

City Council – Action Request Form

Date: December 14, 2021

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

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

Council Action Requested:

Ordinance for Local Historic Landmark Designation of the Shipley Building located at 609 N. Liberty Street (East 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 (LHL) Designation is a program administered by the Forsyth County Historic Resources Commission. Landmark designation is provided for by North Carolina law, and represents a way to signify a property's importance to the heritage and character of the community and its citizens. To date, 141 properties have been designated Local Landmarks within Forsyth County (118 within the Winston-Salem city limits).

The effects of landmark designation are as follows: (1) the property owner who wishes to make changes to a designated landmark property must first have the plans reviewed and approved by the Historic Resources Commission; and, (2) the owner of a landmark property may apply for an annual property tax deferral of up to 50% for as long as the property's important historical features are retained.

An application and report have been submitted by Fain Properties, LLC for designation of the complete exterior and interior of the Shipley Building, located at 609 North Liberty Street in Winston-Salem. The current tax value of the property is \$2,371,700. The tax office will calculate the historic deferral based on the amount of the property that is designated. The Historic Resources Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation on November 3, 2021, and unanimously voted to not recommend designation.

Staff's evaluation of the submitted LHL application follows. This item will be presented at the December 14, 2021 Community Development/Housing/General Government Committee.

Committee Action:

Committee	<u>CDHGG 12/14/21</u>	Action	<u>Denial</u>
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For	<u>Unanimous</u>	Against	<u></u>
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Remarks:

Shipley Building Local Historic Landmark Criteria – Staff Evaluation

Staff sent the application and report to the NC State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) for comment in accordance with North Carolina General Statute 160D-946. The SHPO response dated August 19, 2021 states:

According to the report, The Shipley Building is of local historical significance as a “representative of the ‘era of success’ and commercial growth north of Fourth Street in Winston-Salem.” The report also states it is architecturally significant because it is representative of early twentieth century commercial architecture. The report is unclear why the building holds special local significance. Many commercial properties in Winston-Salem represent commercial growth and early twentieth century commercial architecture. We recommend the report succinctly state why the building possesses special local significance and compare it to other local examples of similar importance. In addition, whether the building possesses requisite integrity should tie directly to the specific argument for special local significance.

The applicant updated the application/report at the request of staff, following SHPO review, to provide more information on the special local significance of the Shipley Building. The application/report states that the Shipley Building is a significant local landmark under Criterion A for Commerce and Criterion C for Architecture.

Evaluation: Category A:

Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.

The landmark designation application/report states that the Shipley Building is:

“...a purpose-built furniture showroom that was home to several prominent local retailers in the early through the late-twentieth century. The building was completed by 1927 for J. W. Shipley, a prominent local real estate investor and former president of the Winston-Salem Building and Loan Association. That same year, the building became the original location of Morris, Early and Company furniture retailer. After Morris, Early and Company outgrew the space, the Shipley Building continued to function as showroom space for several prominent Winston-Salem furniture enterprises through the mid-twentieth century”.

The Commission does not believe the application/report establishes the special local significance of the Shipley Building as a furniture showroom in the context of Winston-Salem’s commercial history. Winston-Salem’s “era of success” was filled with iconic businesses, such as Reynolds Tobacco, Hanes Knitting, Hanes Hosiery, and Wachovia Bank, making them the most significant contributors to local commercial history. The businesses in this area of the city were the standard types of commercial businesses found in any major city in the state or nation during the period of significance (ca. 1927). The buildings on Trade and Liberty Streets north of Fourth Street were, as the Landmark application/report states, “...representative of the ‘era of success’ and commercial growth ...” A representative building, by definition, does not hold special significance.

Of the 58 resources in the Downtown North National Register Historic District, all but one is a building. Apart from the United States Post Office, all of the buildings in the district were commercial in nature. The furniture business is just one of those common commercial businesses.

The application/report does not demonstrate that Mr. Shipley's contributions to the city rise to a level of special local significance. In the 1920s and 1930s, Winston-Salem was filled with successful local businessmen. Further, the application/report does not establish that the Shipley Building is the building which best represents his contributions to Forsyth County during his productive years. Better examples might be his home or office during the 1920s. This particular building does not rise to the level of special local significance for commerce.

Evaluation: Category C:

Properties that embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, or that represent the work of a master, or that possess high artistic values, or that represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction.

