

COA # 2011-COA-041 (WP)	INDIANAPOLIS HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION STAFF REPORT	Hearing Date APRIL 6, 2011
915-917 Woodruff Place West Drive WOODRUFF PLACE		NEW CASE Same request was dismissed Dec. 2, 2010. Center Township Council District: 16 Brian Mahern
Applicant	CHARLES S. WALTMAN on behalf of TAD BOHLSEN with DICKSON STREET INVESTMENTS, LLC	
Mailing address:	201 N. Illinois St. Twr #1600 Indianapolis, IN 46204	
Owner:	Same as above	
CASE		
IHPC COA: 2011-COA-041 (WP) • Demolish fire-damaged house		
STAFF RECOMMENDATION: Approval of a Certificate of Authorization		

STAFF COMMENTS

Background of the Property

The two-story gable roof house was built c.1910 as a two-family residence. It is a wood frame building with wood lap siding on the first floor and shingle siding on the second floor. Shingle siding was on the gable ends. The front of the building has a full width masonry porch coated with stucco.

Background of the Case

At the December 2010 IHPC meeting, this same request was on the agenda and the commission dismissed it for lack of prosecution. What follows is a brief summary of events leading to the case being brought before the commission again.

- 2007 Tad Bohlsen purchased the property.
- Aug. 2009 The Fire. A fire (suspected arson) severely damaged the vacant house, burning off its entire roof structure. The fire started near the rear of the second floor. Health & Hospital Corporation issued a repair or demolish order the next day.
- Dec. 2009 Gable Removed. No repairs had begun. The City received complaints that a leaning gable posed a safety hazard to neighboring properties. Staff confirmed that the unsupported front gable was leaning precariously. In accordance with statute, the Metropolitan Development Director declared an immediate threat to public safety and the gable was removed.
- May 18, 2010 Still no repairs had begun. This was the first date that Mr. Bohlsen was ordered to appear in court. At this time, Mr. Bohlsen was contending that he wanted to rebuild the house.
- Aug, 2010 Application to Rebuild. Mr. Bohlsen submitted an application to accomplish the following work, all of which he estimated to cost \$14,500:
 - a) repair 2nd floor framing,
 - b) replace entire roof structure, and
 - c) make structure weather-tight.

He did not submit adequate plans, scope of work, details, etc., so staff could neither review nor grant a COA. When plans were not forthcoming, the application was put on hold.

- Sep. 2010 After months of court continuances, several failures to appear, possible incarceration for contempt of Court, and lack of progress on repairing the property, the judge ordered Mr. Bohlsen to apply to the IHPC for demolition. He did so on September 7, 2010.
- Nov. 3, 2010 1st IHPC Meeting. Mrs. Vicki Bohlsen appeared for her husband. She said they own Dickson St. Investments, which owns the property, but she has little involvement in the company. She said they would still like to repair the house. When told that the IHPC could only hear the case before it, to demolish the house, she asked for a continuance and was told to make sure someone attended the December meeting prepared to present the request.
- Dec. 1, 2010 2nd IHPC Meeting. Neither Mr. nor Mrs. Bohlsen attended. Instead, Mr. Charles Waltman appeared on behalf of the Bohlsens. He was prepared to only discuss the rebuilding of the house. Because no one was there to present the request for demolition, the IHPC dismissed the application for lack of prosecution.
- Jan. 6, 2010 After hearing the Bohlsens did not pursue the request to demolish, the court ordered them to:
a) withdraw their pending August 2010 application to rebuild the house, and
b) re-apply for demolition.
- Jan. 20, 2011 COA to Rebuild is Granted. Rather than withdraw the pending application to rebuild, Mr. Charles Waltman, on behalf of the Bohlsens, met with staff to get further direction on providing the drawings and specifications needed to grant the request. He then submitted adequate documentation and was granted a COA to renovate and rebuild the house.
- Mar. 2, 2011 By this date, still no repairs had begun. Mr. Charles Waltman, on behalf of Dickson St. Investments LLC, the Bohlsen's company, applied again to demolish the house, in accordance with a new order from the court to do so.
- Mar. 7, 2011 Mr. Charles Waltman, on behalf of Dickson St. Investments LLC, requested by letter that the IHPC withdraw the COA that had been granted for rebuilding the house. This was also done in accordance with the court's order.

Condition of the House

Aside from boarding the structure and removing the front gable, there has been no work done to the property since the fire. The applicant has owned the house since 2007. Staff was given access to the interior and has included photographs of the condition of the building in this report. The following conditions were found at the property as of August 2010:

- The roof structure and attic have been completely burned and removed.
- Much of the framing was burned and/or destroyed in the fire.
- Most of the windows and frames were broken out and damaged beyond repair.
- The floor structure on the second level exists, but is severely compromised.
- Holes exist from falling debris causing water to penetrate through the floor down to the first level.
- The first floor received significant water and smoke damage.
- There appears to be significant mold growth and water damage throughout the interior as a result of putting out the fire and from the roof being open to the elements since August 2009.
- The exterior siding on the lower portions of the house is still in-place, however, it appears that its condition prior to the fire was largely deteriorated.

