

HISTORIC LANDMARK COMMISSION
PERMITS IN NATIONAL REGISTER HISTORIC DISTRICTS
JUNE 28, 2021
HR-2021-083636
WILLOW-SPENCE NATIONAL REGISTER HISTORIC DISTRICT
902 SPENCE STREET

PROPOSAL

Construct a two-story rear addition to a one-story frame house.

PROJECT SPECIFICATIONS AND DESIGN CONSIDERATIONS

The existing house is a one-story, rectangular-plan, pyramidal-roofed-frame house with a partial-width inset porch. The applicant proposes to construct a two-story, pyramidal-roof rear addition with a combination of vertical metal panels and horizontal wood siding and a composition shingle roof. The addition will have an inset balcony on the back of the structure; it will be supported on steel posts.

The Willow-Spence National Register Historic District does not have specific design guidelines for new additions to contributing buildings, but the City has developed a uniform set of design guidelines for projects such as this:

RA1.1 Locate additions to the rear and sides of historic buildings to minimize visual impact. *The project complies.*

RA1.3 If an addition adds a story to the historic building, set it back from the front wall to minimize visual impact. *The project complies.*

RA1.5: Minimize the loss of historic fabric by connecting additions to the existing building through the least possible invasive location and means. *Staff recommends consideration of this standard to minimize the loss of historic fabric.*

RA2.1 Design an addition to complement the scale and massing of the building, including height. The addition must appear subordinate to the historic building. *The proposed addition is two stories on a one-story house but complements the scale and massing of the existing house.*

RA2.2 Minimize the appearance of the addition from the street faced by the historic building's front wall. *The project complies.*

RA3.1 Design additions to be compatible with and differentiated from the historic building, if they are visible from the street. Design proportions and patterns such as window-to-wall area ratios, floor-to-floor heights, fenestration patterns, and bay divisions to increase compatibility. *The proposed addition uses the form of the existing house as a guide but then uses a blank front wall which is out of character with the contributing buildings in the neighborhood and district.*

RA3.2 No particular architectural style is required for addition design. Designs in both traditional and contemporary styles can successfully achieve compatibility and differentiation with historic buildings. *The proposed addition is compatible in its style with the existing building, but the use of vertical metal panels is at odds with the character of the neighborhood.*

RA4.1 If an addition will be visible from a street on the front or side, design its roof form and slope to complement the roof on the historic building. *The project complies.*

RA4.2 Use roof materials that match or have similar color, texture, and other visual qualities as the roof on the historic building. *The project complies.*

RA5.1 If an addition will be visible from a street on the front or side, use exterior wall materials that are compatible with those on the historic building, as well as with the character of the district, in scale, type, material, size, finish, and texture. *This is the aspect of the proposal that deviates significantly from the design standards in the use of vertical metal panels as the siding material of the addition.*

RA5.3 Avoid windowless walls facing a street, unless such walls are a character defining feature of the historic building. *The proposed addition has an almost blank wall facing the street.*

RESEARCH

The ca. 1925 house at 902 Spence Street has been a rental property for the vast majority of its existence. There has been a very high turnover of tenants over the years, with very few tenants staying in this house for more than two or three years.

The tenants have included a ladderman for the Austin Fire Department, an insurance agent, a chauffeur, a barber, a warehouse worker, and a driver. Occupancy of this house changed from Anglo to Hispanic in the early 1970s, but other than that demographic change, which typified this neighborhood, there does not appear to be anything that sets this house apart as a historic landmark, despite the recommendation in the East Austin Survey for landmark designation.

STAFF COMMENTS

The East Austin Historic Resources Survey (2016) recommends the house as individually eligible as a local historic landmark and on the National Register of Historic Places. The house is currently contributing to the Willow-Spence National Register Historic District. Staff acknowledges that the house is contributing to the Willow-Spence National Register Historic District and would be contributing to any local historic district in this neighborhood, but does not agree that the house qualifies as a city historic landmark or as individually eligible for the National Register of Historic Places. Therefore, the Commission's review of this proposed addition should be advisory in nature and not under the standards for an existing or potential landmark.

