

HISTORIC LANDMARK COMMISSION
APPLICATION FOR A CERTIFICATE OF APPROPRIATENESS
MAY 24, 2021
C14H-1986-0015, C14H-2004-0008
GRANDBERRY BUILDING AND MITCHELL-ROBERTSON BUILDING
CONGRESS AVENUE HISTORIC DISTRICT
907, 909, AND 911 CONGRESS AVENUE

PROPOSAL

Review of a plan to deconstruct, store, and re-erect historic building façades.

PROJECT SPECIFICATIONS

Catalog and store, then re-erect the historic building façades as part of a redevelopment project at a later date. In conjunction with proposed additions, the project received preliminary approval from the Historic Landmark Commission on January 26, 2015 and June 25, 2018, pending development of more detailed plans for treatment of the façades.

On March 24, 2021, the Building Standards Commission (BSC) issued an order requiring that conditions be remedied within 90 days or imposing fines on the property owner. The BSC orders are uploaded as backup to this meeting for reference. In discussion at the April 24, 2021 meeting, Commissioners suggested that the applicant determine if scaffolding erected for purposes of documenting and dismantling the façades would suffice for compliance with the BSC orders. The orders do not mention stabilization or bracing as options, and Code Department staff have confirmed that scaffolding would be insufficient to meet the requirements. Instead, the orders require repairs to fully remedy the violations, which include cracks and openings in exterior walls, roof and drainage issues, and missing windows, among other concerns.

Per the applicant, stabilization and repair of the buildings in place is not technically feasible due to the extent of deterioration, including mortar loss, shear failures and racking, and the inability to adequately shore the façades following demolition of masonry party walls that provide lateral support. The wall abutting the adjacent historic landmark building, in particular, requires demolition to allow that property owner to perform needed repairs.

The proposed scope of work entails developing a detailed plan for deconstruction and reconstruction of the historic façades, including as an initial phase: review of existing documentation, visual and non-destructive analysis of building materials and assemblies, structural evaluation, and development of a finalized scope of work and sequence of implementation. Laser scanning has been performed, and analysis of the resulting point cloud is underway. Deconstruction will be done by hand and treated much like an archeological investigation, with specific conditions and hidden elements documented as work progresses. This information will inform preparation of reconstruction drawings and specifications.

The applicant proposes to place a restrictive covenant on the property requiring reconstruction within three years.

ARCHITECTURE

Three two-part commercial blocks sharing party walls; buildings are boarded at the street level. At the second floor, the Grandberry Building at 907 Congress has two-over-two light windows with decorative hood moulds, and the Mitchell-Robertson Building at 909 Congress has one-over-one windows and corbelled brickwork at the cornice.

STANDARDS FOR REVIEW

The City of Austin's Historic Design Standards (March 2021) are based on the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation and are used to evaluate projects at historic landmarks. The Historic Design Standards indicate that if any aspect of a proposed project is not covered by the design standards, the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties shall be used. In certain circumstances, use of the treatments other than rehabilitation may be proposed. This project proposes to apply the Standards for Reconstruction, recognizing that this is a path of last resort:

1) Reconstruction will be used to depict vanished or non-surviving portions of a property when documentary and physical evidence is available to permit accurate reconstruction with minimal conjecture, and such reconstruction is essential to the public understanding of the property.

The applicant asserts that it is not possible to preserve and restore the buildings in place, and therefore reconstruction is required to prevent a gap within the historic streetscape of Congress Avenue.

2) *Reconstruction of a landscape, building, structure or object in its historic location will be preceded by a thorough archeological investigation to identify and evaluate those features and artifacts that are essential to an accurate reconstruction. If such resources must be disturbed, mitigation measures will be undertaken.*

The project benefits from the fact that the buildings are currently extant, even if in deteriorated condition with some missing elements. Thorough documentation of the existing buildings preceding and as part of the deconstruction process will form the basis of reconstruction.

3) *Reconstruction will include measures to preserve any remaining historic materials, features and spatial relationships.*

Details regarding the extent to which building assemblies can be removed and reinstalled intact will be developed during further project planning. The intent is to reuse as much historic fabric as possible, including materials salvaged from portions of the buildings that will not be reconstructed.

4) *Reconstruction will be based on the accurate duplication of historic features and elements substantiated by documentary or physical evidence rather than on conjectural designs or the availability of different features from other historic properties. A reconstructed property will re-create the appearance of the non-surviving historic property in materials, design, color and texture.*

Through archival research and thorough documentation, sufficient details will be available to ensure accurate reconstruction.

5) *A reconstruction will be clearly identified as a contemporary re-creation.*

Interpretive signage will be developed in consultation with the Historic Landmark Commission.

6) *Designs that were never executed historically will not be constructed.*

Not applicable.

While deconstruction and reconstruction of a historic landmark is not a recommended treatment, intensive intervention is necessitated in this case due to major, longstanding conditions. The proposed scope of work entails sufficient care to document, dismantle, store, and re-erect the buildings using original materials to the greatest extent feasible.

