

COUNCIL COMMUNICATION

	Number:	25-399	Meeting:	October 20, 2025
	Agenda Item:	52	Roll Call:	25-1443
	Submitted by:	Cody Christensen, Development Services Director		

AGENDA HEADING:

Appeal from Sherman Hill Association (SHA) of the Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) decision to grant a Certificate of Appropriateness on a request from Colbert Properties (Owner) to construct a new house and garage at 1917 Center Street in the Sherman Hill Local Historic District.

SYNOPSIS:

The SHA (Matt Warner-Blankenship, President) has appealed the HPC's decision to conditionally approve a Certificate of Appropriateness (CAHP-2025-000046) to allow for the construction of a residence at 1917 Center Street. The appeal cites procedural and design concerns. The appellant requests the City Council either review the project on the merits or remand it to the HPC for a rehearing where additional neighborhood input can be provided. The City Council can affirm, reverse, or remand the HPC's decision.

FISCAL IMPACT: NONE

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

- Colbert Properties is proposing to construct a two (2)-story residence and detached four (4)-car tandem garage on a vacant parcel at 1917 Center Street. The house is a modern interpretation of the International Style with Art Deco influences and features a flat roof, stucco exterior, and metal-clad windows. The garage is positioned at the rear of the lot to minimize its visual impact and has two (2) single-car garage doors facing the alley. The request was conditionally approved by the HPC on August 20, 2025.
- The SHA has appealed the HPC's decision to approve the request. They cite concerns regarding limited notice to neighborhood residents prior to the hearing, the project's compatibility with the surrounding historic context, and the participation of a commission member who had prior involvement in the property's sale.
- The agenda and associated staff reports for the August 20, 2025, HPC meeting were posted on the City's website the Friday before the meeting. A notice was distributed electronically utilizing the City's email subscription list for the HPC providing a link to the agenda and staff reports. This is compliant with established procedures.

- The proposed design was evaluated against the *Architectural Guidelines for New Construction in Des Moines's Historic Districts*, which address building height, massing, materials, and site relationships. The guidelines also include the following statements:
 - “The guidelines are developed to encourage new construction in historic districts – new construction which participates in the overall historic neighborhood pattern and at the same time develops a genuine character of its own.”
 - “Sherman Hill, however, developed with greater diversity of land use and building type, and has suffered some demolition and intrusive new construction. Here, because of the diversity of original buildings, new compatible in-fill based on relationship of either contrast or similarity could be successful.”
- The design demonstrates compatibility with the Sherman Hill Historic District with its height and overall scale staying consistent with the context of the area it is located in, and by aligning with the established street rhythm. The project reinforces the district's characteristic vertical emphasis through its window proportions and building height, while its flat roof form reflects patterns also present in nearby commercial and residential structures. The use of smooth stucco and metal-clad windows provides a simple, contemporary material palette that complements the surrounding context and relates to the nearby modern era structures.
- Commission discussion during the August 20, 2025, meeting identified an existing example of the International Style of architecture in Sherman Hill (an apartment building on 19th Street) and noted the district's eclectic mix of architectural styles provides a fitting context for contemporary designs that reflect their own time, such as this proposal.

PREVIOUS COUNCIL ACTION(S):

Date: September 29, 2025

Roll Call Number: [25-1291](#)

Action: [On](#) an appeal from SHA (Matt Warner-Blankenship, President) of the HPC's decision to grant a Certificate of Appropriateness on a request from Colbert Properties (Owner) to construct a new house and garage at 1917 Center Street in the Sherman Hill Local Historic District, (10-20-25). Moved by Gatto to adopt. Second by Voss. Motion Carried 7-0.

BOARD/COMMISSION ACTION(S):

Board: Historic Preservation Commission

Date: August 20, 2025

Resolution Number: CAHP-2025-000046

Action: Conditional Approval

ANTICIPATED ACTIONS AND FUTURE COMMITMENTS: NONE

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