



Staff Report

DIRECTION DISCUSSION ON EMMETT HOUSE RELOCATION

Honorable Mayor and Council Members:

Summary

This is to provide an update on the Emmett House and confirm the direction of the City Council to relocate the structure to Fifth and O'Neil and convert it to two dwelling units.

Background

At the December 5, 2006 Planning Commission Study Session, the Commission had indicated specific concerns with the proposed Emmett House plans. The following is a summary on the Commission's major concerns:

Garage doors/garage orientation:

Many of the Commissioners were dismayed by the proposed location of the garage structure. They feel that the 4-door garage orientation should face away from O'Neill and that the garage should be reoriented towards 6th Avenue. There was significant discussion about reducing the size of the garage to two spaces. A single driveway to the garage was also encouraged, particularly if it is reoriented off of 6th Avenue.

The Project architect has reviewed these comments. The garage can be made to accommodate two cars instead of four cars. There is insufficient room between the creek and the house to reorient the driveway to Sixth Street.

Cost of moving house vs. cost of building new structure (exact replica of Emmett House):

There was a consensus that a cost analysis should be conducted because some Commissioners expressed that it may be cheaper to build a replica of the Emmett House - taking architectural remnants from the existing structure - and placing it on the receptor site.

In the opinion of project architects who specialize in renovation/adaptive re-use of historic properties, the replication of the Emmett House is not considered a recognized method of historic preservation and may be less cost-effective than relocating and rehabilitating the existing building. In addition, the architect indicated the existing structure is much stronger than many contemporary buildings because it is constructed with old growth wood which is stronger than existing wood structures.

Orientation of the building:

The Commission recommended that the relocated Emmett House should be reoriented towards the southeast, towards the corner of O'Neill and Sixth Avenue. Currently, the site plan shows the house directly facing O'Neill.

The project architect indicated that this would not be historically correct to do so. In addition, there are concerns about any portion of the foundation getting too close to the underground culvert in the area.

Design of garage:

Since Mr. Emmett was a carriage maker, the thought was to design the detached garage in the style of a carriage house. In the opinion of project architect, the garage is not a remodeled carriage house and the design should resemble a garage.

Landscaping:

There were numerous Commission comments on the proposed landscaping plans. Some of the more significant comments include:

- Three oaks should be planted on the site to mitigate the loss of the large oak along Sixth.
- All of the proposed landscape materials would not reach adequate height, at maturity, to mitigate visual impacts.
- The palm tree should be reused somewhere on the site.

The project architect agreed that the landscaping plans can be more robust.

End Use:

Finally, the end use of the building was the topic of further Planning Commission discussion. An idea to convert the ground-floor to a community-serving use, such as space to accommodate the Belmont Historical Society, was introduced for consideration. This scenario would provide two affordable units on the top floor of the structure while leaving the ground floor available for community use. This would result in residential units of approximately 750 square feet in size, while the community use would occupy approximately 1500 square feet.

The Commission did not indicate that the community use required additional off-street parking, but some stated that a community use may have special events that would increase parking demand in the surrounding neighborhood. As currently proposed, each residential unit occupies approximately 1500 square feet. Some Planning Commissioners stated such large units may be inappropriate in that location.

Discussion

The project architect has prepared preliminary plans for the conversion of the house to two units,

one on the first floor and one on the second floor. The plans have been developed to a point where the next step is to authorize the civil engineer to prepare site and foundation plans, the electrical engineer to prepare the wiring plans, and the mechanical engineer to prepare heating and ventilation systems for the structure.

Staff did not want to proceed with these plans at a significant expense if Council was going to change direction and request the ground floor be converted to provide a public space and the second floor converted to two dwelling units.

General Plan/Vision Statement

No impact.

Fiscal Impact

Redevelopment Agency Directors should be aware that the suggested community room part of this project can not be funded from redevelopment monies. Staff has not identified an alternative funding source for a community room and or a public space. The balance of the planning commission proposal is constant with the use of RDA low and moderate income funds.

Public Contact

Posting of the City Council agenda.

Recommendation

It is recommended Council discuss and provide direction to the staff as to how they want the final configuration of the Emmett House.

Alternatives

1. Take no action
2. Refer back to staff for additional information
3. Deny Approval.

Respectfully submitted,

Raymond E. Davis III PE, PTOE
Public Works Director

Jack R. Crist
City Manager

Staff Contact:

Raymond E. Davis, Public Works Director
595-7459

Rdavis@belmont.gov