



City of Madison

Meeting Minutes - Approved

LANDMARKS COMMISSION

City of Madison
Madison, WI 53703
www.cityofmadison.com

Wednesday, October 10, 2007

4:30 PM

215 Martin Luther King, Jr. Blvd.
Room LL-130 (Madison Municipal Building)

CALL TO ORDER/ROLL CALL

Present: 5 -

Brenda K. Konkel; Daniel J. Stephans; Robin M. Taylor; Randall A. Page
and Erica Fox Gehrig

Excused: 2 -

Stuart Levitan and Michael J. Rosenblum

Guests: Ms. Johanna Cannon, Mr. Lindsey Lee, Ms. Elizabeth Rosen, Ms. Carolyn
Freiwald, Mr. Gene Devitt, Ms. Ledell Zellers, Ms. Sharon Kilfoy, Mr. Todd Barnett

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

No minutes were submitted for approval.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

1. [06956](#) Amending Section 28.04(22) of the Madison General Ordinances to change various provisions of the ordinance regulating the demolition of buildings.

No revisions to the original draft were available for review yet, so a motion was made by Stephans, seconded by Konkel, to Rerefer to the next LANDMARKS COMMISSION meeting. The motion passed by voice vote/other.

NEW BUSINESS ITEMS

Public Hearing and Consideration of Issuance of Certificates of Appropriateness

2. [07658](#) 731 Williamson Street, Third Lake Ridge historic district - public hearing and consideration of issuance of Certificate of Appropriateness for demolition of existing single-family house and Certificate of Appropriateness for construction of new one

The Landmarks Commission considered the demolition of the existing house first. A motion was made by Stephans, seconded by Taylor the Landmarks Commission to Approve the issuance of a Certificate of Appropriateness for the demolition of the existing house. The motion passed 4 (Konkel, Page, Stephans, Taylor) to 1 (Gehrig).

A motion was made by Stephans, seconded by Gehrig, to Refer consideration of the Certificate of Appropriateness for the new construction to the next LANDMARKS COMMISSION meeting. The motion passed by voice vote/other.

Mr. Lee, one of the owners of the property, said that the current house on the site was assessed for \$2000. He said that he and his wife joked that it was over-assessed because it is in very poor condition. He noted that Ms. Rankin had said that no one in their right mind would try to rehabilitate this house. They intend to demolish it and build a modest single-family residence on the site. He noted that the house is currently five feet away from the adjacent building. The proposed foot print is actually smaller than the footprint of the existing house.

He noted that the existing house was built in two or three phases with lean-tos appended to the side wing. There is no basement or frost footings under the side wing. Mr. Stephans concurred with Mr. Lee's conclusion, saying that there is substantial deflection of the roof members, the roof itself was in very poor condition, and the house had been extensively modified on the interior.

Ms. Zellers, who is a downtown resident, spoke next. She said that she is greatly concerned about the precedence of demolishing houses in historic districts, saying that this project could be used as a rationale for demolishing other houses in historic districts. She said that owners often use the poor condition of existing houses as a basis for requesting demolition, but that any old building can be retained if the will is there, no matter what its existing condition.

Ms. Freiwald said that she lives on Williamson Street. She said that she had toured the house and it is clearly not in the best of shape, but it was one of the 20 oldest houses in Madison, and an entryway for the historic district. She noted the importance of the German immigrants who settled this area early on. She said that many people in the district had taken similar houses and rehabilitated them. She worried about the equity of requiring people who own other old houses in the district to comply with regulations regarding the proper roof material, railing design, etc. and then turning around and letting one of the old buildings be destroyed completely.

Mr. Devitt said he agreed with the previous two speakers. He said that he lives in Mansion Hill and noted that there are buildings being abused and even abandoned there, buildings that help make up the fabric of the neighborhood. He is also very worried about the precedent of allowing the demolition of a house in an historic district. He said that after one goes down, he was afraid that others would follow like dominoes.

Ms. Rosen, the second owner of the property, said that she loves old historic buildings but that the historic part of the house in question is 400 square feet, which would make it almost unusable for residential use. She said that she believed that the Landmarks Commission looks at the merits of each project individually and that this would not necessarily mean that the Landmarks Commission would have to permit other demolitions. She said that if they were to save the historic parts of the house, only the bargeboards and one interior door would remain of the historic fabric of the building.

Mr. Page read to the Commission the standards for demolition. He noted that the current house has been found to have defects that make it unfit for human occupation. He believes that it constitutes a menace to its occupants and perhaps the general population.

Mr. Lee replied that he and his wife had purchased the property last May. He said it had been lived in for about 25 years by a troubled older gentleman, who let the property

deteriorate. He noted that Dick Wagner, who owns other property in this block, said that it was not feasible to reuse. He said that this was not a case in which the applicant had demolished the building by neglect. The condition of the house is actually pulling down the value of neighboring houses. He urged the Commission not to go too far in requiring preservation or they might lose support for preservation.

