



To: Land Use, Transportation, and Infrastructure
From: Becca Dierschow, Senior Planner and Kara Hahn, Planning Supervisor; Community Planning & Development (CPD)
Date: November 10, 2022
RE: Landmark Designation for 401 N Madison St., Richard Crowther 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, staff recommends approval of the application.

Request to Designate a Structure:

Application: #2022L-002
Address: 401 N Madison St.
Zoning: U-RH-3
Council: Council District #10, Councilmember Hinds
Owner: MAG Builders
Applicant(s): Tom Hart, Michael Hughes, Alan Gass

Case Summary:

On September 19, 2022, a demolition permit application for the property at 401 N Madison St. was submitted to CPD. Landmark staff reviewed the property, found it had the potential to be an Individual Denver Landmark, and prepared a staff report stating Landmark staff's findings. Staff also posted public notice of the proposed demolition, which paused the demolition for 21 days. During the 21-day public notice period, three residents of Denver filed a Notice of Intent, which extended the notice period and initiated third-party facilitated stakeholder meetings.

During the extended posting period, three stakeholder meetings were held, including one on-site visit. At these meetings, the owners and applicants sought to find a compromise, researching potential buyers, creative adaptive reuse and redevelopment options, and other preservation alternatives to designation. CDP staff supported these efforts by researching rezoning options, set back requirements and areas of flexibility in redevelopment potential.

At the end of the 60-day notice period, no consensus was reached through the stakeholder meetings and three Denver residents prepared and submitted an owner-opposed designation application. Per the Landmark Ordinance, Chapter 30 of the Denver Revised Municipal Code (DRMC), staff reviewed the application and found that the application was complete and that the structure is eligible for designation. As such, staff set a public hearing before the Landmark Preservation Commission on November 1st 2022 for the Commission to review the designation application.

At the public hearing, the LPC considered the application, staff report, submitted documentation, and public testimony regarding the historic significance of the site. At the public hearing, the Commission received a staff presentation, testimony from the applicants and owners, and comments from 10 members of the public. Seven of these comments were in opposition to the designation and 3 were in support. After moving into their deliberation, the Commission found the building met the designation

requirements as outlined in the Landmark Preservation Ordinance, Chapter 30-4(8) – including maintaining its historic integrity, meeting four significance criteria (C, D, E, and J) and being related to a historic context. Therefore, based on their purview for deliberation and determination, the Commission voted (7-0-0) to recommend approval and forward to City Council the landmark designation. The Commission also stated they anticipated robust City Council deliberation on the property, and encouraged the applicants, owners, and public to share their thoughts at the City Council public hearing as well.

Designation Criteria and Evaluation, Chapter 30, DRMC:

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 Preservation Commission found that the application for designation demonstrates that the structure meets the following criteria.

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



Figure 1: 401 Madison St. Kathleen Roach, "Crowther House". Historic Denver

The building embodies the distinctive visible characteristics of the Late Modern architectural style. According to the book published by Historic Denver, “The Mid-century Modern

House in Denver,” written by architectural critics Michael Paglia and Diane Wray Tomasso, “Late Modern architecture was reductive and functionalist.” Defining characteristics of Late Modernism include:

- Horizontally oriented
- Hooded or deep-set windows
- Large areas without windows
- Use of industrial materials like concrete
- Dramatic sculptural conception of building’s volume
- No ornament
- Walls eave less or with boxed or cantilevered eaves Decorative use of functional features
- Flat and shed roofs

All these characteristics are found in the residence at 401 Madison St. Additionally, the property is featured prominently in the book as an example of Late Modernism architecture.

D. It is a significant example of the work of a recognized architect or master builder;

The residence at 401 N Madison St. is eligible under Criterion D as a significant example of architect Richard Crowther’s Modernist residential design work. Crowther, who came to Denver in 1948, was an artist and an architectural pioneer in commercial modern green holistic passive solar design. From his early career, Crowther anticipated the energy issues generated by man-made climate change in his designs. The 401 Madison residence is listed among Crowther’s most important designs and embodies his guiding fossil fuel-free design philosophy. Although not his first passive solar design, it was completed at the height of his architectural career, served as his home and laboratory until his death in 2006, and is thus a significant example of his work. Additionally, the house has been featured by many architectural publications, architectural critics, and other commentators as the preeminent expression of Crowther’s design philosophy.

