

Advocacy News

August 2021

1854 Home on Jenifer Street Shows: Building Inspectors Are Our Friends

The owners of city landmarks and of improvements in Madison's local historic districts have a duty to:

- (a) Protect the improvement against exterior decay and deterioration.
- (b) Keep the improvement free from structural defects.
- (c) Maintain interior portions of the improvement . . . which may cause the exterior portions . . . to fall into a state of disrepair. Sec. 41.14(1), Madison General Ordinances.

Enforcement of this duty often begins with Madison's Building Inspection Division and relies on the Landmarks Commission and preservation staff.

The "[Vogel House](#)" at [719 Jenifer St](#) is in the Third Lake Historic District and sits next to the Elks Lodge. It has a long history of maintenance issues but serves as a recent example of how Madison is employing the "demolition by neglect" ordinance of [Sec. 41.15, MGO](#).

You can find "before" and "after" photos of 719 Jenifer St. [here](#).

A new owner purchased the home in July of 2017. Several months later, the new owner received a Certificate of Appropriateness from the Landmarks Commission to extend the roof and add skylights. Not much of the approved work was completed in the subsequent 24 months and the rest of the building deteriorated.

Building Inspection found 15 different categories of violations relating to exterior building maintenance in September of 2019 and required correction "on or before August 22, 2020." No apparent improvement occurred by October of 2020, so the Building

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Inspection Division issued a formal “Notice of Demolition by Neglect” indicating they believed that demolition by neglect was occurring. The ordinance requires the Landmarks Commission to hold a public hearing within 90 days of the notice.

Preservation staff engaged with the owner who gradually responded to encouragement and information. Meanwhile, the Landmarks Commission deferred making a formal finding on the issue of whether demolition by neglect was occurring. By July 26, 2021, roughly 90% of the repair project had been completed and the Commission was able to conclude the property was not undergoing demolition by neglect by that time.

It was a painstaking process, but the building survived and its exterior changed from split shingle siding to a historically accurate clapboard. Saved!

By Susie Seefelt Lesieutre & Kurt Stege

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When I was working in an office near Willy Street, our landlord began accumulating a junkyard of vehicles on an adjacent lot.

A couple of weeks after I called in a complaint to the **Building Inspection Division (266-4551)** and without any additional involvement on my part, the mass of unsightliness became smaller and was shielded by fencing. Thank you, building inspectors.

Madison’s historic districts and designated landmarks have special protection provided by the Demolition by Neglect Ordinance. If you see a historic structure suffering from deterioration, bring it to the attention of the interested people who serve us as building inspectors. It may take a while, but good things should happen.

Kurt Stege

Wonder Bar

In its meeting on Monday, July 26, the Plan Commission “placed on file” a developer’s request to demolish **the Wonder Bar** and build a primarily residential building in that location. “Placed on file” means that the application was not accepted but that the developer may choose to substitute a revised application.

Advocacy Committee Co-Chair Bob Klebba’s response:

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Thanks to the 4 board members who registered in opposition to the agenda item that included the request for demolition of the Wonder Bar last night.



Photo from Destination Madison

The overwhelming opposition to demolition we saw last night is exceptional. We've had more preservation defeats than victories in the political process in the last year so more effort is needed! Every registration supporting or opposing is important.

Going forward, preservation in Madison needs the MTHP board and membership to get involved more in the political process. We need to act individually as well as collectively to work against the erosion of the historic fabric of our community.

More than 2500 people [signed a petition](#), advanced by a group of neighbors, opposing the demolition. Next steps are unclear at the time of this writing.