

Staff Report and Findings of Fact Nomination to the Spokane Register of Historic Places Webster Building – 415 W Sprague Avenue

FINDINGS OF FACT

1. SMC 17D.100.090: "Generally a building, structure, object, site, or district which is more than fifty years old may be designated an historic landmark or historic district if it has significant character, interest, or value as part of the development, heritage, or cultural characteristics of the city, county, state, or nation."

- Originally built in 1893, the Webster Building meets the age criteria for listing on the Spokane Register of Historic Places.

2. SMC 17D.100.090: The property must qualify under one or more categories for the Spokane Register (A, B, C, D).

- Eligible under **Category A** as a contributing building to the East Downtown Historic District (NRHP 2003), the mixed use building houses storefronts on the main floor and single room occupancy on the second floor.
- The 1893 Webster Building is eligible under Category A because it was constructed during the frenzy to rebuild downtown Spokane after the devastating 1889 fire. Its construction, unfortunately, coincided with the economic Panic of 1893 and subsequent depression, one that left almost a five-year gap in Spokane's rebuilding, and changed the composition of building ownership in downtown Spokane. The Panic of 1893 slowed new construction which would not begin again until 1898 with the construction of the Peyton Building.
- The Webster Building is one of approximately fifteen brick buildings built in the immediate post-fire era (1889 to 1893) that remain extant in downtown Spokane. It thus remains as a significant physical manifestation of the pivotal period in the city's early development.
- The Webster Building is not being considered under Category C – Architecture due to multiple changes to the storefronts over the years, although the recently reconfigured storefront is considered appropriate as a modern interpretation of commercial vernacular architecture. Other changes to the building that preclude its listing under Category C are the new windows (although in the original openings and of the property material), the configuration of the second story which was originally single-room occupancy, and the loss of any original material at the storefront level of the building which is currently gutted.
- The Webster Building nomination first was brought to the Historic Preservation Office in January of 2020. The building had recently been painted a dark blue color and had white interior tiles affixed to two cast iron columns. At the time, the Nominations Committee felt that these changes to the exterior of the building adversely affected its integrity to the point of not being eligible for listing. Nomination categories and the focus of the nomination document draft were also questioned and suggestions made to remedy the areas of significance. The building has since been repainted a more historically appropriate color and the interior tiles have been removed from the exterior. Brick veneer replaced the inappropriate white tile and were painted to match the rest of the building.

3. SMC17D.100.090: "The property must also possess integrity of location, design, materials, workmanship, and association." From NPS Bulletin 15: "Integrity is the ability of a property to convey its significance...it is not necessary for a property to retain all its historic physical features...the property must retain, however, the essential physical features that enable it to convey its historic identity."

- The Webster Building retains fair architectural integrity in original location, design, materials, workmanship, and association. The building has had changes to the exterior that include a new, period

appropriate storefront, new metal clad wood windows in original openings, and a reconfiguration of the second story. Even with these changes, the building does possess enough essential physical features to convey its historic identity, especially since it is being considered solely under Category A for its significance to downtown Spokane as a relatively rare example of immediate post-fire construction.

4. Once listed, this property will be eligible to apply for incentives, including:

Special Valuation (property tax abatement), Spokane Register historical marker, and special code considerations.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

The **Webster Building** is eligible for listing on the Spokane Register under **Category A**.

Preservation Officer Review: Megan Duvall
Nominations Committee: West, Bradley, Rast, Nunemaker
Landmarks Commission Review: Pending

Report: 10/9/20
Site Visit: 1/9/20 and 8/13/20
Hearing: 10/21/20