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April 9, 2012

Lake Oswego Development Review Commission
City of Lake Oswego
380 "A" Avenue
Lake Oswego, Oregon 97034

Re: LU 12-0005

To Whom It May Concern:

I am the granddaughter of Richard Sundeleaf and served my architectural internship under him in 1981-1984. I have had my own firm since that time and have designed countless alterations and restorations of older and historic homes. Recently, I was approached by Benjamin Chessar to comment on his application for renovation and alteration of his and Emily Chessar's home. I have a history with this property not only because it was designed by my grandfather, but because I have drawn two proposed alterations to this property for two different owners.

The first alteration was drawn in 1984 when I was employed by Richard Sundeleaf as his draftsman. The owners at that time, the Rhoads, loved their home and asked the original architect if it could be enlarged. Much has been made about the existence of these drawings, but any architect has a large quantity of un-built designs. Preliminary designs are used to help clients come to decisions. In this case they decided to abandon the proposed project.

The second alteration for this house I drew for the Chessars. It was smaller than the one proposed in this application, but was still a substantial addition to the existing residence. I cautioned my clients that to add on to a historic home one needed both to be respectful of the existing resource and to be willing to devote sufficient funds to do the work correctly. The Chessars seemed frustrated with these restrictions.

The Black house is both a City Landmark and on the National Register. It is a public resource because of its architectural integrity and craftsmanship. There are many Sundeleaf houses in the city. What gives them their charm is the beauty of the building, both inside and out. The exterior of the Black house is a careful composition. There is balance, rhythm, harmony, and proportion. There is careful detailing of the materials. Inside there are symmetrical rooms with careful window placements. That is what distinguishes it from all other houses that are not designed as thoughtfully. Therefore it is reasonable to critique the current application on its architectural merits.

EXHIBIT G-206
LU 12-0005

The proposed design is out of scale with the existing resource, demonstrates a lack of understanding of historic forms, and would be impossible to build without destroying the qualities that have made the Black house a City Landmark. The design calls for extending both the north and south walls of the existing kitchen and the roof above it in the same planes. There would be no clear break between the old and new portions of the house. Thus the existing proportions are distorted. The new cross gable on the entry side is wider and projects in front of the existing cross gable and becomes the dominant feature on the front façade, dwarfing the existing entry. The nestled shallow double gable is a form more commonly found on contemporary spec houses than of houses of this period. At the mud room porch the single bracketed post is shown setting on a brick plinth. This was copied from the existing condition of the porch posts around the house. The original posts were continuous to the ground. When they rotted at the base instead of restoring the posts they were cut off and set on brick plinths. Poor quality repairs are not details that should be copied. Similarly, the exterior porch fireplace shows a sloped brick face that mimics the sloped brick back of the living room fireplace. The existing sloped brick follows the form of the firebox. When elements from a historic house are copied randomly, without understanding the basis of the form, it becomes a parody of the original architecture.

At the rear of the house there are more problems with proportion. The ratio of window to wall on the main floor is consistent with contemporary construction, but not of houses of the period. The shed dormer does not relate to any other forms on the house, and coupled with the porch below seems to have been stretched to add additional space. Because of the above, the current application fails to meet the standards of LOC 58.02.135(3). It diminishes the architectural significance of the landmark.

While I support the needs of the owners to make modifications to historic houses, the most successful of these alterations are minor. They preserve the resource for the next generation. There is less of a burden on the architect to produce a design that is compatible with the historic property. The larger the alteration, the greater is the burden on the architect to understand the design of the existing building. The proposed addition to the historic Black house fundamentally alters the character of the house. The architect has not been able to design a compatible alteration. If it is approved as shown it is an insult to my grandfather's legacy. It should not remain a City Landmark nor should it be listed on the National Register. The alternative would be to deny the application and preserve the landmark.

Yours truly,

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of several overlapping loops and a long horizontal stroke, positioned above the typed name.

Hilary Mackenzie
AIA