

MINUTES
CITY OF ST. CHARLES
HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION
SPECIAL MEETING
WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 28, 2018
COUNCIL COMMITTEE ROOM

Members Present: Chairman Norris, Pretz, Malay, Gibson, Kessler, Krahenbuhl, Smunt

Members Absent: None

Also Present: Russell Colby, Community Development Division Manager

1. Call to order

Chairman Norris called the meeting to order at 10:00 a.m.

2. Roll call

Mr. Colby called roll with seven members present. There was a quorum.

3. COA: 21 S. 4th St. (demolition and new house)

Zach Derrico, the builder, was present.

Mr. Colby summarized the COA proposal. The Commission previously reviewed an addition to the existing building, but at the last meeting, it was identified that the COA request would include demolition of the existing building. The Commission requested to visit the site to observe the condition of the structure.

Mr. Pretz: In taking a look at the building, I'm still going to support "no" to the demolition. However, these are the things that I see: there is a severe water damage situation based on the elevations; the existing damage down in the basement level; and the foundation, which to me, would have to be entirely replaced. The supporting structure in the basement is not original and also would need to have entire replacement. For the most part, the inside would be an entire gut because I do not see much to save. Those are all important, and normally, I would say yes, but I still can't because of the age of the home. My recommendation to the developer would be to repurpose or to at least save the following items in order to get them back in the market other than going in the dumpster. There are a number of doors that appear to be original; the stained glass window; the radiators; the outside corbels/supports; and then the one transom that is inside the house, that looks like it is original also. Flooring – no. The pine boards in the attic – yes and no; that could be too labor intensive. The built-in is 1920's but may be able to be repurposed.

Ms. Malay: After looking at everything, if we were sitting here looking at the difference between trying to save the house as a whole and tearing it down and building a new house, I'd say I've got some concerns. We're already looking at changing this house. There are a lot of issues. Structurally, at this point, I am going to say I'm in favor of demolition. When you're trying to build a new house and trying to keep that foundation, or any part of that house, it's going to be very detrimental. I do agree with Tom about the salvaging. I had said that you have some older windows that could be repurposed, as well as all the things that Tom mentioned. I definitely would bring that up. The wood floor is in pretty good shape too. You might actually make money off of that, just as a recommendation.

Dr. Smunt: I wanted to look at this in terms of significance because that's why we are here; to preserve the significance of the City's architectural history, or else support it through a contribution to its history. What is significant in the history of this building other than the fact that it's typical of the west side development of the 1890's and 1920's. It falls into that era of construction. It's a Queen Anne structure according to the survey, and I would say based upon the one exterior element that supports Queen Anne, it's the picture window on the east elevation. So other architectural items that are significant on the exterior are the picture window brackets, the art glass windows, and the second floor windows on the north elevation. They are original multi-light casements. Other than form, it could have been many other styles. There is very limited significant architecture left that we would classify as Queen Anne. The original architecture items on the interior which could be repurposed are the mortice locks and doorknobs; cabinet latches, all are salvageable and for repurpose; north second floor windows as mentioned earlier; most second floor four panel original doors and perhaps the radiators. Most windows and the siding is not original and not significant. I think there are structural liabilities, and an old boiler and pipes lined with asbestos. Water ingress through the stone basement walls obviously has been a problem throughout. I saw the house years ago before they covered this over. Beneath that plastic tarp is a deteriorated basement wall with severe loss of mortar and ingress and efflorescence. There were foundation cracks, significant foundation damage, so I see those as being liabilities to support keeping that foundation. If we were to do anything, regardless of whether we're going to support the COA or ask that the City Council deny a COA, I think we need to go back to the survey and change today, formally change it from a contributing to a non-contributing structure based upon its status today. After that's done, I would support the approval of his COA for both the demolition and for reconstruction.

Ms. Malay: We could make that recommendation now that we are saying that it is non-contributing. And then we can make a motion to do that and then vote on the COA. I don't think it has to be delayed.

Dr. Smunt: I want to make sure we make that statement. It would be very hard for me to support this building as contributing. The proposed new construction is going to be contributing. I think there's more of a negative impact on that structure the way it has been and the way it has been used as part business, part residential. I see this new construction as being a true contributing factor to the historic district.

