



DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT SERVICES

Planning Division

m e m o r a n d u m

TO: The Urbana Historic Preservation Commission

FROM: Jeff Engstrom, Planner I

DATE: November 2, 2007

SUBJECT: HP 2007-COA-02, Replacement of Front Porch at 808 W. Main Street.

Introduction

This application is for a Certificate of Appropriateness to reconstruct the front porch at 808 West Main Street, a contributing structure in a pending historic district. According to Section XII-6.C of the Zoning Ordinance, applications for building permits in approved or pending historic districts act as the application for the Certificate of Appropriateness.

As a result of a complaint, the front porch at 808 West Main Street was found to be unsafe and dangerous by a City of Urbana Housing Inspector on August 17, 2007. The inspector ordered the porch to be “demolished and/or repaired and replaced to eliminate structural deficits”. Empty Tomb, Inc. has submitted a building permit application to rebuild the porch. The 800 block of West Main Street is currently under consideration by the Urbana City Council for designation as a local historic district. As per the Urbana Zoning Ordinance Section XII-6.C, Empty Tomb’s application will be considered the application for a Certificate of Appropriateness (COA). However, because the order to abate the code issues predated the District nomination and involves serious life safety issues, the Building Official has allowed demolition and decking work to proceed, as allowed under Section XII-6.F of the Zoning Ordinance. Rebuilding of the porch, however, will require a Certificate of Appropriateness.

Background

On August 13, 2007, Daniel Folk submitted an application to designate the 800 block of West Main Street as a local historic district. The Historic Preservation Commission on September 13, 2007 made a preliminary determination that the proposed historic district met the necessary criteria for designation and then held a public hearing on October 3, 2007. Following the public hearing, the Commission recommended that the Urbana City Council approve the designation of the 800 block of West Main Street as a local historic district.

At the October 15, 2007, City Council meeting, the application was not approved. Since there was a valid protest of the nomination, a two-thirds majority was required for passage. However, Council agreed to reconsider the motion at their November 5, 2007 meeting. If the City Council does not approve the proposed historic district or if 808 West Main Street is not included in an approved historic

district, the Historic Preservation Commission will not need to issue a COA. City staff will provide a verbal report at the Historic Preservation Commission meeting on November 7, 2007 regarding City Council's decision regarding the proposed historic district.

The property owner was notified on August 17, 2007 that the porch was unsafe and had to be repaired by September 17, 2007. The owner filed for a one-month extension and worked with Grants Management Division staff at the City to help secure funds for the required repairs. Empty Tomb was selected as a contractor, and submitted an application for the building permit on October 19, 2007. Neighboring homeowners and residents have also volunteered to participate in the repair of the porch.

Description of the Proposed Changes

The petitioner has submitted an application for a permit to build the porch to its original condition, as shown in Exhibit "C". Early talks with the contractor indicate that as many original materials as possible will be re-used. The existing brick columns will remain, but will be strengthened. The original wooden beams supporting the roof will be re-used if possible. The porch roof itself will be entirely replaced, but will match the original. The deck is going to be replaced with new tongue and groove floorboards. The current pre-cast concrete stairs will also be re-used if possible.

Discussion

Requirements for a Certificate of Appropriateness

The replacement of a porch on a contributing structure in a historic district is considered a major work, and requires approval from the Historic Preservation Commission. According to Section XII-6.B.2 of the Urbana Zoning Ordinance, the criteria to be used by the Preservation Commission in making its determination for a Certificate of Appropriateness shall include:

- 1) *The maintenance of the significant original qualities or character of the buildings, structures, sites or objects including, if significant, its appurtenances. The removal or alteration of any historic or distinctive architectural features should be avoided when possible.*

The rotten and unsafe parts of the porch, such as the roof and deck, will be replaced in kind with the original design. Components such as the columns and railings will be reused whenever feasible.

- 2) *The compatibility of proposed new additions and new construction to the original architecture of the landmark shall be evaluated against general guidelines of height, proportions of the structure's front façade, proportions of openings into the facility, the relationship of building masses and spaces, roof shapes, appurtenances, the scale of building or structure, and the directional expression of front elevation.*

These criteria address new additions or construction, and therefore do not apply to this project.

- 3) *The Secretary of the Interior's "Standards for Historic Preservation Projects," as revised.*

The Secretary of the Interior’s Standards state:

“Deteriorated architectural features shall be repaired rather than replaced, wherever feasible. In the event replacement is necessary, the new material should match the material being replaced in composition, design, color, texture, and other visual qualities. Repair or replacement of missing architectural features should be based on accurate duplications of features, substantiated by historic, physical or pictorial evidence rather than on conjectural designs or the availability of different architectural elements from other buildings, structures, sites or objects.” (Article XII-6.B.3.f)

This project meets the intent Standards for Historic Preservation Projects listed in Section XII-6.B-3 of the Urbana Zoning Ordinance. Original materials are being re-used where feasible. Elements which need to be replaced entirely, such as the roof, will be accurate duplications of the original, based on the physical and pictorial evidence of the existing porch. Exhibit “B” documents the design of the porch before demolition.

Options

The Historic Preservation Commission has the following options in this case:

1. Grant the requested Certificate of Appropriateness.
2. Grant the requested Certificate of Appropriateness subject to certain conditions.
3. Deny the requested Certificate of Appropriateness. If the Commission finds the application is inconsistent with the criteria and denies the application, the Commission should provide the reasons for denial and may recommend to the applicant ways to comply with the criteria.

Should the Historic Preservation Commission choose to deny this application, the petitioner would have three options: (1) re-design the porch to fit in the context of the district and amend the application for a Certificate of Appropriateness within 60 days, (2) apply for a Certificate of Economic Hardship with evidence that denial of this application is financially infeasible, or (3) appeal to City Council within 30 days.

Under all options, the Preservation Commission may make recommendations to the applicant with respect to “the appropriateness of design, arrangement, texture, scale, material, color, location, or other elements of appearance” of the replacement porch.

Staff Recommendation

Based on the findings outlined herein, and without the benefit of considering additional evidence that may be presented at the public hearing, City staff recommends that the Historic Preservation Commission **GRANT** a Certificate of Appropriateness as being consistent with the review criteria of Section XII-6.B of the Zoning Ordinance.

Attachments:

Exhibit A: Location Map

Exhibit B: Photographs of 808 W. Main St.

Exhibit C: Application (including plans and renderings)

cc:

Empty Tomb, Inc.

Gordon Skinner, Building Safety Division Manager

Clay Baier, Housing Inspector

Randy Burgett, Housing Inspector

Exhibit B: Photographs of 808 W. Main St.



The original porch before demolition



Close-up of damage to porch ceiling



Another close-up of the ceiling



Damage to the structural beams



The ceiling appears to have been patched with plywood





Detail of the columns and beams



Detail of the railing