

Staff Report of Findings

Application for Design Review

Property Address: 9th Ave Townhomes – 2009 W 9th Avenue – Tuerke-Diamond House
Applicant: Rex Anderson – Fusion Architecture
Hearing Date: 9/20/2023
Type of Work: New construction in the Ninth Avenue National Register Historic District

FINDINGS OF FACT:

- 1.) The Landmarks Commission has the authority to review this proposal for a Certificate of Appropriateness under SMC 17D.100.230 “Demolition Permits for Historic Structures in the Downtown Boundary Area and National Register Historic Districts.”
- 2.) The certificate of appropriateness review process helps ensure that new construction that takes the place of Contributing Resources within the Rockwood National Register Historic District is compatible with the historic character of the historic district. The process is conducted by the Spokane Historic Landmarks Commission.
- 3.) New construction projects in National Register Historic Districts are reviewed under the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation and Guidelines for Rehabilitating Historic Buildings. Staff recommendation is based on the Standards as listed below.

PROPOSED WORK:

The project is for a new construction townhouse development to replace one contributing historic structure – the Tuerke-Diamond House at 2009 W 9th Avenue – within the boundary of the Ninth Avenue National Register Historic District.

STAFF COMMENTARY/BACKGROUND:

The proposed “9th Ave Townhomes” was submitted for review in August of 2023. 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. A workshop noticed to public was held on Wednesday, August 30 at 3:00 pm to discuss the scoresheets and design of the new construction with the applicants. Public comment was taken at that meeting, but there were no speakers. No written public comment was received at the time this staff report was prepared. Any comments received before the scheduled hearing will be provided to the commission.

Additionally, but unrelated to the COA process, the Washington Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation has requested an intensive level inventory be completed on the property prior to demolition.

HISTORY OF THE PROPERTY/LOCATION

The site currently contains one contributing historic structure, an existing single-family house at 2009 West 9th Avenue (1902).

Built in 1902, the building at 2009 W. 9th Avenue is known as the Tuerke-Diamond House. The architect and builder are unknown. This house has a simple side gable with a front facing gable on the west end of the façade. The house is embellished by a polygonal window bay on the east and a hipped roof porch cover with turned posts. The author of the nomination classifies the house as Queen Anne in style and the form is a cottage. The house is smaller in scale and more simplistic in styling compared to the average

house in the district.

The first long-term resident of the house was Carl Tuerke who served as the Secretary-Treasurer of the Spokane Ornamental Iron Works. Tuerke lived in the house from 1903 to 1909. The subsequent owner and other namesake, Evelyn Diamond, moved into the house in 1909 and resided there until 1923. No biographical information was uncovered on Evelyn Diamond.

The Ninth Avenue National Register Historic District was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1994. The nomination for the district denotes the Period of Significance as beginning in 1892 and ending in 1940 and includes approximately 220 resources. Styles present in the district include Tudor Revival, Colonial Revival, Queen Anne, and Mission Revival. Common materials include concrete or basalt foundations with wood, brick, stone, stucco or shingle siding.

CURRENT SITE CONDITIONS:

The property that is being considered for demolition and new construction is located near the western boundary of the Ninth Avenue National Register Historic District and **is not included** in the portion of the district that has been locally listed as the Cannon Streetcar Suburb Local Historic District. Two additional properties are located to the west on the same blockfront as the proposed new construction, both are contributing to the district. Both are 2.5 stories tall with hipped roofs. One has been converted to multifamily and one remains single family. Both houses use traditional architectural principals with common elements of overhanging eaves and traditional materials. The opposing blockfront includes six houses ranging from 1 to 2.5 stories in height. All but one is contributing to the district (2014 E 9th Ave) and four of the six remain in a single family use. The styles on the blockfront of the project site and opposing blockfront include Craftsman and American Foursquare.

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 does not 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.

Comments:

The proposed new construction project is compatible with the specific site it is proposed on largely because it was designed within the framework of context sensitive compatible design

from the initial concept. The applicants communicated with the Historic Preservation Office at the initial phase of their design work to understand what was necessary to conceive a compatible design. The applicants took suggestions from some of the most notable properties in the district (the Tudor Revival houses on the north side of 9th between Adams and Jefferson Streets) as their inspiration to develop a modern design that is complimentary of and compatible with the surrounding context. Tudor Revival styling is not present on the blockfront of the project site or opposing blockfront, but it is a style closely associated with the context of the district.

A critical element of the sense of place of the district is the residential nature of the streetscapes. According to the district nomination, that feeling is developed and defined through the robust tree canopy, brick streets with streetcar track remnants, uniform setbacks, and “the pattern of residence, yard, sidewalk, and planting strip adjacent to the street.” The proposed project is on a residential street with almost exclusively residential uses and the proposed design maintains that feeling of residential use.

Based on the discussion during the workshop and staff consultation, the applicants refined the original design concept to include more articulation and differentiation between each of the townhouse units, made changes to the porch roofs to make them more consistent with the overall concept, added more fenestration on the side elevations to improve the 360-degree design, and increased the setback to be consistent with the blockfront. These changes have given the structure a more compatible residential feel when compared with the original design. This building is obviously a contemporary townhouse development, but it has taken cues from the surrounding district to be a more compatible neighbor.

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 breaks; and how the roof form relates to the building type and occupiable space. 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 9th Avenue Townhomes is comparable in size with the remaining contributing properties on the blockfront. However, the proposed new construction is significantly larger than the building it will replace. The impact of the increased massing and scale as experienced from 9th Avenue has been reduced by increasing the setback to be consistent with the setbacks of the remaining contributing properties on the blockfront.
 - B. The proposed building’s massing does relate to the historic patterns of the context, although it is done in a contemporary manner. There are historic examples of townhouse style developments in the district and this proposal emulates those examples to a certain degree. The use of gable roof forms, overhanging eaves, street-facing entryways, changes of modulation help to break up the massing. *The proposed design could potentially be more compatible with the district if it emulated the common doublehouse form that is found within the district (602 and 612 S Cedar Street and 1208 W 10th Avenue) while still maintaining the same number of units.*
 - C. The proposed building is similar in height to its surrounding context. Both houses to the west on the blockfront of the project site are 2.5 story houses, which will not be significantly different than the new construction. Despite the compatible height, the scale of the replacement structure is still significantly greater than the contributing resource that will be replaced. Smaller resources like the Tuerke-Diamond House, mixed with the mansions, help to give the district its varied residential character. Preservationists are challenged to balance the current housing shortage with how we respond when reviewing projects that meet the

underlying development standards but may have adverse impacts to historic districts.

- D. The opposing blockfront, which is part of the historic district, is also residential in use. It includes six properties, all but one of which is contributing. They range in height from 1 to 2.5 stories. The proposed new townhouses will not have more than 1 story difference in height from any house on the opposing blockfront.

Comments:

The 9th Avenue Townhomes use proportion, differentiation, and rhythm to establish the residential function of the building. The proposed design is visually contemporary using primarily the “invention within” approach with a bit of the “abstract” approach to new construction in a historic 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 “abstract” approach uses a reference to historic examples, or context, in the design of a new building that can result in a range of solutions. A new building could have an abstract, yet obvious visual reference to buildings in the setting.

The building does not attempt to mimic surrounding historic buildings, but rather to reinvent and make abstract references to the surrounding context. It employs basic architectural design principals, traditional forms like gabled roofs, and uses an abstracted version of half-timbering 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: none
Landmarks Commission Review: Pending

Date: 9/15/23
Site Visit: n/a
Hearing: 9/20/23