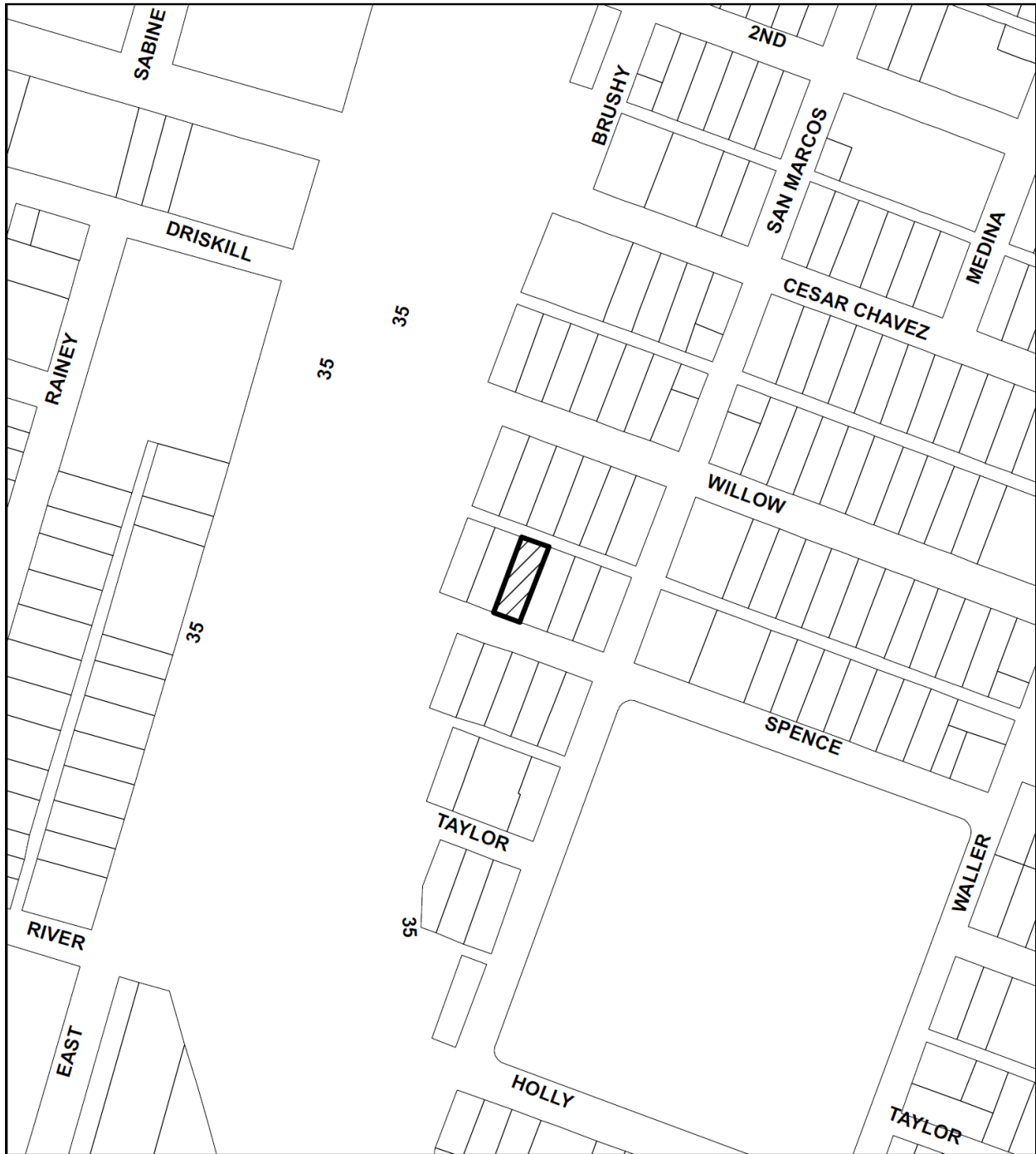
Designation Criteria—Historic Landmark

- 1) The building is more than 50 years old.
- 2) The building retains a high degree of integrity
- 3) Properties must meet two criteria for landmark designation (LDC §25-2-352). Staff has evaluated the property and determined that it does not meet two criteria:
 - a. *Architecture*. The building is a fairly common vernacular working-class housing type in East Austin; this house does not stand apart from others of this type to the degree that it conveys architectural significance.
 - b. *Historical association*. The property was a rental property for the vast majority of its existence with a high turnover of tenants; there are no significant historical associations apparent.
 - c. *Archaeology*. The property was not evaluated for its potential to yield significant data concerning the human history or prehistory of the region.
 - d. *Community value*. The property does not possess a unique location, physical characteristic, or significant feature that contributes to the character, image, or cultural identity of the city, the neighborhood, or a particular demographic group.
 - e. *Landscape feature*. The property is not a significant natural or designed landscape with artistic, aesthetic, cultural, or historical value to the city.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Encourage the applicant to reconsider some design options for the addition. The use of vertical metal panels for the siding of the addition appears to be out of character with the contributing buildings of the historic district; while staff recognizes the potential for weathered metal to fit in with the district, it is not a traditional material, and perhaps should be used as an accent material rather than the predominant material that will make a definite visual impact: board and batten or vertical wood or cementitious fiber siding rather than the metal panels are more appropriate choices in this neighborhood. Further encourage the applicant to consider more fenestration or other details to break up the blank wall on the front of the addition, using the fenestration patterns on the contributing houses in the historic district as a guide. The back of this house does not appear to have any real reason for preservation, but better practice would be to separate the addition from the existing contributing house and connect the two with a breezeway or other connection that would require less removal of historic fabric. With these recommendations, particularly the recommendation to replace the metal panels with wood or wood-like siding, staff can recommend approval of this application and 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 of the house to be archived at the Austin History Center.

LOCATION MAP



1" = 208'



SUBJECT TRACT



PENDING CASE



ZONING BOUNDARY

NOTIFICATIONS

CASE#: HR 21-083636

LOCATION: 902 SPENCE STREET

