

Agenda Report

TO: CITY COUNCIL **DATE:** DECEMBER 5, 2005
FROM: CITY MANAGER
SUBJECT: APPEAL OF A DECISION BY THE HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION TO DENY THE ALTERATIONS TO THE EXISTING HOUSE AT 468 RIO GRANDE (NORMANDIE HEIGHTS LANDMARK DISTRICT)

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the City Council:

1. Acknowledge that the installation of replacement doors is categorically exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (Article 19 §15301, existing facilities);
2. Find that the replacement of the door on the west side elevation does not significantly impact the character-defining features of the house or the landmark district;
3. Find that the replacement and design of the new door on the north (front) elevation does not comply with the applicable Design Guidelines for Historic Districts because the original historic door is a significant character-defining feature that should be repaired and preserved if feasible and if not feasible, should be replaced with new doors that match the original doors as closely as possible (Guidelines 7.7 and 7.10); and
4. Based on this finding, approve the new door on the west (side) elevation.

HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION DECISION

On October 17, 2005 the Historic Preservation Commission:

1. Found that the design of the new doors does not comply with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation and the Design Guidelines for Historic Districts, specifically, because the project does not comply with the requirements to preserve the functional and decorative features of an historic door (Guideline 7.6, pg. 57), and to repair wooden door components by patching, piecing-in, consolidating or otherwise

- reinforcing the wood (Guideline 7.7, pg. 57), and, when replacement is necessary, match the original door as closely as possible (Guideline 7.10, pg. 58); and
2. Based on these findings, denied the application for a Certificate of Appropriateness and specified that the applicant shall have 30 days to sort out replacement of the doors and another 30 days to complete the installation.

BACKGROUND

The simple, vernacular house is a contributing building in the Normandie Heights Landmark District. The owner of the house replaced two doors (a front and a side door) that were original to the 1941 house without obtaining the required permit from the City. The original doors were both flush wood doors; the front door had original hardware and a small, round observation window with a metal grid and the side door had glazing in the upper half. The new doors are reproduction Victorian-period designs with elaborate paneling and decorative glass windows.

On July 12, 2005, the owner of the property submitted an application for a Certificate of Appropriateness for the after-the-fact installation of new front and side doors in the house at 468 Rio Grande Street. Staff reviewed the application, including photos of the original doors, and issued a decision denying the door replacement based on the finding that the alteration to the house did not comply with the applicable guidelines. On August 11, 2005, the applicant filed a letter appealing the staff decision to the Historic Preservation Commission. On October 17, 2005, at a noticed public hearing, the Commission reviewed the application and found that the project did not comply with the applicable guidelines and denied the Certificate of Appropriateness. The Commission also specified that the applicant shall have 30 days to sort out replacement of the doors and another 30 days to complete the installation.

The decision of the Commission was based on the Design Guidelines for Historic Districts, which support the retention of original doors that are visible from the public right-of-way and are character-defining features of a house. On the house at 468 Rio Grande Street, the alteration of doors on the north and west elevations are subject to review under the adopted guidelines. Guideline 7.7 states, "(r)epair wooden window and door components by patching, piecing-in, consolidating or otherwise reinforcing the wood." The property owner is in possession and has stored the original front door. To comply with the guideline, this original door should be repaired by removing built-up paint and repainting, repairing existing hardware if needed, and consolidating and reinforcing the door where the wood is deteriorated.

In addition, Guideline 7.10 states, "when window or door replacement is necessary, match the replacement to the original design as closely as possible." The Commission believed that the new doors are inconsistent with the design of

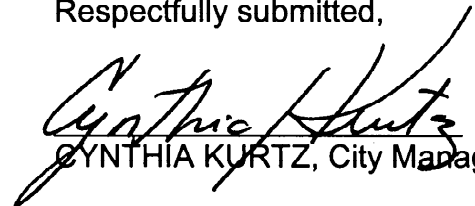
the 1940s modern vernacular house. A flush wood door similar to the original would be an appropriate replacement because it would preserve the character of the 1941 design of the house. During public comment a property owner in the landmark district suggested a compromise. Because the side door is minimally visible from the public right-of-way, the impact of the new door on the significance of the house and the district is inconsequential. The front door, however, is a significant character-defining feature and, therefore, should be either repaired or replaced with a new door that matches the original. The staff believes that this compromise is reasonable in this case.

Because the original front door on this house is an important character-defining feature, the alteration should comply with the *Design Guidelines for Historic Districts*. The original front door should be repaired and re-installed if feasible or should be replaced with a new door that matches the original as closely as possible.

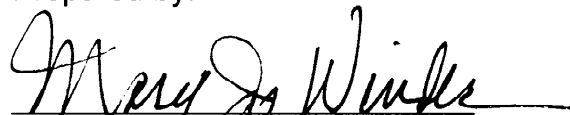
FISCAL IMPACT

Approval or denial of an application for a Certificate of Appropriateness does not affect revenues to the City.


Respectfully submitted,


CYNTHIA KURTZ, City Manager

Prepared by:


Mary Jo Winder, Senior Planner

Approved by:


Richard Bruckner, Director of Planning & Development

ATTACHMENT A: Photos of original and new doors.

ATTACHMENT B: Site plan showing location of doors.