Justification for a Certificate of Authorization

The Woodruff Place Plan states: *“The IHPC shall approve a Certificate of Appropriateness or Authorization for demolition...if it finds one or more of the following:”*

1. **Condition.** *“The structure poses an immediate and substantial threat to the public safety.”*

Staff Analysis. The damage and subsequent deterioration is extensive. The entire roof structure is gone, making it impossible to take any effective temporary or short-term actions to “mothball” this structure. This situation poses an increasing threat to the neighborhood as deterioration progresses. The fact that rain and snow cannot be kept out of the structure guarantees fast deterioration.

The most immediate threat to public safety was eliminated when the gable was removed in December 2009. However, the test is “substantial” threat. Given the condition of the building, the fact that it is entirely open to the elements with no practical way to close it up, staff believes that if the building is not now a substantial threat to public safety, it may soon be. This is especially the case in a densely built neighborhood like Woodruff Place, where the houses are so close together.

2. **Significance.** *“The historic or architectural significance of the structure or part thereof is such that, in the Commission’s opinion, it does not contribute to the historic character of the structure and the district, or the context thereof.”*

Staff Analysis. The damage and subsequent deterioration is so extensive that there are almost no original materials suitable for restoration. While the building could be rebuilt, it would be virtually all new construction and would not have the historic significance of the original.

3. **Replacement.** *“The demolition is necessary to allow new development which, in the Commission’s opinion, is of greater significance to the preservation of the district than is retention of the structure, or portion thereof for which demolition is sought, and/or”*

Staff Analysis. This criteria alone does not justify demolition, because there is no proposal to replace it with a new building at this time. However, staff believes that in order to redeveloped, whether with a new house or with a replication of the original house, the present fire-damaged and deteriorated structure will have to be either entirely or mostly removed.

4. **Economics.** *“The structure or property cannot be put to any reasonable economically beneficial use for which it is or may be reasonable adapted without approval of demolition.”*

Staff Analysis. Even without a structural report or contractor’s estimate for total “restoration,” it is easy to see that far more than \$14,500 will be needed to bring this structure into any semblance of minimal stability, much less restoring it to habitability. Although the owner contends his desire is to restore the house, he has yet to show staff or the court any evidence that he has the financial and technical ability to accomplish the task.

Conclusion

While it would be laudable for someone to invest the money needed to rebuild this house exactly as it was originally, staff believes it is unrealistic to think that this owner can do so, or that a buyer with the resources and willingness will come along soon enough to save what little is left of the building.

It should also be noted that a certificate of authorization to demolish this house does not indicate that the IHPC “wants” the house demolished, or that the IHPC is “ordering” the house to be demolished. It simply means that the IHPC has found that the present condition of the building warrants a certificate of authorization based on the criteria set out in the Woodruff Place Preservation Plan. If the owner chooses to proceed, or the court orders him to proceed, or the court enables Health and Hospital to proceed, then the

demolition can proceed. On the other hand, if someone decides to rebuild the house, the IHPC can accept such a request and grant a COA if it finds the plans to be appropriate.

STAFF RECOMMENDED MOTION

COA #2011-COA-041 (WP):

To approve a Certificate of Authorization to demolish the fire-damaged house per submitted documentation and subject to the following stipulations:

- 1. The demolition must be undertaken and the site cleared in accordance to the regulations set forth in the Revised Code of the Consolidated City and County.**
- 2. The vacant lot shall be seeded with grass and maintained as a lawn.**

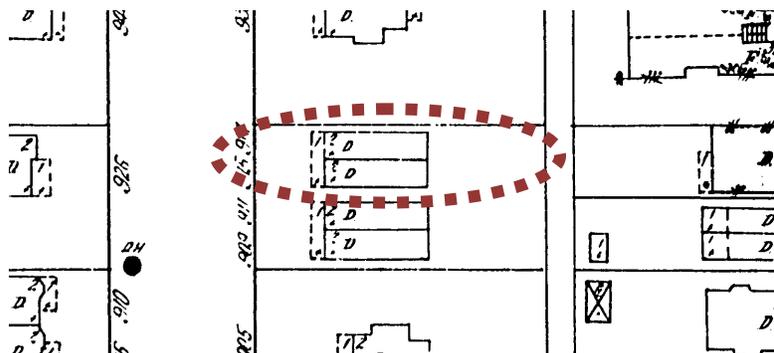
NOTE 1: All necessary permits to complete this work must be obtained from the Department of Code Enforcement before work begins.

NOTE 2: Any future development of the site must be approved by the IHPC before construction.

Staff Reviewer: Meg Purnsley



Map of subject property



1915 Sanborn Map of subject property



Aerial photo showing roof shortly after the fire, but prior to the remainder of the roof being removed as part of the emergency demolition.



Aerial photo looking east toward the front of the house



Mid-1970's photo of house



Front of house today



December 2009 – front gable required emergency demolition



Decemer 2009- front of house before gable was removed by emergency demolition



Rear of building- No roof exists



Close up of second floor rear windows- windows were blown out



Interior at first floor- Black mold covers the area



Interior at second floor- No roof remains



Interior at second floor