

**Department of Community Planning and Economic Development**  
Demolition of a Historic Resource  
BZH-27926

**Date:** October 22, 2013

**Address:** 2309 West 53<sup>rd</sup> Street

**Project Name:** Demolition of Single-Family Dwelling at 2309 West 53<sup>rd</sup> Street

**Applicant:** Bryan and Marcie Nichols

**Contact Person and Phone:** Jerry Carlson, Lee Homes (651-248-4849)

**CPED Staff and Phone:** Janelle Widmeier, Senior City Planner (612-673-3156)

**Date Application Deemed Complete:** September 16, 2013

**End of 60-Day Decision Period:** November 15, 2013

**Ward:** 13     **Neighborhood Organization:** Fulton Neighborhood Association

## **BACKGROUND**

The applicant seeks to demolish the single-family dwelling located at the property of 2309 West 53<sup>rd</sup> Street. In August 2013, the Department of Community Planning and Economic Development (CPED) informed Lee Homes that a demolition of the structure at 2309 West 53<sup>rd</sup> Street would require a Demolition of Historic Resource application because it may meet at least one of the local designation criteria having been the longtime home of William Ransom Holbrook, a pioneering advocate of blind rights in Minneapolis.

## **DESCRIPTION**

The 1 ½ story residence at 2309 West 53<sup>rd</sup> Street was constructed in 1908. It was previously addressed as 5300 Penn Avenue South. A porch and dormer were added in 1921. The dwelling has a total of 1,300 square feet. Other modifications to the structure include replacement windows in 2009 and new siding in 1960. A layer of siding was recently removed, uncovering an underlying layer of cedar shingles.

## **PROPOSED CHANGES**

The applicant is proposing to demolish the building at 2309 West 53<sup>rd</sup> Street in order to construct a new single-family dwelling. A site plan, floor plans and building elevation for the new dwelling are attached for reference.

## **NECESSITY OF DEMOLITION**

The Minneapolis Code of Ordinances, Title 23, Heritage Preservation, Chapter 599 Heritage Preservation Regulations states that before approving the demolition of a property determined to be an

historic resource, the commission shall make findings that the demolition is necessary to correct an unsafe or dangerous condition on the property, or that there are no reasonable alternatives to the demolition. In determining whether reasonable alternatives exist, the commission shall consider, but not be limited to the significance of the property, the integrity of the property and the economic value or usefulness of the existing structure, including its current use, costs of renovation and feasible alternative uses. The commission may delay a final decision for up to 180 days to allow parties interested in preserving the historic resource a reasonable opportunity to act to protect it.

## **SIGNIFICANCE**

In CPED's review, the subject property meets at least one local designation criteria and may be eligible for local designation. The subject property is a potential historic resource and is a candidate for possible local historic designation as a City of Minneapolis landmark based on an analysis of the local criteria:

### **Criterion #1: The property is associated with significant events or with periods that exemplify broad patterns of cultural, political, economic or social history.**

Social awareness of the ability of the blind to live productive lives given the opportunity progressively increased through the 1800's and early 1900's. Although the subject property was the longtime home of William R. Holbrook, a pioneering advocate of blind rights in Minneapolis, it does not appear that the property is associated with significant events or with periods that exemplify broad patterns of cultural, political, economic or social history. References to the organizations and businesses that Holbrook was associated with do not include the subject property.

### **Criterion #2: The property is associated with the lives of significant persons or groups.**

The property was the longtime home of William R. Holbrook, a pioneering advocate of blind rights in Minneapolis. He moved to Minneapolis in 1868 with his family at the age of one. He worked for the Van Dusen Harrington Company as an accountant until he lost his sight in the 1910's.<sup>1</sup>

After attending the Minnesota School for the Blind in Faribault, Minnesota, he founded the Minneapolis Society for the Blind with Miss Edith H. Marsh around 1914. Until 1940, he was the business manager. Thereafter he was a member of the board of directors.<sup>1</sup> Through the Society, Holbrook participated in blindness prevention and education efforts.<sup>2</sup> Records indicate that the Minneapolis Society for the Blind was the first blind advocacy organization in Minneapolis and possibly second in the state. The original society offices were located at 722 South 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue. According to City permit records, that structure was demolished in 1925. The Society constructed a new building in 1957 located at the property of 1936 Lyndale Avenue South.<sup>3</sup> In 1993, the Minneapolis Society for the Blind and the St. Paul Society for the Blind merged and created Vision Loss Resources at the Society's 1936 Lyndale Avenue South location.<sup>4</sup> Because nearly half of the Society's history took place prior to this and other blind advocacy organizations were in existence locally by that time, there is less historic significance associated with that structure.

