

HISTORIC LANDMARK COMMISSION
APPLICATION FOR A CERTIFICATE OF APPROPRIATENESS
JULY 27, 2020
C14H-1996-0003
BARTHOLOMEW-ROBINSON BUILDING
1415 LAVACA STREET

PROPOSAL

Construct a mid-rise addition to the building.

PROJECT SPECIFICATIONS

The applicant proposes to construct a mid-rise hotel addition to the building, which has been rendered untenable by long-standing sewerage and drainage problems. The proposed addition will rise from within the existing walls of the building, and will have 10 stories of hotel rooms above a 24-foot tall glass-clad story that will house hotel meeting rooms and amenities. The total height of the building will be 149 feet.

The base of the addition, clad in glass, will be set back 10 feet from the existing parapet wall of the historic structure on the Lavaca Street frontage and 14 feet behind the 15th Street frontage of the building. The remainder of the addition will be cantilevered out over the walls of the existing building; the bottom of the cantilevered section will be 8 feet above the existing mansard cupolas. The main entrance to the building will be located at the historic entrance location at the corner of 15th and Lavaca Streets. None of the windows or doors on the existing building will be modified.

The walls of the addition will present as white and light gray.

STANDARDS FOR REVIEW

The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation are used to evaluate projects on historic landmarks. The following standards apply to the proposed project:

- 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.*

Evaluation: The building has historically had a commercial use, most recently offices. The change of use to a hotel necessitates the construction of the proposed addition. The existing historic walls, openings, and distinctive mansard turrets on the corners of the original part of the building will be retained but will be visually impacted by the size and scale of an addition that does not meet Standard 9. Thus, the project also does not meet Standard 1.

- 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.*

Evaluation: The existing building will be retained. The addition will be built inside the existing walls.

- 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.*

Evaluation: No changes proposed for this building will convey a false sense of historical development.

- 4) *Changes to a property that have acquired historic significance in their own right will be retained and preserved.*

Evaluation: The historic aspects of this building will remain.

- 5) *Distinctive materials, features, finishes, and construction techniques or examples of craftsmanship that characterize a property will be preserved.*

Evaluation: This proposal does not affect the historic architectural features of the building.

- 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.*

Evaluation: The proposed project will add a mid-rise hotel to the one-story building. Guidance from the National Park Service in *Interpreting the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation Bulletin No. 47: Rooftop Additions on Mid-Size Historic Buildings* is relevant to consider in this case. The bulletin states that rooftop additions generally are not appropriate for buildings under three stories, and additions to mid-rise buildings usually should be one-story or less to minimize visibility. The proposed addition is not compatible with the size and scale of the historic building and does not meet Standard 9.

The Commission has shown some willingness with prior projects to consider large-scale additions to historic buildings in the central business district, given the surrounding context of mid- and high-rise buildings. If permitted, the design goal of such projects should be to minimize the visual impact of the addition through setbacks and other design choices, such that the addition recedes and the landmark retains its prominence. This addition has been designed to provide some space between the existing building and the addition, both in terms of setbacks from the existing walls and height above the mansard turrets that distinguish this building. However, these setbacks are modest. The second floor of the tower is set back 10 feet from the Lavaca Street façade and approximately 14 feet from the 15th Street façade. At a height of only 8 feet above the 31-foot-tall turrets, cantilevers extend close to the front plane of each historic façade. The proposed addition towers above and overwhelms the historic architecture.

The maximum height of the building is constrained by its zoning, and applicants have indicated the proposed building size accommodates the number of rooms needed to make the project financially viable.

- 10) *New additions and adjacent or related 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.*

Evaluation: While the building has been previously gutted, the proposed project would likely damage the existing historic building if it were to be removed in the future.

The project does not meet Standards 1, 9, or 10.

COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS

The Committee does not favor the construction of mid- or high-rise additions to historic landmark buildings in general, but did express appreciation for the changes in design presented to the Committee over the course of several meetings. The Committee members

noted that the addition still seemed crowded against and above the turrets. They also felt the light colors for the building were distracting.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Refer the case back to the Certificate of Appropriateness Review Committee for further deliberations regarding the scale of the addition, its relation to the historic building and ways to diminish the visual impact of the addition on the historic building. Staff very much shares the concerns of the Commission for the integrity of our historic landmark buildings to be protected from large vertical additions. This addition does not meet the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation.

However, staff also recognizes that this building in particular suffers from unique conditions that are not present in other projects. This building has been gutted, and the south one-third of the building has been used as a parking lot with no roof and no windows in the window openings for many years. The building's owner was forced to vacate the building due to long-standing plumbing and sewer line issues. Plainly stated, this building, in its current condition, would be extremely difficult and costly to renovate and return to economic viability. The current proposal preserves the historic walls and distinctive architectural features of the building. The proposed hotel will offer the resources to preserve this building, which might otherwise further deteriorate.



SUBJECT TRACT



PENDING CASE



ZONING BOUNDARY

NOTIFICATIONS

Location: 1415 Lavaca Street

1" = 173'

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