



To: Land Use, Transportation, and Infrastructure Committee
From: Kara Hahn, Principal Planner, Community Planning & Development (CPD)
Date: March 24, 2022
RE: Landmark Designation for 3435 Albion Street, the Robinson House

Staff Recommendation:

Based on the ordinance designation criteria and on the findings of the Landmark Preservation Commission (LPC) that the application meets the criteria for designation of a structure, CPD staff recommends approval of the application.

Request to Designate a Structure:

Application: #2021L-010
Address: 3435 Albion Street
Zoning: PUD 539 (Rezoning to E-MX-2x currently under review by City Council)
Council: Council District 8, Chris Herndon
Owner: 3435 Albion, LLC – Steve Davis
Applicant: Steve Davis

Case Summary:

The property at 3435 Albion Street was submitted for a Certificate of Demolition Eligibility in March of 2021. Landmark staff found it had potential for designation and provided public notice and posted signage on the property. Through a facilitated stakeholder consultation process with the owner and the community, a preservation minded buyer was found.

The new owner, Steve Davis, is proposing to rezone the site, divide the parcel, and designate the structure. The rezoning of the entire site from a Planned Unit Development (PUD) to E-MX-2x was reviewed and recommended for approval by Denver Planning Board; it is currently under review by City Council. On the northern portion of the parcel, outside of the proposed Landmark boundary, Davis is planning to add density to the site.

On the southern portion of the site, he is requesting to designate the 1889 structure. As part of this process, an incompatible 2005 addition was demolished. Once that addition was removed, Davis formally submitted a Landmark Designation application for 3435 Albion Street to CPD. Staff performed an investigation and found the application to be complete and to meet Denver Landmark designation criteria. As such, staff set the public hearing at the Landmark Preservation Commission for March 15, 2022. At the public hearing, the LPC voted (7-0-0) to recommend approval and forward, with minor modifications clarifying the additions, to City Council the landmark designation of 3435 Albion Street.

Designation Criteria and Evaluation, Chapter 30, Denver Revised Municipal Code:

To meet landmark designation criteria, in accordance with Chapter 30, Denver Revised Municipal Code, the application must be complete, and the structure must meet the following criteria:

1. The structure maintains its integrity
2. The structure is more than 30 years old, or is of exceptional importance
3. The structure meets at least three of ten criteria
4. The LPC considers the structure’s historic context

Criteria Evaluation:

Landmark staff found that the structure application meets the following criteria.

A. It has a direct association with a significant historic event or with the historical development of the city, state, or nation;

3435 Albion Street is significant for its direct association with the historical development of the city. The property is one of the oldest extant houses in Park Hill, the first house built on speculation in the newly platted North Division of Capitol Hill, one of the early residential buildings in the then rural plains on the outskirts of Denver, and remained as the neighborhood eventually developed through the 1950s.

The property, named after its first owner Jay A. Robinson, represents a period of expansion in Denver when houses were being built on speculation, which was a new concept in Denver during the late nineteenth century. Due to economic and population growth in the 1870s and 1880s, the city experienced a significant building boom, with 527 subdivisions platted during the 1880s. In 1889, the Robinson House was part of this expansion and building boom, and it was the first house built in the area by developer, John Cook Jr. In an attempt to lure investors, Cook constructed the house on speculation; however, the investors did not follow, and few other lots were sold, or houses were constructed. With the Panic of 1893 and subsequent economic depression, the building boom abruptly ended. As a result, Cook's plans for the subdivision were not realized, leaving this house as a representation of both Denver's boom in the 1880s and then bust in the early 1890s.

The house is also representative of a time when this area of northern Park Hill was on the edge of Denver, straddling an urban and rural setting. In the surrounding area was the Clayton Home for Orphaned Boys to the west, the City Dairy was to the north, and to east and south were brickworks. After the Panic of 1893, the Robinson House and only a handful of other homes were scattered among these dairies and brickyards. In 1913 long-term owners (the Roe family) used the land surrounding the house for farming, with outbuildings such as a barn and chicken coop supporting that use. Amenities and services provided to other parts of the city were absent throughout its first decades. Electricity was not installed until 1921 and at the time of construction, water to the area was provided by a single well. While other parts of Denver were serviced by electric streetcars, residents of the North Division of Capitol Hill were connected to downtown by a horse powered streetcar. Other houses of this earlier period were mostly demolished, but the Robinson House has remained on its corner lot as a neighborhood of Tudor Revivals followed by Minimal Traditional gradually grew around it.

C. It embodies the distinctive visible characteristics of an architectural style or type;

The Robinson House is an excellent example of the Queen Anne style. It embodies many of the defining characteristics of the Queen Anne style, including the steeply pitched roof with a cross gable, dominant front facing gable, and asymmetrical appearance. It also uses detailing to avoid the appearance of a smooth wall with dogtooth brick detailing, stone and brick belt courses, and decorative wood elements such as the vergeboards and spindles to create varied textures. Additionally, many of the upper panes of windows are surrounded with smaller decorative panes which is also a typical feature of Queen Anne.