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<sup>1</sup> Hennepin County Library, Special Collections: Minneapolis Collection: Biographies: Holbrook, William R. (wife, Grace).

<sup>2</sup> "Jewish Women Hear Talk on Eye Care: Half of Blindness Preventable, Assertion at Opening of Sight Saving Campaign," *Minneapolis Morning Tribune*, March 13, 1922.

<sup>3</sup> "New Center Opens," *Minneapolis Tribune*, October 27, 1957.

<sup>4</sup> *Vision Loss Resources* (<http://www.visionlossresources.org/about/our-history>); viewed 8/7/13.

In 1918, Holbrook founded and managed the Victor Broom Company with a capital advancement from the Society. The company was organized in Minneapolis to provide employment to the blind, which was possibly the second such establishment type in the state. It was successful and was financially stable within 2 years of establishment. A high level of quality was expected of the brooms that were made.<sup>5</sup> The company employed 9 blind workers, engaged in production and sales, and paid them a living wage.<sup>6</sup> The company was located in the First Central High School, which was located at 1101 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue South and demolished in 1930.

In 1920, a small weaving facility, producing a variety of wares, to employ the blind was established in the offices of the Society.<sup>7</sup> Holbrook patented a weaving machine to aid the blind in weaving. The same expectation for high quality production at the weaving facility resulted in high demand for their rugs.<sup>8</sup>

In 1938, Holbrook rescued his wife, Grace, from their burning 2309 West 53<sup>rd</sup> Street residence. After hearing crackling coming from the upstairs and discovering smoke at the base of the stairs, he woke his wife from the bedroom on the first floor and led her to the front door. He then went back into the house and called the fire department. Three rooms in the house were significantly damaged by the fire. According to City permit records, the residence was repaired. In 1946, he passed away at the age of 79 at the subject property.<sup>9</sup>

**Criterion #3: The property contains or is associated with distinctive elements of city or neighborhood identity.**

The property does not contain and is not associated with distinctive elements of city and neighborhood identity. The building is a single family residence in a neighborhood comprised primarily of single family residences. Neither the building's size nor its design or function distinguish it from other residences in the neighborhood or the city, where single family residences are the most common building type.

**Criterion #4: The property embodies the distinctive characteristics of an architectural or engineering type or style, or method of construction.**

The property does not embody any distinctive characteristics of an architectural or engineering type or style, or method of construction.

**Criterion #5: The property exemplifies a landscape design or development pattern distinguished by innovation, rarity, uniqueness or quality of design or detail.**

The property does not exemplify a landscape design or development pattern distinguished by innovation, rarity, uniqueness or quality of design or detail. The lot in question possesses commonplace shrubs, trees, and grass. These elements are not part of a unified landscape design.

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<sup>5</sup> "Blind Workmen at Victor Broom Shop Sell Product on Own Merits and It Makes Good," *Minneapolis Morning Tribune*, May 30, 1920.

<sup>6</sup> "City's Blind Workers Will Give Exhibition," *Minneapolis Morning Tribune*, November 17, 1918.

<sup>7</sup> "Rug Weaving Is New Industry For the Blind in Minneapolis," *Minneapolis Morning Tribune*, April 4, 1920.

<sup>8</sup> "Blind Man Invents Warping Machine," *Minneapolis Morning Tribune*, December 18, 1920.

<sup>9</sup> Hennepin County Library, Special Collections: Minneapolis Collection: Biographies: Holbrook, William R. (wife, Grace).

**Criterion #6: The property exemplifies works of master builders, engineers, designers, artists, craftsmen or architects.**

The property does not exemplify works of master builders, engineers, designers, artists, craftsmen or architects.