Mr. Barnett, the architect, said that the house was in such bad condition that he didn't even want to spend much time in it. The floors were sagging, it needs new foundation underpinnings, siding, etc., etc., saying that by the time the building were rehabilitated there would be little of it left.

Mr. Stephans said that, in his opinion, the building would be eligible for condemnation by the City. Many of the additions and alterations had originally been done in less than craftsman-like fashion.

Mr. Devitt said that if the assessment is so low, it makes it more feasible to spend a fair amount of money on rehabilitation. He noted that every old building has replacement parts. He said that if buildings could be demolished because they had many replacement parts, probably most of the downtown could be demolished.

Ms. Cannon said that she had been to two neighborhood association board meetings at which this project was discussed. The board was careful to seriously consider the demolition because they generally agree that buildings should be preserved, but that the board was convinced that the building cannot be restored affordably. She said that the board was particularly happy to retain a young family and wants to attract more young homeowners to the neighborhood. The board was thinking about the bigger picture of wanting to encourage people of different ages and diversity, and economic growth. The board did not have a problem with the modern design, adding that the neighborhood does not want to see fake historic buildings in the district.

Ms. Taylor said that the building was an eyesore and has a large hole in its roof. There is nothing historic or architecturally significant about it. She said that the Commission looks at all demolition projects case-by-case. Mr. Page asked if they considered keeping the oldest part of the house, but Mr. Lee said that the only way to put a reasonably sized house on the property would be to make it multi-level. Ms. Rankin said that the upper floor of the oldest section probably would not meet code for ceiling heights. She added that she has been in many old buildings in the downtown and that she had never seen any that were in worse condition.

Mr. Stephans said that if the siding and plaster were removed there would be no house left, because the structure is so deteriorated. Saving the house would be creating a replica. The fact that the proposal is for a modest single-family house will help to ensure the retention of the small scale buildings in the immediate vicinity. Ms. Gehrig was still concerned about the equity of allowing a building to be torn down while requiring others to be preserved.

The Commission then discussed the proposed new house design. Ms. Rankin noted that her major concern was with the reverse pitched roof, which is very different from the gable and hipped roofs in the immediate part of the district. Mr. Lee said that if they use a flat roof, it would look too much like the commercial structures in the area. He said that he had considered other roof designs, but a gabled roof made it look too much like a doll house. He said that the butterfly roof was a reflection of what its going on in the interior. He said he was open to other ideas, although the butterfly roof was integral to the house design. Mr. Page expressed concern that the window design did not reflect the rhythm of

fenestration in the district.

Mr. Devitt said that the proposed design looked like it was from the 1970s or 1980s, a type that was actually an impetus that helped create the need for historic districts, specifically because people did not want to see that kind of design in the historic neighborhoods.

Mr. Lee said that he had received strong support from neighborhood residents. Ms. Cannon said that the MNA board had not really taken up the design for the proposed building and said when they did, she would report back to the Landmarks Commission. Ms. Gehrig said that it was important to have a new building fit in with its surroundings and this design did not fit in. Ms. Taylor said that she was sure a beautiful and functional modern house could be designed to weave into the old. She said the proposed design was almost a slap in the face to the other buildings in the neighborhood.

Mr. Stephans said that the proposal needs to have an alternate roof shape and he said he could think of several design solutions that would look more compatible. He said he would like to see something that looked like a gable, maybe incorporating the bargeboards into the new design. He also urged that something nice be done with the garage doors. Ms. Taylor urged the applicants to soften the design, using shapes reminiscent of neighboring structures. Mr. Page noted that it was not the Landmarks Commissions' place to design buildings for people, and suggested that the owners come back to the commission with some ideas for modification. Ms. Cannon said she totally understood where the Landmarks Commission was coming from but noted that part of the beauty of Williamson Street is its diversity. Ms. Gehrig said that she was afraid that after it was built residents of the district would wonder how that could have been approved.

3. [07659](#)

Williamson Street Park, 1002 Williamson Street, Third Lake Ridge Historic District - consideration of issuance of Certificate of Appropriateness for murals in park

A motion was made by Stephans, seconded by Taylor, to Approve a Certificate of Appropriateness for this project. The motion passed by voice vote/other.

Ms. Kilfoy, the artist for this project said that the mural would be about the history of arts on Williamson Street in the 1970s. The Greater Williamson Area Business Association had approved the project, as has the Marquette Neighborhood Association. The painting work will be coordinated by Ms. Kilfoy, and will be undertaken by members of the community.

Mr. Lee, treasurer for the Greater Williamson Business Association, said that there was a synergy of artists in the area in the 1970s and they didn't want that freedom of artistic expression to be lost.

Ms. Taylor said that these projects always involved many children in the neighborhood and the project was a great one on many levels. She said it would be a nice addition to the neighborhood. Mr. Page noted the great amount of neighborhood support for this project.

OTHER BUSINESS

4. Secretary's Report

None

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 7:15 p.m.