Mr. Kessler: I'm always uncomfortable when we're talking about taking down a building. In the past when a building like this was going to be preserved, and the foundation, for example, really is mainly the issue that we're seeing here, they would lift the house and put a new foundation in and then set the house back down. Having said that, and given the process that we've gone through to this point where we know that there's going to be a new home there, so whatever part of that interior that is there now wouldn't be there anyway. We don't really have control over that. I would be a little more comfortable, especially in light of the talk of repurposing the materials. I think that's very important. I would not oppose the demolition, especially all the different factors that we're looking at. It's going to improve the neighborhood and the district. With regard to the changing of the status from contributing to non-contributing, when we were talking about the Judge Barry house, that was also non-contributing. We talked about changing the classification, but we have not yet. I'm just trying to balance our recent activities to make sure we're making fair decisions.

Mr. Krahenbuhl: I would agree that a lot of the architectural elements from the original are in very poor shape, or they are not very significant structural elements that stand out. I agree with what everyone is saying. I would approve the demolition and would like to see some of the original elements salvaged. There's a market out there for that. On changing the survey, right now the building condition is listed as excellent, well maintained. I think that could move to fair, with major repairs needed. In terms of contributing, I would probably want a little more feedback on what contributing means with regard to condition and age. I would agree with what Phil said about the Judge Barry house. If that's non-contributing and we're not approving demolition of that, it doesn't make a lot sense if this is contributing and to approve it.

Mr. Colby: This survey is an architectural survey so it looks at the architectural value of buildings in the historic district. It doesn't necessarily look at the historical significance, which was one of the main discussions of the Judge Barry house. Based on its current appearance, it perhaps could fall in the category of architecturally non-contributing, but there was history to the structure that would add significance. In looking at it from the standpoint of the architectural survey, what we look at isn't necessarily just the age of the building, but it's whether the building was constructed during a period of significance for the historic district, which this building was. Then we would look at what type of architectural style it was designed in as identified in the survey. Does it have contributing elements to that style based on the condition that it is in today? Dr. Smunt spoke to the fact that there are very few contributing features left on the building to support classifying it as contributing. We would say it still was constructed in the period of significance, but it's lacking elements to make it contributing.

Dr. Smunt: From the time of the survey where we had the original siding, that is now gone. Now we have an artificial siding so it's been devalued in terms of contributing or non-contributing. It's been pushed more towards non-contributing.

Mr. Krahenbuhl: With that I'd also like to say we talked about having a formal application and unfortunately, we weren't able to have the time to do the research as much as I would have liked on this house; who the owners were. As to his point, we haven't found anything significant in terms of the history.

Vice Chairman Gibson: Speaking specifically about history, I reviewed the History Museum records for properties in that area, both on Walnut and Fourth Street; there is no mention of that property specifically in any of the requests. I went back and looked at the directories back into the 1900's and I also looked back at some other histories for obituaries and things. I found a couple of names that related to it, including the name Frank Mitchell which I don't believe I have ever heard that name attached to anything. This stretch of street is the last bricked pavement that we have in St. Charles; that that makes that block unique. If you look at the house to the north, it's a beautiful old stone house. It's in good shape. It has a great wrap-around veranda. It really gives you a nice taste of the history of the place. Then you come to this house and it's essentially been stripped of almost all its details. It's been made less maintenance necessary so it's got a lot of vinyl and aluminum cladding on everything. I think it doesn't support the historic significance any longer. Something else we talked about before, the fact that we are required to look at this in terms of our inventory of homes that are available. If this was the last existing Queen Anne from the 1890's in this neighborhood, this would be a very significant house and I would have a hard time voting for it. As I've said about the Judge Barry house over and over, I believe the Judge Barry house is a story house connected to the history of St. Charles. I spent hours trying to find some bit of history about this house and it doesn't exist. It has not been landmarked and it was not inventoried to be landmarked. I think it's just one of a bunch of houses that were built in what was a very booming time for St. Charles in the 1890's. I would like to figure out how we can urge you to salvage important architectural features. If I was living in that neighborhood and was involved in history, I would worry those things are going to be lost. The house itself, your proposed house, will be much nicer than the house that is there now, but those details that are in that house are unique and need to be preserved.

Mr. Derrico: I'm sure the homeowner wouldn't have an issue with that. I just have to run it by them. I'm sure there are some things they may want to hang on to, but a lot of things you are making mention of, they would probably have no issue with giving away.

Mr. Pretz: I'm guessing something like the radiator, the current owners after they moved back into their house would probably say they really don't want those. Steve is saying there is going to be somebody, or maybe somebody in the neighborhood, who wants those. But there are some items you can incorporate like the stained glass, the front window supports, some of those smaller items are things that are part of the history of that home that the current owner may want to still keep because someday they will sell that house, and when they do, they can at least pass on the history.

Ms. Malay: Like the windows, there's a big demand for those divided light windows because there's a lot of art projects now done with pictures. They may even want to use those for a project.

Mr. Pretz: People are using the glass itself in repair of old windows. Not necessarily the whole frame, but they do salvage the wood also to do repairs.