3435 Albion Street, front façade

G. It promotes understanding and appreciation of the urban environment by means of distinctive physical characteristics or rarity;

The property promotes an understanding and appreciation of the urban environment through its physical characteristics and rarity. With the failure of John Cook's subdivision and Panic of 1893, there was little development in the area until decades after its initial platting. The surrounding neighborhood primarily consists of simple Tudor Revival styles from the 1920s or 1930s, Minimal Traditional houses constructed in the 1940s and 1950s, and more recent larger-scale development. The detailing and stylistic elements for all three of these periods of construction are typically more minimal in character.

In contrast, the elaborate Queen Anne house, with extensive detailing and distinctive characteristics, stands out amongst the post-war houses and contemporary housing developments.

Additionally, in both the immediate area of Northeast Park Hill and the greater Park Hill Neighborhood, there are only a handful of houses of the same vintage. In what was the North Division of Capitol Hill there are only two houses still extant - the Robinson House and the McCoy House, a small Victorian cottage a block south of the Robinson House. Both were constructed in 1889 and both show characteristics of the Queen Anne style although the Robinson House is larger and more ornate. Beyond the North Division of Capitol Hill subdivision only the Queen Anne at 3301 Dexter Street and a Craftsman Bungalow at 3326 Cherry Street, remain nearby, leaving the Robinson House a rare survivor and the oldest home not just in Cook's subdivision, but in the adjacent subdivisions.

The home's age and style are also rare within greater Park Hill Neighborhood, which extends south to Colfax and east to Quebec, where only a small handful of homes were constructed before the twentieth century. For example, in the first Park Hill subdivision, which includes approximately 700 homes between Montview and 26th, Colorado Boulevard and Dahlia, there is only one other extant home from the nineteenth century, a Four Square constructed in 1895 and there is only one house identified as partially Queen Anne, constructed in 1904 at 2309 Ash.

The style of the Robinson House, which clearly signals its age, make it a physically distinctive and rare property.



3435 Albion Street, side and front façade

Integrity:

Chapter 30 requires that a landmark designated property maintain its integrity. Integrity is defined as “the ability of a structure or district to convey its historic, geographic, architectural, or cultural significance...recognized as belonging to its particular time and place in Denver’s history.” The seven qualities that, in various combinations, define integrity are location, setting, design, materials, workmanship, feeling and association.

The Robinson House retains a high degree of integrity. It has not moved and retains integrity of location. While there have been some exterior alterations and additions at the rear of the property, the design, material, and workmanship of the house remains. The prominent Queen Anne defining elements such as the spindle work two-story porch, decorative window elements, stone and brickwork, window openings, decorative vergeboards, belt courses, and shingles are retained. The additions are on the rear and do not diminish the prominent Queen Anne features.

Because the house retains a high degree of its materials, workmanship, and design, it also retains its historic feeling and association as a single-family Queen Anne home despite the previous use as restaurant. Other than the rear additions, the property looks and presents as a residence constructed in the 1880s retaining its feeling and association.

The only quality of integrity that has been slightly compromised is the setting. While the initial historic setting was an underdeveloped one with much open land dotted with dairies, brickyards and only a handful of houses, the area changed throughout the period of significance, which ended in 1953. There is still open space across the street, which was a Dairy during the period of significance, and much of the surrounding area was developed starting in the 1920s. And, while there has been more recent demolition and redevelopment, the area is still primarily residential as it was in the 1950s. Overall, the property retains a high amount of integrity and clearly conveys its historical and architectural significance



3435 Albion Street, side façade and rear additions



3435 Albion Street, rear facade, with additions

Relates to a Historic Context and Period of Significance:

As is appropriate for a property proposed for designation, the historic context is strongly interrelated to both the areas of significance and period of significance. The property is associated with the initial platting of North Division of Capitol Hill, the speculation construction of the house in 1889, the economic collapse in 1893, and then the slower redevelopment of the area in the first half of the twentieth century. As a property in a more rural setting for the first several decades, the land surrounding it was used as small family farm by the Roes. Family members remained in the house until the post-war era. The period of significance extends through their ownership, as the longest tenured owners, who finally sold in 1953.

Boundary:

The designation application proposes to designate the legal description below:

Lots 26, 27, and the southerly three (3) feet of lot 28, Block 39, J. Cook Jr's. North Division of Capitol Hill, City and County of Denver, State of Colorado.

Public Review Process:

Community Planning & Development has met all posting and notification requirements delineated in Chapter 12 (Article III, Section 12-96) and Chapter 30 of the DRMC.

Notifications:

- Owner notification letters regarding the LPC public hearing
- City Council and Community Planning and Development email notifications
- Registered Neighborhood Organization and courtesy email notifications
 - Greater Park Hill Community, Inc.
 - Opportunity Corridor Coalition of United Residents
 - Northeast Park Hill Coalition
 - United Northeast Denver Residents
 - East Denver Residents Council
 - Inter-Neighborhood Cooperation (INC)
 - Denver Neighborhood Association, Inc.
 - Historic Denver, Inc
 - Colorado Preservation, Inc
 - State of Colorado Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation
- Posted signage for Landmark Preservation Commission public hearing

Public Comments:

- As of the date of the staff report, CPD has received no written public comments.
- At the LPC public hearing two members of the public spoke in support of the designation.

Attachments Provided by CPD:

- Designation Application
- Map of property