

Staff Report of Findings

Application for Design Review

Property Address: Cedar Street New Construction – 619 South Cedar Street
Applicant: Press Architecture
Hearing Date: 1/21/2026
Type of Work: New construction in the Cannon Streetcar Suburb Local Historic District

FINDINGS OF FACT:

- 1.) The Landmarks Commission has the authority to review this proposal for a Certificate of Appropriateness under SMC 17D.100.220 - Certificates of Appropriateness – Demolition of Historic Landmarks or Contributing Resources Within Spokane Register Historic Districts.
- 2.) The certificate of appropriateness review process helps to ensure that new construction that takes the place of contributing resources within the Cannon Streetcar Suburb Local Historic District is compatible with the historic character of the historic district. The review process is conducted by the Spokane Historic Landmarks Commission.
- 3.) New construction projects in Spokane Register Historic Districts are reviewed under the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation and Guidelines for Rehabilitating Historic Buildings, with additional guidance provided in the Cannon Streetcar Suburb Local Historic District Design Standards and Guidelines. Staff recommendation is based on the Standards as listed below.

PROPOSED WORK:

The project is for a new apartment building to replace one non-contributing structure – 619 S Cedar Street – within the boundary of the Cannon Streetcar Suburb Local Historic District.

STAFF COMMENTARY/BACKGROUND:

The proposed “619 S Cedar New Construction” building was submitted for review in November of 2025. Staff from the Historic Preservation Office asked the full SHLC to fill out a “Compatibility Scoresheet” for new construction that has been used in our local historic district guidance: Design Standards and Guidelines (both Browne’s Addition and the Cannon Streetcar Suburb local historic districts). Compatibility Scoresheets are used as a tool to initiate a conversation between the Commission and the applicant and are not a pass/fail exercise. The average of the commissioner’s scores suggested that building was generally compatible.

A workshop was held on Wednesday, December 18, 2025 at 3:00 pm to discuss the scoresheets and design of the new construction with the applicants. Public comment was accepted at that meeting but there were no comments. No written public comment had been received at the time this staff report was prepared. Any additional comments received before the scheduled hearing will be provided to the commission.

HISTORY OF THE PROPERTY/LOCATION

The site currently contains one non-contributing structure, a house that has been converted to multiple units. Built in 1894, the structure at 619 South Cedar Street has likely been used for multifamily residential since the 1930s. The house was built for W.D. and Jennie Richardson in 1894 in a vernacular style. The front door is situated under a small gabled roof supported with iron railing. The house originally featured a wraparound porch on the northwest corner (Sanborn Map). The first floor is covered in red brick veneer and the second floor and gable ends are covered in horizontal metal siding. A few historic wood windows remain on the primary façade. The house received an addition in the 1930s when it was

converted to apartments. Because the house is a simple vernacular design and it has experienced significant changes, it does not retain sufficient integrity to contribute to the district.

The Cannon Streetcar Suburb Local Historic District was placed on the Spokane Register of Historic Places in 2024. The nomination for the district denotes the Period of Significance as beginning in 1883 and ending in 1955 and includes approximately 479 resources. Styles present in the district include Queen Anne, Colonial Revival, Craftsman, Tudor Composite, and Modern. Common materials include stone and concrete foundations with wood, stone, stucco or shingle siding.

The author of the district nomination provides some context for Cedar Street, which along with Adams and Monroe are the streets in the district which are wider and have large east and west-facing residences. All three of these streets once had streetcar lines and the gravitational pull of the streetcar altered the dominant pattern of north and south facing facades in the district and spurred the construction of east and west street-facing residences on Cedar, Monroe, and Adams Streets. The orientation of the residences on Cedar is a remnant of the district's streetcar legacy

CURRENT SITE CONDITIONS:

The property proposed for demolition and new construction is located in the northwest corner of the district. The 600 block of South Cedar Street only has two properties, the one proposed for demolition at 619 South Cedar and a small contributing cottage at 627 South Cedar Street. The house at 627 South Cedar was built in 1931 by Joseph Rubens and is designed in the Tudor Composite style. There is also a large contributing apartment building across the alley to the north of 619 South Cedar but it faces Sixth Avenue.

The opposing block front of 600 South Cedar Street includes four properties, all of which are contributing to the district. 602 and 612 South Cedar Street were both originally constructed as doublehouse duplexes but have since been modified to accommodate additional units. 620 South Cedar Street, which is directly across the street from the proposed new construction, is a three-story apartment building designed with Mid-20th Century Modern styling. This building was the most recent new construction on the 600 block of South Cedar Street since 1955. 626 South Cedar Street was originally constructed as a single-family house in Mission Revival style and has been converted into apartment units.

With the exception of 626 and 627 South Cedar Street, most of the surrounding context is buildings that are multi-family construction. The scale of buildings is largest in the northern part of the historic district where zoning allows for less restrictive height limits.

RELEVANT STANDARDS (Secretary of the Interior's Standards):

Standard Number 9: New additions, exterior alterations, or related new construction shall not destroy historic materials that characterize the property (or district). The new work shall be differentiated from the old and *shall be compatible with the massing, size, scale, and architectural features to protect the historic integrity of the property and its environment.*

SITE DESIGN STANDARDS:

1. **Compatibility** with facing blockfronts and adjacent buildings – but differentiated from the old.
 - A. The field of historic preservation has long used the concept of “context sensitive design” but uses the term “compatible.” Designing for a *specific site* within the historic district allows for compatible new construction in one spot that *may not be suitable for another site* within the district.
 - B. It is important to note that “compatibility” is not “comparability.” Compatibility can be defined in terms of the absence of conflict; in more casual and visual terms, it can

mean being a good neighbor in that a building “fits in.” Comparability is a very close state of compatibility, in that the two things have enough in common that they can be compared meaningfully.