The Landmark application/report states:

"The building's character defining features such as its recessed entry and mosaic tile floor, limestone and masonry facade, and plate glass storefront are representative of early-twentieth-century commercial style buildings. The double-height ceilings on the main level as well as its display platforms, pressed tin ceilings, wood floors, original stair, and open space are also character defining features of commercial architecture of the period. The building also retains key elements that supported the building's furniture retail function including rear loading doors and elevator. These features in addition to the large display window platforms and the open floor plan are representative of the type of commercial space that catered to furniture showrooms".

"The building at 609 N. Liberty Street is similar in scale and massing to the rest of the district and fits in with the style and character of the Downtown North Historic District. More than 50 percent of the buildings in the historic district were constructed during the 1920s, and represent standard commercial design from the period. The district includes a high concentration of masonry or stuccoed buildings that are one-to-two-story in height, and served a variety of functions including "feed and seed stores, hardware stores, wholesale groceries, automotive businesses and other shops." The limestone surround on the façade, recessed entry, and tri-level fenestration hierarchy on the façade of the building are representative of the commercial character of the district, in which the design of the building is expressed primarily through materials and spatial arrangement".

The Downtown North National Register District Nomination, presented as part of the Landmark application/report, states that most of the buildings in the district:

"...are standard commercial buildings, dating largely from the 1920s, significant for [their] reflection of the tobacco-trade. While there are small clusters of 1910-1950 standard commercial buildings elsewhere in Winston-Salem, this is the largest, most intact area with these simpler types and styles of commercial buildings. In addition, the district also contains the former United States Post Office and the former Farmer's Market, both of which are architecturally significant in the history of Winston-Salem as a whole. For the most part, the district's buildings reflect the distinctive characteristics of the standard commercial design prevalent during the first half of the twentieth century and, particularly, in the 1920s in Winston-Salem".

"This area housed commercial buildings for the working-class tobacco economy of Winston-Salem. The buildings were less ornate than those found on Fourth Street. Most of the buildings in the district fall into the category of standard commercial design for the

first half of the twentieth century with no particular, if any, style represented. Other architects may have worked in the district, but they have not been identified. Judging from the generally more modest character of most of the buildings in the district when compared with the flashier Fourth Street area of Winston-Salem's downtown, more of the district's buildings were probably built without the air of an architect, but rather with the general knowledge of design and construction possessed by local buildings”.

At the time the district nomination was written, the facade of the Shipley Building was covered - once uncovered, however, the building best fit into the standard commercial design category. The only buildings spotlighted in the district nomination as reflecting popular styles of the period are the former United States Post Office at 101 West Fifth Street (Beaux Arts Classicism), the Centenary Church Education Building at 545 North Trade Street (Tudor Revival), and the former Brown-Rogers-Dixson Company Building at 516 North Trade Street (Modernism). The only buildings noted as architecturally significant are the US Post Office and Farmer's Market. At the time the nomination was prepared, these were the only two known architect-designed buildings in the district. However, it has subsequently been discovered that the Twin City Motor Company Building, located at 633 North Liberty Street, was designed by Northrup and O'Brien.

Local buildings from the 1920s that hold special local significance were typically designed by local, regional, and even nationally known architects. They are heavily stylized anchor buildings with textbook and often ornate architectural features. The SHPO asked for a comparison of the Shipley Building to other buildings in downtown, which was not supplied in the application/report. However, other Local Historic Landmarks from 1900-1930 include the 1911 Wachovia Bank Building (Milburn, Heister, and Co.); 1915 O'Hanlon Building (Northrup); 1915 Main Post Office Building (Oscar Wenderoth); 1925 Gilmer Building (Harold Macklin); 1926 Nissen Building (William L. Stoddart); 1926 Winston-Salem City Hall (Northrup and O'Brien); 1926 Courthouse (Northrup and O'Brien); 1927 Spruce Street YMCA (Harold Macklin); 1928 Pepper Building (Northrup and O'Brien); 1929 Reynolds Building (Shreve and Lamb); and 1929 Sosnik/Morris-Early Building (Northrup and O'Brien with renovations by Raymond Loewy).

Based on this analysis, the Shipley Building is simply one of many commercial properties in Winston-Salem that represent commercial growth and early twentieth century commercial architecture, but which do not reach the level of special local architectural significance.