

City Council – Action Request Form

Date: December 11, 2023

To: Mayor, Mayor Pro Tempore, and Members of the City Council

From: Aaron King, Assistant City Manager
Chris Murphy, Director of Planning and Development Services

Council Action Requested:

Ordinance Designating Certain Property as a Local Historic Landmark – Peter Fetter House (South Ward)

Strategic Focus Area: Livable Neighborhoods

Strategic Objective: Preserve Historic Resources

Strategic Plan Action Item: No

Key Work Item: No



Summary of Information:

Local historic landmark designation is administered by the Forsyth County Historic Resources Commission. Landmark designation is provided for by North Carolina law and signifies recognition that a property is important to the heritage and character of the community and that its protection enriches the community’s residents. To date, 142 properties in Forsyth County are so designated. The effects of landmark designation are as follows: (1) a property owner who wishes to make changes to a designated landmark must first have the plans reviewed and approved by the Historic Resources Commission and (2) the owner of a designated landmark may apply for an annual property tax deferral of up to 50% for as long as the property’s important historical features are retained.

A designation application and report have been submitted by James Howard Kelly III and Louise Rankin Kelly for the complete exterior and interior of the Peter Fetter House and all of the tax block and lot upon which the house sits, located at 319 South Main Street in Winston-Salem, Tax Block 0558, Tax Lots 109 and 110. PIN 6835-24-9526. The tax value of the property is \$407,000, and the tax office will calculate the value of the tax deferral based on the amount of the property that is designated. The Historic Resources Commission held a public hearing on the application/report on November 1, 2023 and unanimously recommended denial.

Committee Action:

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| Committee | <u>CD/H/GG – 12/11/23</u> | Action | <u>Forward Without Recommendation</u> |
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| For | <u>Unanimous</u> | Against | <u></u> |
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Remarks:

The Commission found the Peter Fetter House did not hold special local significance because of the following reasons. The application lacked evidence that this is one of the only remaining conversion duplexes left in Winston-Salem and furthermore, in 2017, a kitchen renovation brought the two units back together again. Also, considering that the mission of Old Salem Inc. and the local historic district is still to maintain and encourage restoration of the buildings to the 1766-1856 period of significance, designating a property as a local historic landmark that has not met that goal would contradict the mission of both programs. And unfortunately, the changes, made in 1920 make the building lack special significance for its 1840 original construction and architecture.

Peter Fetter House

From the designation application and report:

The Peter Fetter House, located at 319 S. Main Street in Winston-Salem, possesses requisite architectural significance and integrity for local historic landmark designation. The house has been part of the fabric of the town of Salem since it was built in 1840; original building materials such as floorboards were repurposed in its 1920 duplex conversion and other original details remain. However, while the Fetter House is important because of its long history in Salem, it is equally important as one of the most fully realized and intact examples of a 1920s duplex in Winston Salem, a period characterized by broader urbanization and the growth of duplexes and multifamily housing in the city. The history of the Peter Fetter House spans the 19th and 20th centuries, and its 1920-30 Period of Significance recognizes its current duplex configuration and its place as a prime example of housing in post-World War I Winston-Salem.

Backing up to the God's Acre cemetery, it is defined by its picturesque site, including a terraced lawn with stone retaining walls and steps, and prominent brick and parging foundation, one that became more easily viewed from Main Street when the street grade was changed to accommodate the streetcar system in 1889/1890. The unrestored nature of this house and therefore its intact early 20th century alteration, represents what was a rather common situation in Salem before the Old Salem, Inc. restoration project began in the 1950s. Few buildings showing this kind of process now remain in this condition in Salem.

(James Howard Kelly III and Louise Rankin Kelly, The Peter Fetter House Local Historic Landmark Application 7/16/2021)

Integrity

The application and report states that the Peter Fetter House possesses the seven qualities of historic integrity—location, setting, feeling, association, design, materials, and workmanship—required for local historic landmark designation.

NC State Historic Preservation Office Comments

Taken from letter dated: September 20, 2023, from Kristy Brantley, Local Preservation Commissions/CLG Coordinator

Thank you for the report for the Peter Fetter House, 319 South Main St., Winston-Salem, Forsyth County. We have reviewed the information in the report and offer the following comments in accordance with North Carolina General Statute 160D-946.

We commend staff and the commission for submitting a well-researched local landmark report. We feel the report provides the preservation commission and local governing board sufficient information to determine whether the Peter Fetter House possesses the requisite special local significance and integrity for local historic landmark designation.

Landmark designation means the community recognizes the property is worthy of preservation because of its special significance and integrity in the local community. Any substantial change in the design, material, and appearance is subject to the design review procedures of the preservation commission. The owner may receive an annual deferral of up to fifty percent of the property taxes for as long as the property is designated and retains significance and integrity. (N.C.G.S. 105-278 et seq.).