E. It contains elements of design, engineering, materials, craftsmanship, or artistic merit which represent a significant innovation or technical achievement;

The structure at 401 N Madison St is significant under Criterion E as it contains elements of design, engineering, materials, which represent a significant innovation in solar, and energy-conserving architecture -- what is now call passive house design. As such, the house was horizontally oriented, with the exception of large, angled windows to capture sun light. The building has little ornament, but deeply hooded openings, which lend a sculptural quality to the building. The use concrete and tinted stucco as the building materials increases the solar gain of the structure, where desired. In other areas, lighter colored stucco and concrete or metal materials redirected unwanted solar heat.

Crowther spoke of his design and conservation philosophy as such:

“The traditional concept of architecture has been a ‘shelter’ – a shelter from climate, a shelter from predators and hostile persons, a shelter for valuables and a shelter for personal privacy. While these time-honored considerations remain of consummate value, *holistic architecture optimally would also use energies of the sun, earth, air, water, people, and architecture itself.*”

As a whole, the design, engineering, and materials of 401 Madison St. were an innovative approach to “Green” architecture, long before the philosophy became popular in the architecture field.

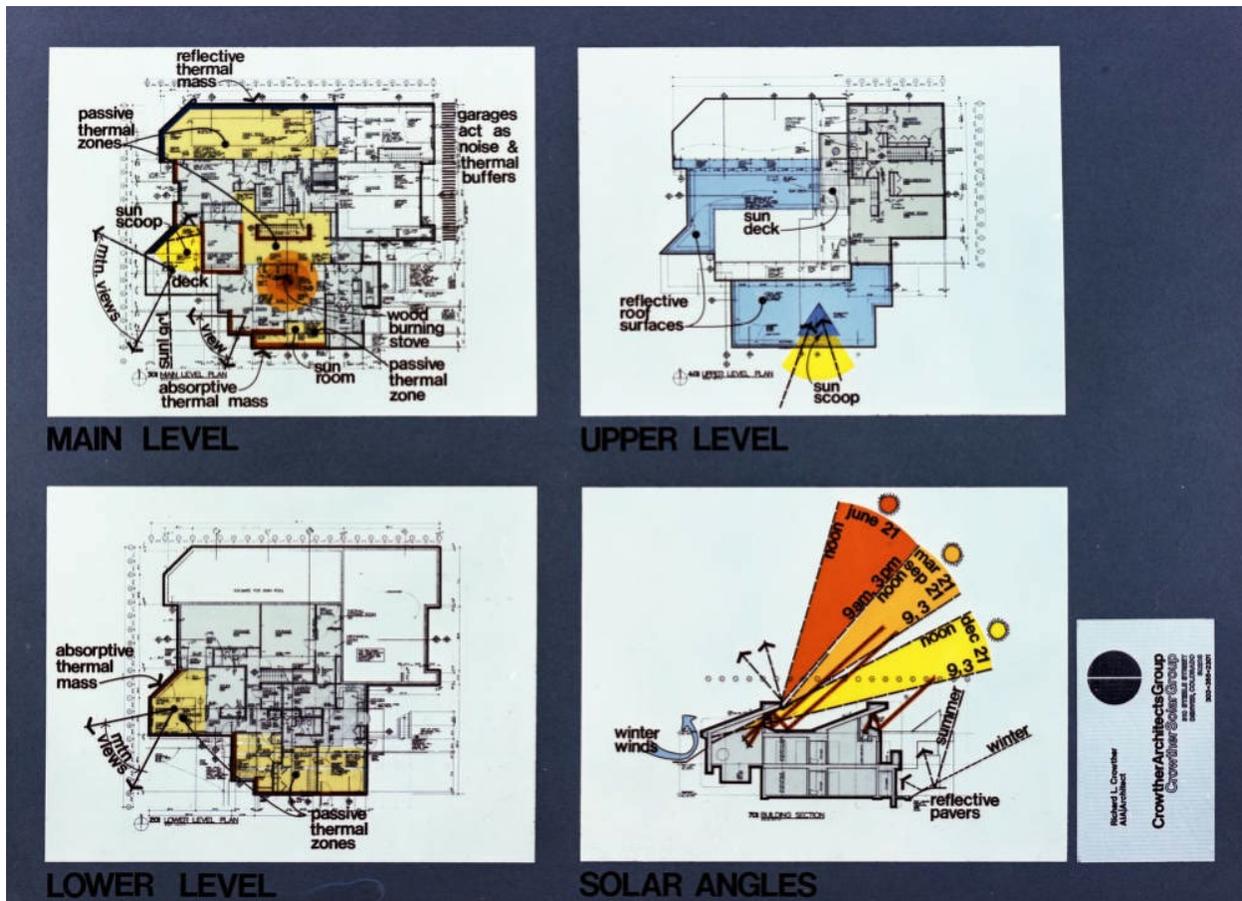


Figure 2: Details of Crowther's passive solar design at 401 Madison St. WH1504-2016-76

J. It is associated with social movements, institutions, or patterns of growth or change that contributed significantly to the culture of the neighborhood, community, city, state, or nation.

The structure is significant under Criterion J as an important example of a building constructed with the ethos of the environmental sustainability movement and sensitivity to the potentially disastrous effects of climate change, that continues to represent a danger to life on Earth. In the late 1960s, energy conservation and environmentalism “became a mass social movement ... drawing on a culture of political activism inspired in part by the civil rights and antiwar movements, thousands of citizens, particularly young middle-class white men and women, became involved with environmental politics.” A series of well-publicized environmental disasters further legitimized the environmental movement, leading to the creation of the Environmental Protection Agency in 1970.

Crowther saw himself and the architecture field as an important part of the environmental movement. He authored numerous books on the subject of architectural environmentalism and gave many lectures

