



Historic Resources Board

Staff Report

Date: August 15, 2007

To: Historic Resources Board

From: Dennis Backlund
Historic Preservation Planner

Department: Planning and
Community Environment

Subject: 212-214 Homer Avenue [07PLN-00047]: Request by Lippert & Lippert Design for Historic Resources Board review of final window mullion dimensions of the new storefronts of the previously approved project for compatibility with the historic building.

RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the Board recommend to the Director of Planning and Community Environment regarding the historic compatibility of the recently submitted window frame and mullion dimensions of the two conditionally approved new storefronts of the historic commercial building at 212-214 Homer Avenue. Staff did not include a recommendation in this report due to anticipation that the Board may wish to explore this issue with the applicant at the Board meeting prior to developing a recommendation.

BACKGROUND

On May 2, 2007 the Historic Resources Board reviewed and conditionally recommended approval unanimously of the applicant's comprehensive rehabilitation plan for the building. The four HRB conditions that relate to the new storefronts are as follows:

- The exact dimensions of the window mullions of the two new storefronts shall be provided to the HRB.
- The two new aluminum storefronts shall be painted to match the color scheme presented by the applicant for all the windows of the building.
- The new storefronts shall be provided with a solid material base, the final design of which shall be reviewed by staff.

- The new storefronts shall be recessed to align with the recess of the existing historic storefronts.

STANDARDS OF REVIEW FOR THE WINDOW FRAMES AND MULLIONS

The Board's review of the proposed dimensions for the window frames and mullions of the new storefronts (see Attachments A and B) should be guided by the standards of differentiation and compatibility cited in Standard # 9 of the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation. Standard # 9 reads as follows:

“New additions, exterior alterations, or related new construction shall not destroy historic materials that characterize the property. The new work shall be differentiated from the old and shall be compatible with the massing, size, scale, and architectural features to protect the historic integrity of the property and its environment.”

Staff has provided the following discussion of the Standards for differentiation and compatibility.

Secretary's Standard of Differentiation

This Standard is directed primarily to constructed additions to a historic building. The purpose is to prevent an addition that exactly replicates the historic building and, consequently, creates the perception that the building was designed in a different form than it actually was (and makes it difficult or impossible to tell which part of the building is historic and which part is the addition). This Standard does not intend to encourage the introduction of strongly contrasting infill on the face of a historic building (where the original form and footprint of the building are not issues). In most historic building infill projects the manufacturing details of the infill materials adequately clarify that the infill is not historic.

Secretary's Standard of Compatibility

The purpose of this standard, as it relates to the 212-214 Homer Avenue project, is to ensure that the elements of the new storefront windows will not be too strongly contrasting (which would disrupt the overall unity of the façade of the building). Another goal of compatibility review for the proposed new storefront windows is to prevent the new window systems from inappropriately dominating the historic window systems of the building (which would reduce the building's historic significance). Staff notes that while the project's historic metal windows are steel, the Secretary's Standards and Guidelines for Rehabilitation do allow a substitute material like aluminum for new windows provided that an adequate level of compatibility is achieved.

Staff reviewed the aluminum window systems of several historic and modern buildings on University Avenue, and concluded that ideally compatible new window frames and mullions for the 212-214 Homer Avenue project would have two characteristics: thin

width and shallow depth. These two characteristics are found on the historic steel window systems of the project building. The proposed aluminum material, being less strong than steel, will likely require wider and deeper window frames and mullions than would be required using steel, and the Board may wish to discuss this issue with the applicant. The preface of the Secretary’s Standards does note that the Standards for Rehabilitation “are to be applied to specific rehabilitation projects in a reasonable manner, taking into consideration economic and technical feasibility.” It may be helpful to the Board if before the HRB meeting the Board Members visit some of the University Avenue buildings surveyed by staff and examine the various aluminum window systems. Staff’s comments on the buildings visited are as follows.

STAFF COMMENTS ON ALUMINUM WINDOW SYSTEMS DOWNTOWN

339 University Avenue, a vacant former bank building: The mullions are of thinner width than most on University (they are deep, however—about 2 inches).

301 University Avenue, Wells Fargo Private Bank: The mullions (except at the entry doors) are of a narrower width than most on University and have a very shallow depth on the exterior. Even the wider frames around the edges of the window systems are of very shallow depth on the exterior. (The mullions around the entry doors have much greater depth apparently to increase the weight and presence of the recessed entry, but there were likely structural requirements too. The window mullions of this building are of shallow depth on the interior as well, and staff would recommend this approach for the 212-214 Homer Avenue project to the extent feasible.

251 University Avenue, Fidelity Investments, and 255 University Avenue, Arnoldi’s Jewelers: Although the Fidelity Building has historic windows with steel mullions, the building shows the almost universal historic approach to metal window systems (lightweight delicate design produced by mullions of thin width and shallow depth). In contrast, the modern storefronts on University Avenue, and in downtown generally, almost universally exhibit wide and very deep mullions which give the storefront windows the heavy blocky look that is a common characteristic of contemporary storefront design. The historic building next door to the Fidelity Building (Arnoldi’s Jewelers) has a modern replacement storefront with wide, deep aluminum mullions that are very contemporary in character. (One reason this contemporary mullion design works to some degree on the Arnoldi’s historic building is that the entire storefront was replaced—there are no adjacent historic windows on the building to be compatible with.)

180 University Avenue, Magnolia Hi-Fi: The entire first floor of this Historic Inventory building has been replaced, and the window design dates from the late 1990’s. A key element in the historic compatibility of the modern first-floor windows is the very shallow depth of the mullions on the exterior. The glass is almost at the same level as the

surface of the mullions (which is also the case with the historic window mullions on the 212-214 Homer Avenue building). However, the mullions at 180 University are very deep on the interior, and because one can see this from the street it would have been better to have a shallower mullion depth in the interior (as was done with the window systems at the Wells Fargo Private Bank at 301 University).

KEY DECISIONS TO BE MADE BY THE HRB

- Whether the proposed width of the new storefront window frames and mullions would be compatible with the adjacent historic storefronts, and, therefore, would conform to the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation.
- Whether the proposed depth of the new storefront window frames and mullions would be compatible with the adjacent historic storefronts, and, therefore, would conform to the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation.
- Whether the HRB should recommend conditions of approval for the proposed window frames and mullions.

ATTACHMENTS

- Attachment A: Proposed New Storefront Window Frame and Mullion Dimensions.
- Attachment B: Historic Storefront Window Frame and Mullion Dimensions.
- Attachment C: Photo of 212-214 Homer Avenue

COURTESY COPY

Lippert & Lippert Design

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