

Providence City Plan Commission

May 21, 2024



AGENDA ITEM 4 ■ DEMOLITION DELAY IN HISTORIC DISTRICTS

OVERVIEW

PROPONENT: Councilman John Goncalves

RECOMMENDATION: Recommend denial of the proposed amendment

CASE NO./ CPC Referral 3579

PROJECT TYPE: Amendment of zoning ordinance

PROJECT DESCRIPTION: Amendment of zoning ordinance regarding demolition in Historic Districts

PROJECT PLANNER: Robert Azar

Discussion

For the roughly 2,600 properties regulated within the city's local historic districts, there is already a rigorous public review by the Historic District Commission (HDC) of all demolition applications. The HDC's standards and guidelines apply different rules to structures that contribute to the significance of the historic district and those that don't. For utilitarian outbuildings or newer buildings or additions that do not contribute to the significance of the district, demolition approval may and should be issued swiftly. For contributing structures, the HDC requires extensive documentation of the condition of the building, alternatives to demolition (including sale of the building), and proposals for new construction. For highly significant buildings there will be no path to demolition. In other cases, the HDC weighs the evidence and considers the costs and benefits to the city of demolition and new construction. This review process takes at least two months, and often longer, to complete.

Importantly, demolition may be approved for any building that poses a public safety hazard. Even then, the city requires confirmation from a structural engineer and other city officials before a demolition permit may be issued.

This process provides such strong protections against demolition in our historic districts that there have been no demolitions of contributing structures in residential historic districts in over 20 years. In fact, in that timeframe, there has only been one application to demolish a house, and that application was withdrawn before the HDC could act. In the Industrial and Commercial Buildings historic district, the HDC has approved a handful of demolitions, but only for structurally unsound buildings, where the cleanup of environmental contamination required removal of a building, or for a major improvement program which is of substantial benefit to the community.

Importantly, the proposed ordinance would not prevent or delay demolition of any structure outside of a historic district.

Recommendation

Based on the foregoing discussion, the DPD recommends that the CPC advise the City Council to deny the proposed amendment.