**Criterion #7: The property has yielded, or may be likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.**

Research of the property did not yield information important to prehistory or history, and therefore, should not be evaluated for archeological significance.

**UNSAFE OR DANGEROUS CONDITION**

The applicant contends that the building presents an unsafe condition and has provided evidence that the building is in poor condition. As part of the application, a structural condition assessment was included that outlines the extensive work that would be required to rehabilitate the building. The report identifies that all areas of the building would require repairs in order to rehabilitate it. The condition of the building is very deteriorated. Water has been the main source of damage including through roof infiltration and a substantial leak in the upstairs plumbing system, which also affected the lower levels of the house. Because of the water damage, all mechanical systems have been removed. Rehabilitating the building will require replacing the roof, siding, plumbing, electrical and mechanical systems, insulation, drywall, doors and windows, appliances, and cabinets, replacing or reinforcing the foundation, water proofing the basement, and completing interior finishes. Without any action, the building will continue to deteriorate and become more unsafe.

**REASONABLE ALTERNATIVES TO DEMOLITION**

The applicant states that the best use for the building is demolishing it. They have explored the possibility of renovating the building and determined that there are no reasonable alternatives to demolition based on the structure's condition and economic considerations. They've determined that the best investment return would be generated by constructing a new single family dwelling. The applicant states that the projected rehabilitation costs total approximately \$252,500. This is in addition to land acquisition costs. The approximate land value is \$250,000. Because there are no comparable properties for a one-bedroom house in the area, the approximate remodel valuation of the property would be \$240,000 to \$250,000.

**INTEGRITY**

The National Register traditionally recognizes a property's integrity through seven aspects or qualities: location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association. The integrity of 2309 West 53<sup>rd</sup> Street remains somewhat intact.

*Location:* The building remains in its original location, indicating the building maintains integrity of location.

*Design:* The size and proportion of the building has not changed. Some exterior modifications include replacement windows and doors.

*Setting:* The property's integrity of setting is somewhat intact. The area is still low density residential. The subject property was one of the first dwellings established in the area. Most of the surrounding dwellings are newer.

*Materials:* The integrity of the materials of the house has been compromised with replacement windows and doors. The siding that was added in 1960 has been removed. The underlying cedar shingles may be original; however, they have sustained damage to the point where they need to be replaced.

*Workmanship:* Although it appears that there are some original exterior materials, it does not appear that there is any significant craftsmanship.

*Feeling:* The building retains the look and feel of a single family dwelling.

*Association:* The property does not have any features that convey its association with Holbrook.

## **ECONOMIC VALUE OR USEFULNESS OF THE EXISTING STRUCTURE**

The applicant states that the rehabilitation of the building is cost prohibitive. They've determined that the best investment return would be generated by constructing a new single family dwelling. The applicant states that the projected rehabilitation costs total approximately \$252,500. Because there are no comparable properties for a one-bedroom house in the area, the approximate remodel valuation of the property would be \$240,000 to \$250,000.

## **PUBLIC COMMENT**

CPED notified the neighborhood association and the surrounding property owners; however, no letters have been received.

## **FINDINGS**

1. The subject property is a historic resource. In CPED's review, the subject property meets at least one local designation criteria and may be eligible for local designation. Specifically, the property is associated with the lives of a significant person.
2. The demolition is necessary to correct an unsafe or dangerous condition.
3. Rehabilitation of the entire building is not a viable alternative to demolition.
4. The building somewhat retains its integrity.
5. The applicant submitted a rehabilitation estimate that indicates the overall cost for rehabilitating the property would result in an investment loss of approximately \$250,000.

**RECOMMENDATION**

The Department of Community Planning and Economic Development recommends that the Heritage Preservation Commission adopt the above findings and **approve** the demolition application for the property located at 2309 West 53<sup>rd</sup> Street.

**Attachments:**

- Applicant's statement letters
- Structural and code review and letters
- Remodel evaluation
- Exterior and interior structure photos
- Existing site plan
- Proposed site, building elevation and floor plans
- Photos of surrounding properties