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HISTORIC LANDMARK COMMISSION
OCTOBER 28, 2019
PERMITS IN NATIONAL REGISTER HISTORIC DISTRICTS
NRD-2019-0061
1716 W. 34TH STREET
OLD WEST AUSTIN NATIONAL REGISTER HISTORIC DISTRICT

PROPOSAL

Demolish a one-story house built ca. 1941; construct a new house.

ARCHITECTURE

1-story, side-gabled, rectangular-plan house; shiplap wood siding with multi-lite double-hung wood-sash windows; small entry porch.

PROJECT SPECIFICATIONS

The proposed irregular-plan building is capped by a hipped roof and clad in limestone at the ground floor, wood siding at the second floor, and vertical hardiplank on a rear portion. It features fixed and casement aluminum-sash windows, a fully glazed door, and an integral garage with a wood door stepped back 20’ from the front wall.

RESEARCH

Caxton Cavitt and Jessie Comer constructed the house around 1941 and lived there until around 1968 (Caxton died the previous year). Caxton C. Comer was born in 1877 to a farming family in either Kentucky or Texas. He began teaching at age 17 and attended the State Teachers’ College, Trinity University, and the University of Texas. By the time he retired at age 79, Caxton Comer had worked for 62 years in education, both in public schools and the state and federal government; he rose to the position of Superintendent of Schools for the State Health Department. He was involved in the Chamber of Commerce, the Lions Club, and First Presbyterian Church. Caxton Comer died in 1967 in Austin.

Jessie Blanche Comer (nee Smith) was born in 1891 in Avalon, Texas. She married C. C. Cavitt around 1909, and the couple had two children. In 1930, she was working as the manager of a cafeteria in Gatesville, Texas. After the family moved to Austin, Jessie Comer was involved with the ladies’ auxiliary of the First Presbyterian Church. She died in 1986 in Georgetown.

STANDARDS FOR REVIEW

The house is a contributing property in the Old West Austin National Register Historic District. It does not appear to meet the standards for designation as a historic 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 historic designation criteria for landmark designation (City of Austin Land Development Code (Section 25-2-352). The property does not appear to demonstrate significance according to any criteria.
   a. Architecture. The building is an intact example of the Minimal Traditional style, but does not appear to be architecturally significant.
b. **Historical association.** Caxton and Jessie Comer lived in the house for more than 25 years, from the time the house was constructed until at least 1968. There do not appear to be significant historical associations.

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 appear to possess a unique location, physical characteristic, or significant feature that contributes to the character, image, or cultural identity of the community, Austin, or Texas as a whole.

e. **Landscape feature.** The property is not a significant natural or designed landscape with artistic, aesthetic, cultural, or historical value to the city.

The Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation are used to evaluate projects in National Register historic districts. The following standards apply to the proposed project:

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.  
The surrounding area contains mostly one-story buildings with side-gabled or hipped roofs and wood siding; a few two-story modern buildings and limestone-clad buildings are scattered nearby. The proposed building is somewhat compatible with the area in its cladding materials and hipped roof; however, it is not compatible in terms of size and scale, irregular massing, and its integrated garage. Its design and materials mark it as new construction.

10) **New additions and adjacent or related new 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.**  
If the proposed building were to be removed in the future, the essential form and integrity of the historic district would be unimpaired.

The proposed project somewhat meets the standards.

**COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION**

The committee recommended redesigning the house to have a one-story street presence and reduced vertical emphasis.

The flat roof has been changed to a hipped roof, the material of the front façade has been altered, with second-story wood cladding above limestone on the ground floor; windows have been added to the primary façade; and the material of the garage door has been changed. A projecting porch roof has also been added.

**STAFF RECOMMENDATION**

Encourage rehabilitation and adaptive re-use of the existing building, including consideration of a demolition delay, as the building is contributing to the historic district; then encourage relocation over demolition. If the Commission votes to release the demolition permit, then staff recommends completion of a City of Austin Documentation Package, consisting of photographs of all elevations, a dimensioned sketch plan, and a narrative history, for archiving at the Austin History Center.

Due to the building’s location in a National Register historic district, the Commission must review and comment on the proposed plans for new construction prior to the release of the
demolition permit. If the Commission votes to release the demolition permit, staff recommends commenting on and releasing the plans for new construction.
PROPERTY INFORMATION

Photos

Primary (south) façade and west elevation of 1716 W. 34th Street.

Buildings immediately to the east.
Occupancy History

City directory research, Austin History Center
By Historic Preservation Office staff
October 2019

1941 Address not listed

1944 C. C. and Jessie Comer, owners (listed as 1916 W. 34th Street)

1947 Address not listed
1916 W. 34th Street vacant

1949 Martin C. and Catherine C. Young, owners
Estimator, J. M. Odom

1952 Marlin C. and Cath Young, owners
Estimator, Jamie M. Odom

1955 Cavitt C. and Jessie Comer, owners
No occupation listed

1959 Covitt C. and Jessie Comer, owners
No occupation listed

1962 Covitt C. and Jessie Comer, owners
No occupation listed

1965 Guy and Emma D. Burks, owners
Chief engineer, Bluebonnet Electric Co-op (Giddings)

1968 Mrs. Jessie Comer, owner (widow of Cavett C.)
Retired

1973 Tom C. and Beth Granger, owners
Salesman, Ray Butler Inc.

1977 S. F. and Beth Smith, owners
Student

1981 John and Sarah Larkin, renters
No occupation listed

1986 S. F. Smith, owner
Sales employee, Import Business

1992 Andrew and Lisa Galewsky, renters
Nurse, Wilson Grosenheider (Lisa)
CAXTON C. COMER

Caxton C. Comer, 90, 1716 West 34th, died in a local hospital Monday after a lingering illness. He had been a resident of Austin 34 years, began teaching at 17 and served the public schools, federal government and state health department in a teaching capacity for 62 years.

Comer retired at 79. He attended the State Teachers' College, Trinity University, and the University of Texas. He was a life member of the Texas State Teachers Association of School Administrators, a member of the Chamber of Commerce, the Lions Club, and First Presbyterian Church where he was an elder 57 years.

He is survived by his widow, Jessie B. Comer; two daughters, Miss Mary Beth Comer, Oakland, Calif., and Mrs. W. R. Stump, Georgetown; one son, J. S. Comer, Dallas; four grandsons, Jim and Chris Comer, and Billy and Randy Stump, two sisters, Mrs. J. W. Lauck, Waco, and Mrs. T. W. F. Smith, Dallas; and one brother, Dr. J. P. Comer, Charlottesville, Va.

Funeral services were held Tuesday at First Presbyterian Church. Rev. William P. Caldwell and Dr. Frederick Brooks officiated and burial was in Capital Memorial Gardens under direction of Weed-Corley Funeral Home.

Pallbearers were W. H. Whittle, Noel P. Amstead, E. D. Wiginton, Dr. D. R. Peevy, J. H. Sheffield and Harris Bell.

Honorary pallbearers were L. C. Procter, Everett Williams, Fred Haynie, Roy West, Fred Schmidt, Tom Teer and officers of First Presbyterian Church.

Those who care to do so may make a memorial contribution to the Memorial Fund of the Presbyterian Church or the American Cancer Society.
Death certificate, 1967.
Water tap permit issued to J. V. Williams, 11/26/1941.

Sewer connection permit issued to Smoot, 11/26/1941.