following:

- (a) Whether the structure is of such architectural or historic significance that its demolition or removal would be detrimental to the public interest and contrary to the general welfare of the people of the City and the State.
- (b) Whether a landmark's designation has been rescinded.
- (c) Whether the structure, although not itself a landmark structure, contributes to the distinctive architectural or 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.
- (d) Whether demolition or removal of the subject property would be contrary to the policy and purpose of this ordinance and/or to the objectives of the historic preservation plan for the applicable historic district as duly adopted by the Common Council.
- (e) Whether the structure is of such old and unusual or uncommon design, method of construction, or material that it could not be reproduced or be reproduced only with great difficulty and/or expense.
- (f) Whether retention of the 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.
- (g) The condition of the property, provided that any deterioration of the property which is self-created or which is the result of a failure to maintain the property as required by this chapter cannot qualify as a basis for the issuance of a certificate of appropriateness for demolition or removal.
- (h) Whether any new structure proposed to be constructed or change in use proposed to be made is compatible with the historic resources of the historic district in which the subject property is located, or if outside a historic district, compatible with the mass and scale of buildings within two hundred (200) feet of the boundary of the landmark site.

Prior to approving a certificate of appropriateness for demolition, the Landmarks Commission may require the applicant to provide documentation of the structure. Documentation shall be in the form required by the Commission.

- (4) Land Divisions and Combinations. The commission shall approve a certificate of appropriateness for land divisions, combinations, and subdivision plats of landmark sites and properties in historic districts, unless it finds that the proposed lot sizes adversely impact the historic character or significance of a landmark, are incompatible with adjacent lot sizes, or fail to maintain the general lot size pattern of the historic district.

#### **41.23 THIRD LAKE RIDGE HISTORIC DISTRICT.**

- (6) Standards for New Structures in the Third Lake Ridge Historic District - Parcels Zoned for Mixed-Use and Commercial Use. Any new structures on parcels zoned for mixed-use and commercial use that are located within two hundred (200) feet of other historic resources shall be visually compatible with those historic resources in the following ways:
  - (a) Gross Volume.
  - (b) Height.
  - (c) The proportion and rhythm of solids to voids in the street facade(s).
  - (d) The materials used in the street facade(s).
  - (e) The design of the roof.
  - (f) The rhythm of buildings masses and spaces.

## Analysis and Conclusion

The applicant is requesting a Certificates of Appropriateness to demolish an existing commercial structure, resolve the underlying lot line for a land combination to create one lot, and construct a new three-story mixed-use structure. The existing building was constructed in 1966 for the Gilman Press and housed their shop. The single-story International-style brick building crosses the lot lines for 817 and 821 Williamson. The remainder of the existing lot contains a surface parking lot.

### Demolition

The narrative in the applicant's letter of interest details how they believe that they meet the criteria for demolition. The existing building is well outside of the period of significance for Third Lake Ridge. Both its architectural style and form are out of character with the historic resources in the district. Please see the March 16 staff report for a discussion of the demolition standards. Staff continues to believe that the request meets the demolition standards.

### Land Combination

While there were originally two buildings on this parcel (one on each lot), those were torn down due to their deteriorated condition in 1966 and 1978. The current building was constructed so that it crossed the lot line and the rest of the property functioned as a surface parking lot. The result is that the parcel has functioned as a single lot and the current proposal is more of a platting process to address an unresolved underlying lot line. Please see the March 16 staff report for a discussion of the land combination standards. Staff continues to believe that the request meets the land combination standards.

### New Structure

Prior to the March 16, 2020 staff report, the applicant requested that the application be put on hold so they could complete a neighborhood meeting. Based upon staff comments and community feedback, they have redesigned the proposed building by setting back on bays on either side of the central façade. This helps to mitigate the perceived mass of the building where previously the façade had been 61-feet in width whereas the widest historic resource in the vicinity was 30-feet wide. The central bay of the street façade is 41-feet 9-inches in width, which is still wider than the historic resources in the vicinity, but is more comparable. However, the southwestern bay on the façade is only set back two feet, which does not provide much of a visual separation. Staff would recommend maintaining the symmetry of the building by setting back the southwestern bay approximately 8-feet, which is the amount of setback on the northeastern bay.

At a full three stories, the building is taller than the historic resources within 200 feet, which are either two or two-and-a-half stories. The application contends that their building is of a similar height to the taller historic resources, however most of the taller historic resources are significantly set back from the front property line. However, the standard is about being visually compatible, not identical. At the corner of the block, the non-historic building at 803 Williamson St. is a three-story commercial building that comes up to the front of the property and is adjacent to a two-and-a-half story historic building. It is taller, but visually compatible:



Streetview of 803-811 Williamson Street illustrating a similar street façade height

The design of the façade is sympathetic to historic commercial resources in the vicinity both in its design and use of masonry. The symmetrical pattern of windows on the façade is in keeping with the pattern of the rhythm of solids and voids in the vicinity. There is a larger proportion of glass on the street level, which is in keeping with some of the historic commercial resources in the vicinity. Overall, the street façade uses a similar architectural vocabulary to historic resources within 200 feet while not creating a false sense of history.

A discussion of the relevant ordinance sections follows:

**41.23 THIRD LAKE RIDGE HISTORIC DISTRICT.**

- (6) Standards for New Structures in the Third Lake Ridge Historic District - Parcels Zoned for Mixed-Use and Commercial Use. Any new structures on parcels zoned for mixed-use and commercial use that are located within two hundred (200) feet of other historic resources shall be visually compatible with those historic resources in the following ways:
- (a) The application does not provide an analysis of the gross volume of the proposed building as compared to the gross volume of the historic resources within 200 feet. Most of the volume of the new building is nested into the back of the lot, which lessens the appearance of the volume on the street façade. The entrance to the garage in the back can read like a separate garage in the back of the lot, which is a feature of other historic resources in the vicinity. The historic commercial resources within 200 feet are approximately 30-feet in width. The front of the building is 61-feet wide with a 41-foot 9-inch wide central bay that comes up to the front property line. At 41'-9", the central bay of the building would be wider than the street facades of the historic resources, but could be visually compatible if the bays on either side of it are significantly set back. To assist with making the street façade compatible in terms of its perceived gross volume, it is critical to set back the southwestern bay from the currently proposed 2 feet to approximately 8 feet to be comparable to the setback on the northeastern bay.
  - (b) The height of the proposed building does not appear to have changed from the previous submission. By providing a substantial setback of the bays on either side of the central street façade, the height of the building could be visually compatible while not identical to the historic resources in the vicinity.
  - (c) The new design maintains a similar rhythm of solids and voids as found on historic resources in the vicinity.

- (d) The use of brick and cast stone on the street façade is in keeping with the historic resources in the vicinity.
- (e) The flat roof design with a simple parapet on the street façade is a form found on historic resources within 200’.
- (f) The other buildings that were originally designed to be commercial buildings are all located up against the front property line. They tend to have some space on the sides of the building to allow access to the rear of the principal structure, and then feature garages at the back of the property. While the current proposal is for one building, its configuration will read like a traditional commercial building occupying most of the front of the property, and a garage accessed from the side.

## **Recommendation**

Staff believes that the standards for granting Certificates of Appropriateness for the demolition and land combination are met and should be approved as proposed. Staff believes that the Certificate of Appropriateness for the new construction could be met and recommends that the Landmarks Commission approve the proposal with the following condition:

1. Setback the southwestern bay of the street façade to approximately 8 feet to be comparable with the setback of the northeastern bay.