

Summary of March 25, 2019 Historic Landmark Commission Meeting regarding the request by owners for partial demolition of 607 Texas Avenue.

Due to interest in the above, here's a summary.

607 Texas Avenue

The home at 607 Texas Avenue was built in 1930. The current owner bought the house 2009. and has lived in it since purchase. Per City staff the house does not qualify for an individual landmark, though it would be considered a contributing structure to any future local historic district in the neighborhood. (A contributing structure “adds to the historical integrity or architectural qualities that make a historic district.”)

Summary of Historic Landmark Commission Hearing on Application for partial Demolition of 607 Texas Avenue.

Hancock Neighborhood attendees: Natalie Axe,
Coan Dillahunty, Merianne Gaston, Mary Sanger

Steve Sadowsky, the City's Landmark Historic
Preservation Officer, presented the case and staff
recommendation

As posted by the Landmark Commission:

“PROPOSAL FOR NEW CONSTRUCTION

The applicant proposes an addition to the first floor and the addition of a second floor to the house. The proposed addition will add 296 square feet to the first floor, 1,175 square feet to the second story, and 240 square feet of habitable attic space to the 1,218 square foot existing house. The proposed second story addition will be offset to the left of the house, and will contain a front-facing gable with paired 6:6 fenestration and a shed-dormer to the east (left). The area of the second story addition with the habitable space in the attic will be set further back and will be front-have a front-facing gable.

The materials proposed for the addition are brick, hardi-plank, and stucco. Some of the windows removed from the existing house will be re-used in the addition, particularly in the front-facing sections with brick veneer. Additional fenestration will be Marvin Integrity fiberglass windows divided lite casement and picture windows. The roof will have dimensional asphalt shingle.

STAFF COMMENTS

Staff has evaluated this house for designation as a historic landmark and has determined that the house does not meet the criteria for landmark designation as set forth in City Code:

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

The proposed addition is large and has the potential to overwhelm the original house. Staff recognizes that the house does not qualify as a historic landmark, but is completely intact now, and would definitely be contributing to a potential historic district in the neighborhood. Staff recommends scaling back the addition from

the front, so that the existing house retains a much higher degree of articulation in the proposed configuration, but release of the permit upon completion of a City of Austin Documentation Package, consisting of photographs of all elevations, a dimensioned sketch plan, and a narrative history, for archiving at the Austin History Center. “

In Favor, Object

The owners stated that they had done their best to preserve the architectural aspects of the house, including reuse of original materials and maintaining the full facade. They also stated

they had met with some neighbors over the weekend about their plan in advance of the hearing and listened to their concerns. The owners said they were supportive of a local historic district and had design standards been in place, they would have followed them, but since no standards existed, they did their best.

The homeowners' architect pointed out how the

original materials were to be re-used in the remodel, the window style were being preserved and the exterior finishes would match the historic style. He added that the addition would be "doing a favor to the neighborhood" by being a tasteful and well considered addition.

The neighbors then spoke in opposition to the request for partial demolition requesting a postponement in order for the owners to voluntarily meet with the Commission's Committee on Certificate of Appropriateness.

Natalie Axe spoke first, indicating that an LHD was in the process of being considered and that the house was an intact building from 1930 and would be a contributing structure* as it now stands and would be non-contributing after the partial demolition and proposed addition. She also presented the Commission with nine letters

from immediate neighbors, and one letter from a neighbor not within 500 ft, but greatly interested, all requesting the Commission to

postpone the partial demolition to give the owners time to meet on April 8th with the Commission's Review Committee on Appropriateness which could help the owners address staff recommendations as well as provide design changes that would allow the home to remain a contributing structure.

Coan Dillahunty stated he was a member of the Hancock Neighborhood LHD committee, he provided a quick overview on the committee's work to date and made the same points as Natalie, ultimately requesting that the case decision be deferred until it could be reviewed by the Landmark Commission's Appropriateness committee.

At some point during the back & forth between the Commissioners and Sadowsky, the latter pointed out Department of Interior standards are used when local standards have not been adopted.

In the hearing discussion, Sadowsky said he understood the Hancock Neighborhood was

currently in the process of researching a Local

Historic District designation and he was very supportive of that effort in that Hancock is one of the most intact historical neighborhoods. At the same time, however, this should not be the basis for the decision about the current case.

Commissioner Heismath pointed out this case is a prime example of why we need historic districts, explaining the Review Committee of Appropriateness had no jurisdiction in that the home is not considered a historic landmark and is not located in a local historic district.

There was a discussion among the Commissioners about whether the renovation would make this home a non-contributing structure . Commissioner Meyer explained that the height of the renovation and the front roof plane would not convey the home's history. Director Sadowsky, Commissioners Koch and Commissioner Emily Hibbs agreed. Moreover, Commissioner Kevin Koch, who is also the

architect of the Capitol Preservation Board, told the owners he thought a few tweaks to their plan would allow the home to remain a contributing structure. It was also explained that as a contributing property in a local historic district one is available for a tax abatement for seven years with certain conditions. (For more

information see tax exemption for local historic districts at AustinTexas.Gov)

Since no LHD is in place and the property is not eligible for landmark status, the Commissioners didn't think they had the authority to postpone the partial demolition request and require appearance before the Appropriateness Committee. Commissioner Koch made a motion approving the partial demolition based on the completion of the City's standard information packet. Importantly, the motion also recommended that the owners appear voluntarily before the Appropriateness Committee to get guidance on how the addition could be made in a way that wouldn't make the building necessarily

non-contributing, but that was only a non-binding recommendation. The motion passed. Commissioner Meyer once again encouraged the owners to come voluntarily to the Certificate of Appropriateness Review Committee.

Notification timing

The neighbors within 500 feet of 607 Texas Avenue received the mailed notice for a partial demolition on March 14th. The staff posted the renovation plan & its recommendation on March 21st, the hearing took place the following Monday, the 25th. The owners requested an

expedited hearing which possibly compressed the notification process. There is no requirement that an owner confer with the Neighborhood Association.

At the time of this writing, there is no information on whether the owners of 607 Texas Avenue have changed their renovation plans.

A recording of the hearing can be found by going to the March 25 meeting of the Austin Landmark Commission, You can skip directly to the 607 Texas Avenue case.

Summary prepared by Mary Sanger and a committee of editors. 3.29.2019