



Advocacy News

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By Kurt Stege, Advocacy Committee Co-Chair

Infill Project Proposed for a Mansion Hill Historic District Site on East Gorham Street

The 124 E. Gorham St. address is conveniently located in downtown Madison and about 80% of the lot is currently being used for surface parking. But it also contains one of Madison's relatively few remaining carriage houses, is adjacent to a City Landmark, and was built during the period of significance in the first historic district recognized by Madison. What is your opinion of an appropriate structure to be added to the lot?



The Lake Mendota side of the 100 block of East Gorham Street contains a large area used for surface parking. At the very back of that lot sits a carriage house that was built for the stately 1863 Timothy and Elizabeth Brown House, which sits on the adjoining lot to the left of the photo. On the adjoining lot to the right is the 1885 Frank (son of Timothy) and Minnie Brown House. The carriage house and both Brown homes are part of the local Mansion Hill Historic District. The 1863 home also holds the distinction of being the 12th local landmark designated by the City of Madison. On May 19, the Landmarks Commission is scheduled to consider a proposal to add a new building in front of the carriage house. Photo by Kurt Stege.

The Landmarks Commission is now facing that question in light of [a revised application](#) to combine the carriage house lot with the adjacent lot containing the 1863 landmarked home, to move the carriage house a bit, and then to build a new structure with approximately 25 housing units on four floors (with possibly two in the carriage house) and two levels of parking. Page 32 of the application (which is marked as page 27 in the bottom right corner) shows an aerial view of the proposed

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building nestled between the landmarked 1863 Timothy and Elizabeth Brown House (variously identified as 112 or 116 E. Gorham St.) and the 1885 Frank and Minnie Brown House (at 130 E. Gorham St.).¹ All of the documents that have been formally submitted regarding the proposal are found in [Legistar File 87103](#).

The developer for the proposal, Apex Real Estate Holdings, LLC, already provided an “informational presentation” to the members of the Landmarks Commission on March 1. That March presentation was an effort to obtain the commissioners’ feedback with respect to what was being considered at that time.

The Madison Trust for Historic Preservation has begun its review of the current proposal and is assembling material to present to its Board of Trustees before the Madison Trust asserts a formal position.

What do you feel would be a reasonable result for the Landmarks Commission to reach?

Madison’s Preservation Planner has already identified the applicable standards to be applied by the Landmarks Commission in its review:²

A. If the lot at 124 E. Gorham St. (the carriage house) is not combined with the lot at 116 E. Gorham St. (the Timothy and Elizabeth Brown House), a new residential structure at the front of the carriage house lot “would have to comply with Historic District Standards and [obtain a] review for [a] Development Adjacent to a Landmark.” The latter provision is found in Sec. 28.144, Madison General Ordinances:

Any development on a zoning lot adjoining a landmark or landmark site for which Plan Commission or Urban Design Commission review is required shall be reviewed by the Landmark Commission to determine whether the proposed development is so large or visually intrusive as to adversely affect the historic character and integrity of the adjoining landmark or landmark site. Landmark Commission review shall be advisory to the Plan Commission and the Urban Design Commission.

The lengthy Historic District Standards (more specifically, the “Standards for New Structures”) are found in [Sec. 41.27, MGO](#).

B. If the lot at 124 E. Gorham St. (the carriage house) is combined with the lot at 116 E. Gorham St., the Landmarks Commission would have to issue a Certificate of Appropriateness (CoA) for land combination as provided in Sec. 41.18(4), MGO:

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¹ Due to copyright constraints and the nature of the subject matter, I am not in a position to pull out specific images from the revised application. I encourage you to use the preceding link to take at least a brief look at the renderings produced by the architecture firm.

² In preparation for that meeting, the city’s Preservation Planner generated a [staff report](#) providing some background to the proposal as well as setting forth some of the relevant ordinances that applied.

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.

In addition, the new residential construction at the front of the carriage house lot would have to comply with Sec. 41.18(1), MGO, in order for the Landmarks Commission to issue a CoA for that structure:

New Construction or Exterior Alteration. The Landmarks Commission shall approve a certificate of appropriateness for exterior alteration or construction only if: . . .

(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.

The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation read as follows:

1. A property will be used as it was historically or be given a new use that requires minimal change to its distinctive materials, features, spaces and spatial relationships.
2. The historic character of a property will be retained and preserved. The removal of distinctive materials or alteration of features, spaces and spatial relationships that characterize a property will be avoided.
3. Each property will be recognized as a physical record of its time, place and use. Changes that create a false sense of historical development, such as adding conjectural features or elements from other historic properties, will not be undertaken.
4. Changes to a property that have acquired historic significance in their own right will be retained and preserved.
5. Distinctive materials, features, finishes, and construction techniques or examples of craftsmanship that characterize a property will be preserved.
6. Deteriorated historic features will be repaired rather than replaced. Where the severity of deterioration requires replacement of a distinctive feature, the new feature will match the old in design, color, texture and, where possible, materials. Replacement of missing features will be substantiated by documentary and physical evidence.
7. Chemical or physical treatments, if appropriate, will be undertaken using the gentlest means possible. Treatments that cause damage to historic materials will not be used.

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8. Archeological resources will be protected and preserved in place. If such resources must be disturbed, mitigation measures will be undertaken.
9. New additions, exterior alterations, or related new construction will not destroy historic materials, features, and spatial relationships that characterize the property. The new work will be differentiated from the old and will be compatible with the historic materials, features, size, scale and proportion, and massing to protect the integrity of the property and its environment.
10. New additions and adjacent or related new construction will be undertaken in such a manner that, if removed in the future, the essential form and integrity of the historic property and its environment would be unimpaired.



Of course, there is more to check out for those readers who wish to do so.

In 2024, the Landmarks Commission adopted [Illustrated Design Guidelines for Historic Districts](#).

[Madison's Downtown Plan](#) includes segments regarding historic resources (p. 89) and Mansion Hill (p. 59)

In 2012, the Landmarks Commission considered (and approved!) a proposal to move a historic structure from elsewhere in Madison onto the front of the lot containing the carriage house at 124 E. Gorham St. After receiving approval, the proposal was withdrawn. It would have looked like this:



Used with permission from Bruce Bosben.

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