COMMITTEE FEEDBACK AND PRIOR COMMISSION REVIEW

At the March 8, 2021 meeting, the committee members requested the applicant consider stabilization of building façades in place rather than removal and reconstruction; provide a detailed condition assessment or other analysis of the buildings' conditions; and pay particular attention to keeping the corbelled brickwork on the Mitchell-Robertson Building intact. Committee members expressed concern regarding having the buildings down for an indefinite period prior to the redevelopment.

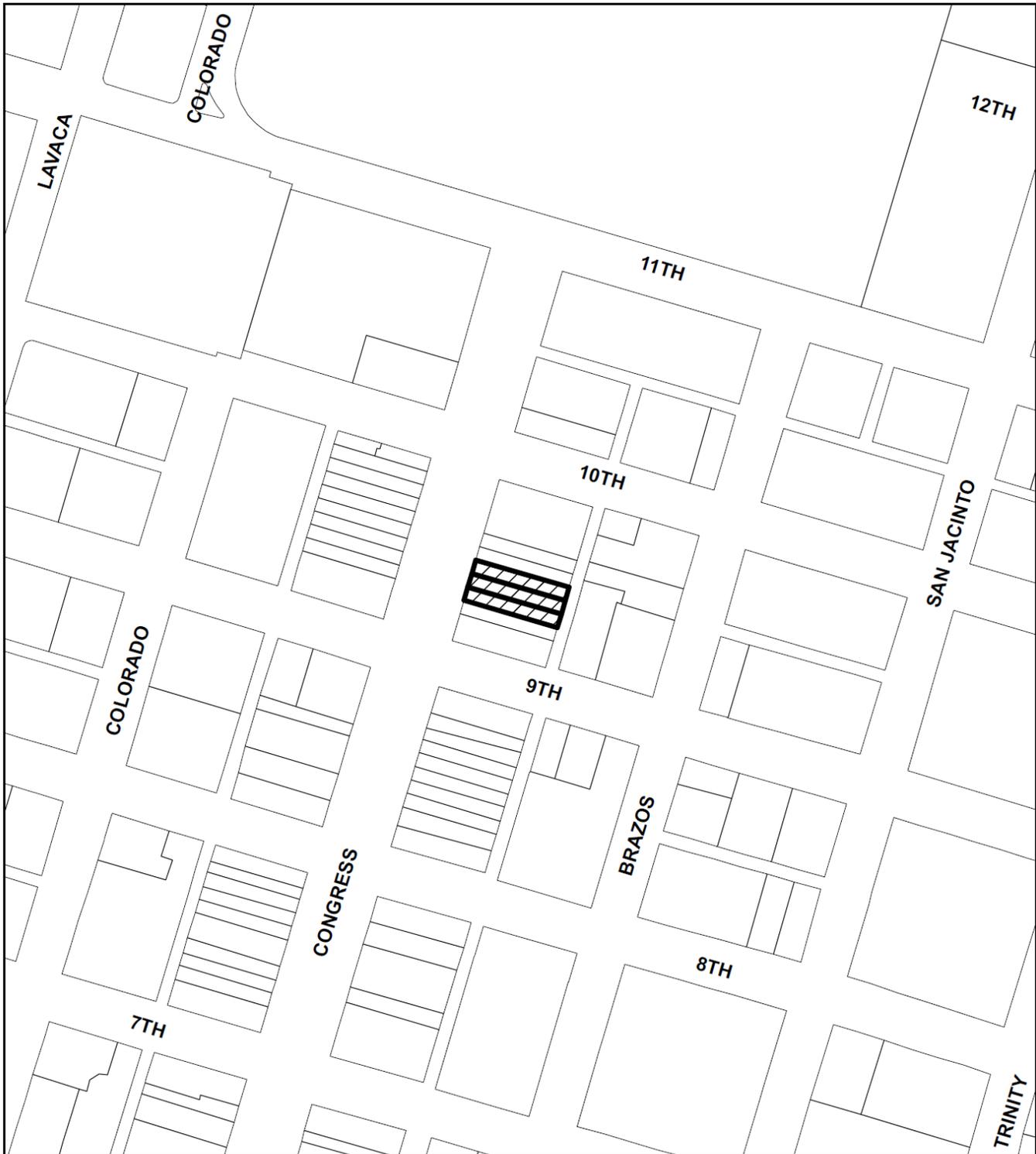
At the April 12, 2021 meeting, the committee members indicated a need for more documentation and desire to explore every alternative to demolition before agreeing to that approach. The timeline imposed by the Building and Standards Commission is of concern in terms of the ability to take the proper care in moving forward.

The Commission postponed the case at both the March and April meetings and has requested the applicant consider and present alternatives to demolition.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Provide additional feedback on the scope of work for façade deconstruction/reconstruction based on the materials presented to date, and request additional information needed to consider Certificate of Appropriateness request at the June 28, 2021 Commission meeting.

LOCATION MAP



-  SUBJECT TRACT
-  PENDING CASE
-  ZONING BOUNDARY

NOTIFICATIONS

CASE#: C14H-1986-0015 & C14H-2004-0008
 LOCATION: 907, 909 & 911 CONGRESS AVE



1" = 208'

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PROPERTY INFORMATION

Photos



*Grandberry Building, 907 Congress Avenue, and Mitchell-Robertson Building, 909 Congress Avenue
Historic Preservation Office staff, historic landmark inspections, 2020-2021*