across the country on solar design. He also sought to live a healthy lifestyle, which was integrated into his residential design, as evidenced by the solar-heated swimming pool and greenhouses featured prominently in the design of the structure.

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 house retains a remarkably high degree of integrity because of its substantial basic structure of reinforced concrete exterior walls and interior floor, notwithstanding recent cosmetic vandalism. The original features and architectural elements are intact, retaining the integrity of design, workmanship, and materials. The energy conserving features of the design are intact and can be reactivated. The shell of the building is a well-insulated concrete heat sink. As the property is still in its original location, situated in a residential neighborhood, on a corner lot, fronting Madison Street and 4th Avenue in the Cherry Creek North neighborhood, the property also maintains integrity of location, setting, feeling, and association.

Relates to Historic Context and Period of Significance:

The house at 401 N Madison St. reflects the history of the modern environmental movement, as Crowther saw himself and the architectural field as a part of the Green movement. In 1976 he wrote and published the *Sun/Earth* book, for which he received 1977 Progressive Architecture citations. This text has a reputation for setting the benchmark in early holistic architecture design. The building’s design was an avant-garde structure at the cutting edge of stylistic expression and technological innovation.

The period of significance is listed as 1979, the year the property was constructed.

Boundary:

The designation application proposes to designate the legal description below:

Plot 10, Block 22, Harmans Subdivision, City and County of Denver

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
 - Inter-Neighborhood Cooperation (INC)
 - Green Cherry Creek
 - Capitol Hill United Neighborhoods, Inc.
 - Cherry Creek North Neighborhood Association
 - Strong Denver

- Historic Denver, Inc
- Colorado Preservation, Inc
- National Trust for Historic Preservation
- State of Colorado Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation (History Colorado)
- Posted signage for Landmark Preservation Commission public hearing

Public Comments:

As of 11:00 am November 10, 2022, CPD has received 70 public comments from 64 individuals and organizations regarding the application. Some members of the public have submitted multiple comments or submitted written comments and spoke at the LPC hearing.

- Public Comments submitted to CPD
 - 21 letters in opposition
 - 33 neighborhood signatures in opposition
 - One voicemail in opposition
 - Five letters in support
- LPC Public Hearing
 - 10 speakers
 - Seven in opposition
 - Three in support

Attachments Provided by CPD:

- Designation Application
- Map of structure proposed for preservation
- Owner's property report
- Written public comments received by 11:00 am November 10, 2022