

Mr Steve Sadowski
City of Austin
Austin, Texas 78701

January 15th, 2019

Re: Existing building conditions report – 1808 West 6th Street

Dear Mr. Sadowski:

Per your request, between January 10th and 14th I conducted an extensive review and inspection of 1808 West 6th Street to assess its condition and character. I have been a neighbor to this property since 1990 and am quite familiar with it, and much of what has been done to it over the past three decades. The follow are my professional observations, both based on my personal visits, as well as upon interviews with the past building owners – including the current building owner.

I. Foundation and Structural Frame:

See separate Structural Engineers Report

II. Exterior Building Envelope:

The one-story wood-framed, wood-siding clad building is an unremarkable example of Craftsman Bungalow styling made popular by magazines around the turn of the nineteenth century. The building shows signs of at least four areas of modification from the original construction and inconsistencies with the original design.

The small rear porch was closed in to create a utility room, the front entry vestibule was originally exterior space off the front porch, the rear bedroom was expanded by approximately four feet towards the alley, and the larger porch facing W 6th Street was added and later closed in to make a sunroom.

A poorly constructed wooden deck was later added off the sunroom and was rebuilt several years ago by the current owner out of safety concerns for its structural integrity.

A hodge-podge of windows added over time show inconsistency with Craftsman bungalow styling and differ in pattern from each other with divided lite over single lite in the original construction, then divided lite over divided lite and single lite over single lite resulting from various remodels and additions. Numerous areas of replacement glass are not of the original “float-glass” type common to the original period of construction.

Some previously installed windows have been boarded up with plywood on the exterior and painted over, with wallboard installed on the inside, apparently without proper insulation, caulk and sealant. None of the windows were installed with modern moisture barriers around the perimeter framing and sheathing, and all offer extremely poor insulation qualities and weather tightness.

The front door, atypical for the architectural style, is a bastard dimension and is not believed to be original to the house. A carved wooden embellishment was added over the front door by a prior owner-antique dealer. Door hardware and deadbolt are of different finishes and design styles. The strike bolt of both the deadbolt and front entry-set barely fit into their respective receivers thereby providing minimal security at this opening.

The double doors leading from the added sunroom to the wooden deck were added by the prior owner and show signs of poor-quality installation and repair. The carved wooden panels are damaged on one door and a plywood panel has been haphazardly installed to keep the elements out. There is no threshold or weather stripping and drafts of wind and rain enter the space from openings around the poorly-fitting doors. The door hardware does not function correctly, and a surface hasp with padlock secures the doors from the inside creating a code violation and safety concern for fire escape.

The original wood shingle roof was replaced years ago with asbestos-containing asphalt shingles, and recently replaced with modern composition shingles by the current owner. Attic ventilation is provided by mismatched gable louvers added over time, and by "air hawks" installed by the current owner when the roof was replaced several years ago.

The exterior of the house is clad in wood siding, with original materials being of 2-step horizontal pine clapboard. However, there are several other patterns present from prior remodels and additions that are inconsistent with the original siding pattern and design. Lead based paint was used in the original construction and all remodels and additions.

The original wood-burning fireplace presents a fire hazard owing to the fact that it does not include an internal damper and the flue lining and firebox are not constructed of fire brick or fire clay. Many of the bricks forming the firebox are loose and have fractured and disintegrated over time due to intense heat.

The building lacks sidewall and underfloor thermal insulation, and the attic has been improperly insulated with a thin layer of blown-in insulation.

III. Interior Finishes:

Drywall wallboard was poorly installed over original wood clapboard framing in many areas, and over new balloon-type stud framing in areas of remodel and addition. The drywall bedding and texture materials show signs of containing asbestos particles. Lead-based paint was used on the interior as well as the exterior.

The interior trim carpentry, doors and cabinetry are a mixture of architectural styles and patterns. The doors and windows are not consistently trimmed in detail or materials. The doors include original two-panel styling with original door hardware, but various remodels and additions include louvered and raised panel style units inconsistent with Craftsman styling.

The living and dining rooms include average examples of Craftsman style boxed-beams, plinths, and built-in cabinetry as room dividers. However, the four Doric-styled round wooden columns and related architrave elements at the remodeled entry and sunroom were added by the prior owner and are out-of-character with Craftsman styling.

Carved mirror frames at the rear bathroom were not original to the house and were added by the antiques dealer. The built-in bookshelves in the rear bedroom were added during the 1970's and the adjustable shelf hardware is out-of-character with the original Craftsman style.

The kitchen cabinets are crudely constructed and date from the original construction, as do those cabinets in the added laundry room.

Door and cabinet hardware vary from original to modern in terms of style and finish, giving off a mismatched and less than remarkable appearance.

Three different types, styles and species of wood flooring are present. The sunroom oak plank flooring was not properly installed over sub-flooring and was instead nailed directly to the floor joists. Daylight can be seen between the joints. This ¾' thick wood material was not designed to span between floor joists and therefore constitutes a threat to life safety. Signs of prior termite infestations have rendered many areas of the flooring unsightly. The parquet floor at the entry was not common to the style or period, and the pine plank flooring at the kitchen was previously covered with asbestos-containing linoleum.

IV. MEP Systems:

The original heating system was replaced several times over the years and currently includes two central air conditioning systems. The ducts are not properly insulated and the electrical power wiring to the units does not meet electric code.

The plumbing system has also evolved over time, with all of the plumbing piping having been replaced over time with a mixture of materials, none according to plumbing code. Irrigation piping was used as potable water piping in places, and P-traps and vents are substandard throughout. Clay and cast-iron sewer pipes were replaced with PVC piping that show signs of code deviations.

The electrical wiring system is also non-compliant with code in practically every area of design. Breaker panels and breakers, branch circuit wiring and 220V power wiring and lighting all show signs of poor quality installation and repair.

V. Conclusion:

The cost to remove and replace all the defective and non-code compliant elements coupled with the removal and replacement of non-Craftsman styled components, both exterior and interior, will greatly exceed the resulting value of the property upon completion of such work. Demolition and removal are warranted in this situation.

Warmest Regards,

Peter L. Pfeiffer, FAIA

As President & Founding Principal

Barley | Pfeiffer Architecture

(a Texas Corporation)