

Re: LU 12-0005  
March 19, 2012

My name is Marylou Colver and I live at 68 Leonard Street. As president of the Lake Oswego Preservation Society, I am testifying in opposition to LU 12-0005. I am also a Landmark homeowner.

The Black House is the only residence in Lake Oswego designed by Richard Sundeleaf that is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. It is also unique in that it is the only Sundeleaf-designed house that has merited the distinction and protection of being on City of Lake Oswego's Landmark Designation List in addition to being on the National Register. The Black House, one such house out of 17,000 housing units in the city, is a rare, and unique historic resource.

The State Historic Preservation Office, also known as "SHPO," is the entity that is responsible for overseeing National Register properties in Oregon. SHPO has recommended against the proposed major alterations. In my testimony I'm going to address the two major concerns expressed by SHPO in the letter submitted as Exhibit G-200.

Today I spoke with Julie Osborne, the SHPO Preservation Specialist, who wrote the letter. SHPO receive hundreds of requests to write letters relating to National Register properties and they selectively comment on very few. In the last two years SHPO has only commented on two projects. The proposed major alterations to the Black House were deemed important enough that Ms. Osborne provided written testimony recommending against the proposed major alterations.

Ms. Osborne has a Masters in Historic Preservation and 20 years of experience in the field of preservation and she has dealt extensively with National Register properties. Ms. Osborne's supervisor, who also has a Masters in Historic Preservation, reviewed the Black House plans and, together, they agreed on the recommendation against the proposed major alterations.

The opinion of the Preservation Specialist is that "... the proposed addition may compromise the building's historic integrity **to the point that it may jeopardize its National Register status** (emphasis added)." In spite of this expert opinion, the staff report concludes exactly the opposite. Staff finds that: "... the proposed alteration does not diminish the historical or architectural significance of the residence."

The applicant's architect also, not surprisingly, disagrees with SHPO's Preservation Specialist and claims that the historical significance will not be diminished. He further points out that Sundeleaf was hired to do drawings for an addition in 1984 and this somehow gives the applicants license to significantly alter the house in 2012. Facts that this argument omits are that between 1984 and 2012 the house became both a National Register property and a designated city Landmark. The reality is that the 1984 addition was never built so the drawings, the proposed size, and style of it have no bearing on the

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current hearing. The fact is that now, 28 years later; we are reviewing a completely new proposal by a different architect in light of the current city code.

If the 1984 addition had been built, the Black House would probably not have qualified for the National Register. The National Register Advisory Committee usually turns down buildings because of alterations that cause a loss of historic integrity. In the National Register nomination the house is deemed significant under Criterion C as a "well-preserved and excellent example of the early residential work of prominent local architect Richard W. Sundeleaf" and that it is "virtually intact as built in 1933." For the same reasons, the 1984 addition would probably have also disqualified the house for the protection provided by city Landmark status.

Sundeleaf, in an *Oregonian* interview published on August 19, 1982, two years before the commission for the addition to the Black House, said, "People call me up and if they can pronounce 'architect,' I won't say no. I've never turned down a job." In the same interview he also said, "I always gave my clients exactly the kind of house they wanted." Sundeleaf was at liberty to give free reign to the Black House owners in 1984 because it was not listed as a national or a local historic property.

Also, there seems to be confusion about the "compatibility" of the addition. In the staff report, phrases such as "repeating design elements," "match of materials," etc. are cited as evidence that the historic integrity of the Black House would be maintained. The applicant's narrative, Exhibit F-1, states that the addition will "mimic the language of the existing home," "new materials will match the existing," etc. Mimicking, repeating, matching, or copying the architectural style of the house distorts history and is actually the opposite of what is intended. The design should be compatible, not identical. It should be smaller in scale, stepped back, and employ compatible, but different, materials to distinguish the addition from the original structure.

I agree with the opinion of the SHPO Preservation Specialist that the current proposed plan compromises the historic integrity of the building and I ask you to deny LU 12-0005.

The SHPO expert also asserts "... it appears that this addition could **not** (emphasis added) be removed because it is an extension of the existing house." Again this is contradicted by the staff report that states: "... the addition could potentially be removed in the future without impacting the essential form or integrity of the structure."

It's not surprising that the opinion of the applicant's architect opposes SHPO's expert. Mr. Olson states: "If the new addition were to be removed at some point in the future, the original form could be reconstructed fairly easily as the addition is limited to one side of the home." This is an interesting claim in light of the opposite opinion of the State's expert quoted above. Ms. Osborne offers further guidance: "Often 'hyphens' (hallways, breezeways, etc.) that connect the existing building with the addition are utilized so that the original exterior wall remains largely intact, and the addition is clearly demarcated." The applicant is, in the opinion of the States' Preservation Specialist, proposing a non-reversible major alteration (LOC 58.02.0135 (5) d.8). I agree with this opinion and I ask you to deny LU 12-0005.

I can understand why the applicant's architect doesn't agree with the expert's opinion, but I can't understand why the staff report contradicts the opinion of Ms. Osborne, the SHPO Preservation Specialist, who is educated, trained, and experienced in this field.

According to the 2010 census, there are 16,995 housing units in Lake Oswego, but there are only 43 homes on the Landmark list and 13 homes on the National Register, and as I've pointed out, only one by Richard Sundeleaf on both lists. Why single out this unique historic resource for major alterations that might, in the opinion of the State Historic Preservation Office, jeopardize its National Register status and diminish this well-preserved city landmark that has been a feature of the community for almost 80 years?

This is an era when we are beginning to recognize and celebrate the importance of Sundeleaf's work, the architect that shaped Lake Oswego more than any other single individual. There was the recent dedication of City's newest park, Sundeleaf Plaza, and there is an upcoming Sundeleaf home tour. It's ironic that with the current focus on Sundeleaf's contribution to the built fabric of the city that there would be support for major alterations that diminish the historical and architectural integrity of this landmark.

Excellent examples of our built heritage make Lake Oswego unique. Protection of our cultural heritage for today's community and to educate future generations should be a priority, especially preserving an example as rare and unique as the Black House. The Black House has served, in its present condition, as a family residence since 1933, almost 80 years, and it is reasonable to expect it to continue to do so.

For the reasons outlined above, I ask you to deny LU 12-0005. If, in the end, you decide to sanction these major alterations, I would strongly recommend that the applicants work with the State Historic Preservation Office to devise an appropriately designed addition that would allow the Black House to retain its National Register status.