This product is for informational purposes and may not have been prepared for or be suitable for legal, engineering, or surveying purposes. It does not represent an on-the-ground survey and represents only the approximate relative location of property boundaries.

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PROPERTY INFORMATION

902 Spence Street
ca. 1925



OCCUPANCY HISTORY
902 Spence Street

City Directory Research, Austin History Center
By City Historic Preservation Office
January, 2013

1992	Casados and Maria Estrada, renters No occupation listed
1985-86	Cruz and Ofelia Castillo, renters No occupation listed NOTE: The directory indicates that Cruz and Ofelia Castillo were new residents at this address.
1981	Gilbert J. and Mary H. Sanchez, renters Employed by Houston Instruments (not listed in the directory).
1977	Gilbert J. and Mary H. Sanchez, renters Employed by Riley Staplemann (not listed in the directory).
1973	Gilbert J. and Mary H. Sanchez, owners No occupation listed

NOTE: The directory indicates that Gilbert and Mary Sanchez were new residents at this address.

1969	Louis and Theresa Coy, renters Driver, Chem-Products, 2500 Rutland Drive.
1962	Robert C. and Catherine Davis, renters Laborer, public schools
1958	Cecil R. and Belle McDonald, renters Driver, City Parks Department
1954	C.R. and Belle McDonald, renters Driver, City Parks Department
1952	Wiley and Ada Nichols, renters Foreman, Austin Fireproof Warehouse, 3 rd and Trinity Streets.
1949	Wiley and Ada Nichols, renters Driver, Austin Fireproof Warehouse, 3 rd and Trinity Streets.
1947	Wiley and Ada M. Nichols, renters Van operator, Austin Fireproof Warehouse, 3 rd and Trinity Streets.
1944-45	Wiley and Ada Nichols, renters Van operator, Austin Fireproof Warehouse, 3 rd and Trinity Streets.
1941	Melvin O. and Mary G. Speir, renters Barber, Driskill Barber Shop, 604 Brazos Street.
1939	Melvin O. and Mary Speir, renters Barber, Driskill Barber Shop, 604 Brazos Street
	William D. and Louise Adams, renters No occupation listed
1937	Melvin O and Mary M. Speir, renters Barber, Driskill Hotel Barber Shop, 604 Brazos Street.
	William D. and Louise Adams, renters Chauffeur
1935	Joseph L. and Lula Stegall, renters No occupation listed
1932-33	Allen S. and Maude Dow, renters Foreman, Bert Haston Body Works, South Congress Avenue at Barton Springs Road. NOTE: The address is listed as 812 Spence Street.
1930-31	B. Hugh and Dee Brinkley, renters Ladderman, Austin Fire Department NOTE: The address is listed as 812 Spence Street. NOTE: In 1929, B. Hugh and Dee Brinkley were living at 907 E. 9 th Street; he was a ladderman for the Austin Fire Department.
1929	Guy and Mary Campbell, renters

Agent, National Life and Accident Insurance Company, 719-21 Scarbrough Building.
NOTE: The address is listed as 812 Spence Street.

1927 S. Anthony and Etta Graham, renters
Foreman
NOTE: The address is listed as 812 Spence Street.

1924 The address is not listed in the directory.