Vice Chair Gibson: There was the stained glass transom over the front window, but there is also a cut glass transom over the window on Walnut too. That's all I would say. Having somebody

come in and say, “yes, I’ll use those wood posts, I’d love to have that trim board” or whatever that is. At least it’s been used again and not sitting in a landfill someplace.

Dr. Smunt: What if we talk to the history museum and find out if they would like to do a fundraiser, and open it up kind of like a citywide garage sale. Items have to be architectural, with a silent auction with proceeds to the museum.

Mr. Kessler: A number of years ago, the library cleared that block that’s next to them and they turned it into parking. I remember the four homes that they took down, they had sales. I don’t know who they got, but I could find out. I still have moldings from the little Queen Anne bungalow in my basement that I kept because I thought they were valuable.

Mr. Derrico: Are there are a couple of you that would like some of the items inside the house?

Mr. Kessler: Not personally. That would be a conflict for us.

Ms. Malay: We know there has been a demand for it and it’s good to see those elements get reused.

Vice Chairman Gibson: What we’re asking you do to is your best effort and I would encourage the Commissioners outside of here to contact you directly and help you with resources.

Mr. Derrico: If you want to give me the contact info for the persons you were describing that refurbish and repurpose some of that stuff, it would be helpful.

Vice Chairman Gibson: Would it then be something we can ask him to report back to Russ that he’s made that effort prior to the demolition?

Mr. Colby: The issue is, from the standpoint of the COA approval, all that can really be attached to the COA is whatever physical condition the building is going to be when the project is completed. So if we were going to ask him to re-use exterior elements of the building in the new building, that’s something we could condition, but we can’t necessarily condition that certain things be done with the materials because they are not related to the final product of the house. If that’s something that the builder is willing to do and is agreeable to reporting back that information we can ask that they do that, but we can’t necessarily tie that to the COA.

Dr. Smunt: Here’s the problem I see with any of those original elements, a few brackets that are on the Queen Anne picture window, they have been sandblasted. They’re not even in an acceptable condition. They have been damaged by a prior owner.

Vice Chairman Gibson: We can’t make any of this discussion about salvage materials conditional on the COA. If we decide it’s important stuff on the house that we don’t want to lose, we need to deny the COA. If we believe that’s not the case and we feel these things should be salvaged, that’s a different story. Russ says you can tell him that that happens. We can make that part of the record for this home; that this best effort is made. I think we determined the house

is not historical, certainly not publicly historical. There are certain places that we know that about, and sometimes as public as that is, it isn't obvious like the Judge Barry house. I think we did our due diligence to go back and look for that. The last part is this inventory of comparable architecture, and we're not now looking at getting rid of the last Queen Anne, even on that block.

Mr. Kessler: For other properties that have been taken down, how was that handled? I remember when the Piano Factory was taken down and the developer reused some of the materials. I don't think that was mandated and it's not the historic district anyway, but I think as a courtesy, did he bring in this to the Commission? Does anyone know?

Chairman Norris: No, that was old growth wood so he harvested all the beams. That's probably one of the only reasons why it came down is because the wood was so valuable. It was supply and demand. The wood had value. That's why they took the pain to take it apart and then load it up on a truck and sell it off.

Mr. Kessler: He wasn't mandated by the City or anybody to reuse it. He did it of his own volition. Have others that have come before this Commission done that? I'm just curious.

Vice Chairman Gibson: Before we take up the COA, do we need to take up the issue of contributing versus non-contributing? Is that appropriate to do at this meeting?

Mr. Colby: If based on what was observed, if the Commission is supportive of asking that the rating be changed, we can have a motion made to direct that to be brought to a future meeting. It's not a final action. The final action would be taken at a later meeting.

A motion was made by Ms. Malay and seconded by Dr. Smunt with a unanimous voice vote to reassess the Architectural Survey ratings for 21 S. 4th St. regarding reducing the rating to non-contributing and reducing the condition to fair, for the Commission to review and act on it at the next meeting.

A motion was made by Ms. Malay and seconded by Dr. Smunt with a 5-1 voice vote to approve the demolition of 21 S. 4th Street due to its condition and subject to the construction of the dwelling that is shown on the plans. Mr. Pretz voted no.

Mr. Pretz thanked Mr. Derrico for taking the time to give the Commissioners the opportunity to view the building.

4. Meeting Announcements: Historic Preservation Commission meeting Wednesday, March 7, 2018 at 7:00 P.M. in the Committee Room.

5. Public Comment

6. Adjournment

With no further business to discuss, the meeting adjourned at 10:36 a.m.