

Staff Report

4a New two story house and new fence -#914 James Street- Seatech of the Florida Keys (H12-01-345)

This staff report is for the review of a Certificate of Appropriateness for a request for the construction of a new two story house. The plans propose the demolition of a one story non-contributing house. On February 8, 2012 the Commission approved the design of the "restoration" of the historic portion of the house and a new two story addition. A second reading for the demolition of non-historic portions of the house was approved on the February 21 public meeting. On March 28 a new application was postponed by the Commission for the demolition of the entire house and the new construction of a two story structure. On May 9 and 22 revised plans were submitted and the project was, in both occasions, postponed. On June 12 this item was postponed since the vote for motions were tied. During that meeting, as a request of the Commission, the applicant chose Proposal B as the design they wanted to pursue. On June 26 the item was again postponed since there was a tied vote. The Commission requested a perspective drawing during the June 12 meeting, but as per today, staff has never received such requested drawings.

Proposal B depicts the same front porch design of proposal A but includes the first five feet depth of the main house roof as a hip one. The house to the east side is a non- historic 2 story frame structure and to the west a one story historic structure. The new building will sit across the City parking garage and the majority of the structures abutting the back yard are two stories.

The plans propose metal hung 4 over 1 windows and hardi board siding. The roof will have metal v-crimp. The plans show the new building elevated for FEMA requirements; the applicant submitted an Elevation Certificate. The building is located on an AE 7 flood zone.

Staff understands that the guidelines for New Construction (pages 36-38a) are applicable for the review of the plans. Under page 38 of the Historic Architectural Guidelines, new construction criteria can be found:

1. **Siting** – *New construction must conform to all current city easement, setback and building requirements. No existing building shall be relocated and no new structure shall be placed closer to the sidewalk, street or visible alley, than the distance of pre-existing historic structures. Areas reserved for parks or open space must be retained.*

According to the submitted plans the proposed design will conform to actual setbacks for this particular historic zone district HMDR;

Front yard- 10 feet

Side yard- 5 feet
Back yard- 15 feet
Maximum height- 30 feet

2. **Elevation of finished floor above grade** - Applications for buildings with the first finished floor above the minimum height necessary to comply with federal flood regulations will not be approved unless the applicant demonstrates that such elevation does not interfere with the essential form and integrity of properties in the neighborhood. In situations wherein parking is proposed below the first finished floor, HARC shall consider how visible the parking is from the public right-of-way; whether the parking area is enclosed or otherwise concealed by walls, louvers, lattice, landscaping or other features; and whether fill and/or berms are used to minimize the gap between the first finished floor and the crown of the nearest road.

The applicant has designed a new house that will meet FEMA requirements for new construction.

3. **Height** - must not exceed two and a half stories. There must be a sympathetic relationship of height between new buildings and existing adjacent structures of the neighborhood. New buildings must be compatible with historic floor elevations. The height of all new construction shall be based upon the height of existing structures within the vicinity.

The proposed new structure will be two stories. The building will be 28'-0" high.

4. **Proportion, scale and mass** - massing, scale and proportion shall be similar to that of existing historical buildings in the historical zone. No new construction shall be enlarged so that its proportions are out of scale with its surroundings. No new construction shall be more than two and a half stories. No structure shall outsize the majority of structures in the streetscape or historic zone.

Although there are no contributing buildings within the 900 block of James Street it is staff's belief that the proposed new structure's mass, scale and proportions will not be similar to the two one story historic houses located on 912 and 910 James Street. Although the non-historic house located on 916 James Street is a two story structure the main gable roof can barely be visible from the pedestrian level. The new house will be set back from the sidewalk almost as the same distance the 916 James Street house is setback and will still be perceived as taller than 916 James Street modular house.

5. **Compatibility** – Design must be compatible with Key West architectural characteristics in the historical zones. All new construction must be in keeping with the historic character in terms of size, scale, design, materials, color and texture.

The proposed plans are based on a traditional frame vernacular design. Although architectural elements have been refined on this new proposals the size, design and scale of the new building will not be compatible with the actual existing historic buildings still found in the urban fabric.

6. **Building Detail** – All new buildings shall incorporate a level of detail that assures compatibility with the surrounding historic context. New construction shall not precisely mimic the details of historic buildings but should have features that are compatible with the lines of historic architecture.

The new design proposes traditional building details that can be found in new houses in Old Town.

7. **Relationship of materials** – Materials used on new construction shall be of similar color, dimension, texture, and appearance as historic fabrics. The predominant exterior finish in historic zones is wood weatherboard, clapboard, drop siding, or board and batten. Exceptions for the use of composite materials may be permissible. Roofing is primarily sheet metal or metal shingles. New construction shall establish a relationship with existing historic structures by utilizing similar finishes and metals.

The proposed new structure will incorporate building materials that are used and have been accepted for new construction in the historic district.

It is staff's opinion that Proposal B is inconsistent with many of the guidelines for new construction. Staff understands that although the building will be setback from the sidewalk approximately 13', it will be perceived taller than the non-historic house on the east side. The main façade of the east side house is also setback from the sidewalk, but approximately 15'. The scale of the proposed house will not be in keeping to the scale and massing **of the existing historic houses on that urban block**. Staff understands that most of the historic urban context on this part in town has been lost but what is still left as historic should be protected. It is staff's opinion that, although the applicant has tried to lower the main façade's scale by incorporating hip roofs, the massing and scale of the entire house is not appropriate when reviewing what still standing as historic fabric.