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the report. Our comments are advisory only and therefore, non-binding. Once the governing board has received a recommendation from the Forsyth County Historic Resources Commission, it should proceed in the same manner as would otherwise be required for an amendment to the zoning ordinance. Once the designation decision has been made, please return a completed copy of the attached designation confirmation form to our office.

Staff Comments

Staff has reservations about whether the building holds the requisite special local significance for local historic landmark designation. The application and report detail the history of the site and buildings constructed and changed on the site. However, it does not demonstrate how this 1920 duplex holds special significance over the other duplexes found in the city at that time. Nor does it demonstrate how it being one of the only buildings in Old Salem not to be restored to the period of significance (1766-1856) gives it special significance.

1. The changes, made in 1920 make the building lack special significance for its 1840 original construction and architecture.

The Old Salem Historic District National Historic Landmark that was updated and approved on December 23, 2016 states:

The Peter Fetter House, Lot 83, ca. 1840 is a contributing building. The ca. 1920 purchase of this house by Walter Hege and his conversion of it into a duplex concealed and modified the original center hall, two-room deep single-family house. Located at the south end of Lot 83 and against the sidewalk, the two-story frame (weatherboard) building with side gable roof (asphalt shingle) has returned eaves and is on a high stuccoed stone foundation. The symmetrically arranged three-bay façade has wide cornice and corner boards and paired four-over-one sash windows with wide casings. Side porches (north and south) have low hip roofs supported by square posts with shingled balustrade. A two-story frame (weatherboard) centered rear ell has a hip roof with an interior chimney.

The remodeling of the house removed front and rear porches, altered fenestration, and adjusted the interior to accommodate two housing units. The house was split in half and a two-story rear ell was added to accommodate a kitchen/ pantry and additional bedroom for each unit. With the front entry removed, side porches were added to shelter new entrances. The roof retains interior end brick chimneys (south has lost its corbelled cap), and each upper gable end retains the two six-over-six sash windows at the third floor/attic level.

2. Considering the evidence provided that the Peter Fetter House holds special significance because "...it is equally important as one of the most fully realized and intact examples of a 1920s duplex in Winston-Salem, a period character by broader urbanization and growth of duplexes and multifamily housing in the city," staff believes this argument lacks substance and evidence in the report. By 1920 the young city of Winston-Salem was bustling with industrial growth and a variety of housing styles were being constructed to accommodate the influx of new workers in the tobacco, textile, and furniture industries. The duplex, quadruplex, and other multi-family buildings and conversions were found throughout the city at this time. There is no evidence supplied in the report that most or all of these are no longer extant. The current Forsyth County Architectural Survey lists several duplexes in Winston-Salem built in 1920 as still existing. Even if one considers that this maybe the only duplex conversion from an 1840 home in the 1920s, staff does not believe that this creates special significance on the property.
3. The application and report state that the Peter Fetter House's special significance is derived from "the unrestored nature of this house therefore its intact early 20th century alteration, represents what was a rather common situation in Salem before the Old Salem, Inc. restoration project began in the 1950s. Few buildings showing this kind of process now remain in this condition in Salem." Unlike many other buildings in the Old Salem Historic District, it is correct the Peter Fetter House was not restored nor planned to be restored by Old Salem Inc., which was established in the 1950s. Old Salem Inc.'s original mission was to preserve and restore Old Salem "as closely as possible to the way it appeared in the early 1800s." (*An Adventure in Historic Preservation* by Frances Griffin, page 21.) The original 1840 Peter Fetter House did fall into the period of significance 1766-1856. Why it was not selected for restoration is unknown at this time, but it may have been because of the large number of changes that were made in the 1920s by Walter Hege and his conversion of it into a duplex, which included concealing and modifying the original center hall, two-room deep single-family house. The remodeling of the house removed front and rear porches, altered fenestration, and adjusted the interior to accommodate two housing units. The house was split in half and a two-story rear ell was added to accommodate a kitchen/ pantry and additional bedroom for each unit. The front entry was removed, and side porches were added to shelter new entrances.

Considering that the mission of Old Salem Inc. and the local historic district is still to maintain and encourage restoration of the buildings to the 1766-1856 period of significance, designating a property as a local historic landmark that has not met that goal would contradict the mission of both programs. There are a large number of landmarks in the Old Salem District, most of which were designated because of their restoration or reconstruction to the period of significance, or because of their exceptional architectural style at the time of construction, such as the John Francis Shaffner House.

Also, the Peter Fetter House is currently not a duplex. The interior of the duplex was compromised in 2017 when the interior walls were removed to join the two spaces as one again and installing a new kitchen area. Evidence still exists of how the building was converted into a duplex, however, the return to a single-family house reduces the case for special significance of an intact 1920 duplex.

Forsyth County Historic Resources Commission Finding

The Commission found on November 1, 2023 that the Peter Fetter House, 319 South Main Street, does not meet the criteria for designation as a local historic landmark and does not have the special significance in terms of its architectural importance. As such, the Commission does not recommend designation as a local historic landmark of the Peter Fetter House to the Winston-Salem City Council.