

SUBJECT: 628 C Street Demolition and New Construction

TO: City of Davis Planning Commission

October 7, 2019

I submit my comments on this matter in writing as I am unable to attend the Planning Commission's public hearing on October 9.

As both the Historical Resources Management Commission and city staff found, the proposed new construction at 628 C Street appears consistent with the design guidelines for the Old North neighborhood. With one minor comment on the new home's design, I agree with that determination and see the project as a positive for our neighborhood. However, I do have significant concerns about the review process for the project.

Comment on the Project Design

The HRMC provided valuable input on the project's compatibility with the DDTRN Design Guidelines. As the HRMC minutes indicated (in Attachment 4 of the staff report), the Commission recommended elimination of the Cache Creek Cobblestone material proposed for the front porch and fire place. Staff indicated to me in a conversation that the applicant would be substituting brick or brick veneer.

I seek clarification of this item as I do not see revised elevations or a new condition of approval specifying this requirement in the staff report.

Comments on the Demolition Review Process

I reiterate that I support the project but at the same time believe in protecting the integrity of the review process for demolitions and new construction in our neighborhood. The review process is important as it provides full disclosure of construction proposals and an opportunity for comment from all interested parties. In this case, the process has been less than ideal as the extent of the original demolition proposal was not made clear during the initial review process.

1. Demolition of the property took place in two steps: first everything was removed except the stud walls and then the stud walls were removed leaving only the foundation and floor (as well as what may be temporary studs around the connection to electrical power). The property owner's narrative to the Planning Commission reads in part "The exterior walls were to remain as stud walls only." But this fact was not readily apparent. The staff report to the HRMC specifically mentions "partial demolition." The HRMC minutes also indicate its review was for partial demolition and the Commission does not seem to have directly discussed demolition down to the stud walls. In looking at the site plan, one could reasonably assume that only the walls affected by the additions would be substantially demolished. In looking at the elevations provided in that report, one could also assume the roof would remain with new shingles as well as changes for the new dormer and gable end. The HRMC staff report did describe the additions and the various extensive changes being proposed. In hindsight someone with home construction experience like the property owner might understand that demolition down to stud walls would be the result of all of the proposed modifications. But at no point in the report is the demolition fully and accurately described in the information provided by the applicant or the analysis done by staff.

For future projects, it is apparent the extent of demolition should be more exactly described and shown on site plans and building elevations by the applicant. Perhaps staff should be directed to return to both

the planning and historical commissions with language clarifying future submittal requirements for partial and complete demolitions associated with the design review process. Clarification on what constitutes a demolition that triggers Tier #3 review instead of Tier #2 under the DDTRN Design Guidelines also seems warranted. If a future proposal in our neighborhood or of another older structure includes demolition down to stud walls, would that trigger Tier #3 design review?

2. The description of Tier #2 and Tier #3 review in the DDTRN Design Guidelines call for public notice to include an on-site posting. I am not aware of any on-site posting for the Tier #3 review being done at this time by the Planning Commission. On-site posting is a useful way of informing neighbors who may live outside the radius for mailed notices. While the circumstances of this review by the Planning Commission are not ideal for the property owner or the neighbors, following the on-site posting requirement for future projects is important to the integrity of the design review process.
3. In addition to the planning process presented in the DDTRN Design Guidelines, the City Code in Chapter 8 addresses building demolitions.

Article 8.19.020 spells out the requirement for a “site management plan” for a demolition. Was this part of the demolition process followed?

Article 8.19.040 also requires on-site posting of the proposal for demolition. It further requires a 500’ radius for a mailed notice – which the Planning Commission staff report indicates was done. This 500’ radius is larger than the 300’ radius under the design guidelines. Is there a reason the noticing requirement specified for the design review process and that specified in city code are not consistent?

Not surprisingly, when the walls of a house built in 1948 were opened, numerous shortcomings were found. Experienced builders like the property owner and the contractor would have likely expected finding some problems such as bad plumbing, wiring, a lack of insulation or termite damage. Article 8.19.050 addresses unsafe or hazardous conditions that may warrant demolition. Finding these deficiencies and reaching the conclusion that further demolition is needed warrants notifying the planning and building staff. Experienced local builders such as the property owner and the project builder should have been aware that further demolition, which constituted a change to the approved plan, necessitated at least a conversation with the planning and building staff.

In conclusion, while the new construction appears to be a good quality project that fits with the neighborhood, shortcomings in the review process for a demolition are apparent. To preserve the character of Old North and other neighborhoods covered by the DDTRN Design Guidelines, improvements should be considered for how partial and complete demolitions are described by applicants and noticed and reviewed by the city.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

Karen Moore
Resident of Old North on E Street