- C. The framework for context-sensitive new construction is firmly grounded in compatible contemporary design: design that is clearly of the 21st century and doesn’t try to fool the viewer into thinking that it might be historic, but at the same time, it still fits into the historic district as compatible design.
- D. According to the Cannon Streetcar Suburb Design Guidelines document: “The Cannon Streetcar Suburb Historic District has some of the most varied streetscapes found in areas protected as historic districts. While this variety allows for a somewhat wide range of compatible new construction, there are strong patterns in scale, siting, design, and use of materials that provide context for the design of new buildings. This variety does mean that several types of multi-family buildings are appropriate in the district, including duplexes, tri-plexes, buildings appearing as attached rowhouses and apartment buildings of various sizes.”

Comments:

The district nomination identifies four critical components of the sense of place of the district: the streetcar-dominated development pattern, hilly topography, an eclectic yet cohesive mix of styles and forms, and mature tree canopy that creates a feeling of walkability. These are the basic elements that must not be destroyed or adversely impacted by new construction in the district.

The proposed new construction is designed with the primary façade and main entrance facing the street which is consistent with the historic pattern of east and west facing facades on South Cedar Street. The new design has a consistent setback with other structures on the block. The design attempts to leverage the hilly topography to maximize new housing units while also making accommodations for parking accessible from the alley and not visible from the street. The style and form are clearly of the 21st century and do not attempt to fool the viewer that they are historic, nonetheless the building feels compatible and not unnecessarily intrusive. The design incorporates the existing mature street tree into the design in order to help maintain the mature tree canopy.

The proposed design uses the invention from within strategy to achieve a compatible design. The materials, colors, and design elements pull from influences in the neighborhood but still combine into a cohesive design, which contributes to the feeling of compatibility. The colors as shown on the rendering are not indicative but rather the color samples on page 10 of the applicant’s design package are the actual color profiles. The building has 360-degree design so that it relates to the context on all four sides.

Based on the discussion during the workshop and staff consultation, the applicants refined the original design concept to include a front porch overhang, central address numbering, a refined front patio design, increased the size and legibility of the bellybands, and added wall sconces to the primary facade. These changes have given the structure a more residential feel when compared with the original design. This building is obviously a contemporary apartment building, but it has taken cues from the surrounding district to be a more compatible neighboring structure.

2. **Massing, Size, Scale.** Does the proposed project maintain the scale of the adjacent and facing blockfronts? Massing relates to historic patterns of dominant and secondary spaces; large forms are modulated with horizontal and vertical plane breaks; and how the roof form relates to the

building type and occupiable space. The district design guidelines suggest that massing for multi-family buildings in the district be relatively simple arrangements of volumes with rectangular footprints. Finally, the question of height/size asks if the project avoids a difference in height of more than two stories from its neighbors.

- A. The proposed new construction is comparable in size with other large buildings in the vicinity. The apartment to the north is similar in height and the apartment across the street is similar in massing. Nonetheless, the difference in size to the building one south is significant.
- B. The proposed building's massing does relate to the historic patterns of the context, although it is done in a contemporary manner. The use of a cornice, bellybands, front overhang and recessed balconies helps to break up the massing with subtle modulation of form. *The impact of the massing and scale could be reduced by the use of a gable roof form which broadcasts a feeling of residential design regardless of overall height.*
- C. The proposed building is 42 feet tall and 2+ stories taller than its closest neighbor. There is no denying that the project is much larger than the house directly adjacent to it. However, the underlying zoning does allow this size and larger. Preservationists are challenged to balance the current housing shortage with how to respond when reviewing projects that meet the underlying development standards but may have adverse impacts to historic districts. *The impact of the massing and scale as it relates to the house to the south could be reduced by decreasing the overall height of the building, flipping the stepped top floor to the north, or increasing the side setback.*
- D. The opposing blockfront is dominated by multi-family residential structures including two doublehouses, a three-story apartment building, and a single-family house converted to apartments.

Comments:

The proposed new construction project, while larger than the adjacent house to the south, is proposed in the northeast portion of the district where larger scale structures are consistent with the historic development pattern. The 600 block of Cedar contains one small cottage and one substantially sized house, but the other three (or four) structures are multi-family construction and larger in scale. Due to the in-part to the proximity to downtown, the property is zoned as Residential High Density which allows for heights up to 70 feet.

The proposed new construction uses proportion and rhythm to establish the residential function of the building. The proposed design is visually contemporary using the "invention within" approach to new construction in the district. "Invention within" can and should be a coherent approach to design, not a jumble of various elements from building types and styles. Reinvention allows for various building forms and styles in the district to be used as inspiration and will result in buildings that would come under the broad umbrella of compatible contemporary construction.

The building does not attempt to mimic surrounding historic buildings. It employs basic architectural design principals, traditional forms like a front porch and typical siding profiles to complement the surrounding district.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Replacement Structure: Staff recommends that the proposed new construction is compatible with the surrounding context and should be **approved**.

HPO Report – Logan Camporeale
Design Review Committee Review: Reported at Workshop
Landmarks Commission Review: Pending

Report: 1/20/2025
Site Visit: 12/4/2025
Hearing: 1/21/2026