

Constance Istratescu  
821 St. James  
Rapid City, South Dakota 57701  
September 22, 2014

City Council Members  
Rapid City, South Dakota 57701

Re: 821 St. James

Dear Council Member,

I am the owner of the above-referenced property. I grew up in Lead, went to college at Black Hills State and have lived in California since 1979. I purchased the St. James property in 2007 as a retirement property. My sister, Nicky Spencer, has lived and owned a business in Rapid City since 1980 and currently lives in the house. Previous to the "Stop Work" order for the project at issue, I had no information that the house was historical or that West Boulevard Historic District [WBHD] even existed.

The house sits at the east edge of the WBHD near Mt. Rushmore Road and was only added to the WBHD in 1995 because it is a modest home built by a janitor in 1925 and "helps to illustrate the varied economic status of the neighborhood's inhabitants during this era and serves as a representative example of residential architecture common at the time." (South Dakota Historic Sites Inventory [HSI], 1972.) It is surrounded by other houses, most of which have been designated as "non-contributing," serve as rental properties and are poorly maintained. I did not expect to get resistance for investing a substantial amount of money to improve a property in an area which could use invigoration.

I could see that the house was poorly maintained and in bad shape when I bought it but saw the potential in the entire property. Originally, I believed the house could be painted. The paint on the house has been tested and is lead based. I learned that lead abatement according to EPA standards is a time consuming and expensive process. In 2012, I contacted several painters for estimates. Only a few came to the house and most refused to bid on the project. Several said that because of damage to the siding, paint would peel off from the wood. The only painter who gave me a bid was David of DJ Painting. His bid, however, did not include a warranty or the windows. The house has 26 windows and so the bid minus the windows seemed unreasonable. I began to realize that siding the house was the most feasible option.

I contacted DJ Painting again this year after the HPC meeting on September 5 at the suggestion of Mrs. Kessler and asked for another bid on the house. I explained my situation and the fact that other painters would not bid on the house. David advised that most commercial painters want to apply spray and old homes like mine need to be hand-painted. His bid for the house and garage was \$10,600 and, again, this did not include the windows or the front porch which had been sided just prior to the "Stop

Work.” David advised his bid would have to be adjusted upward based on what material would be used to side the porch. Consequently, getting the house and windows painted could cost approximately \$14,000 dollars or more which is almost what I am paying for the siding package. However, I would have no warranty on the paint job and high recurring maintenance costs for repainting.

We met the current contractor, Ed Eixenberger, coincidentally in the neighborhood and found out he lived around the corner. He knew the previous owners of the home and agreed it needed a lot of work when they had it. He spoke to us about siding work he had done in the area and after looking at it, I decided I would ask him for a bid to side all structures on the property. After receiving his bid, I decided to hire him so I could get the house sided and paid for before it deteriorated further and before I retired.

Not long after the contractor began work, I was advised of the “Stop Work” order because the house was historical. The contractor had asked me if the house was historical and I told him it was not. However, according to the Historic Preservation Commission [HPC] the contractor who himself lives in the WBHD should have double-checked or advised me to double-check this fact because the house had been in the WBHD since 1995. Although I agree with the HPC on this point, I would like to move forward with the project because I am convinced that it is the best way to preserve what was a badly maintained and deteriorating historical home and provides the “environmental component of sustainability.” (Design Guidelines for the West Boulevard Historic District [Design Guidelines].)

The siding package on the house and garage was priced at \$19,200 and included the following:

- (1) Removal and disposal of lead contaminated siding;
- (2) Prepping windows for glaze and paint;
- (3) Installation of ¼” extruded insulation;
- (4) Installation of LP Smartside Diamondkote 6” clapboard (prefinished compressed wood siding) in Bungalow color; and
- (5) Installation of aluminum soffit and fascia in Autumn Red color.

The siding on the garage and carport, which are different from each other and the house comprise the actual walls of the structures and would not be removed. I had also contracted to make repairs on the garage and install new garage doors. On the house, I would install storm window inserts for all windows, a seamless gutter system and a new deck. These improvements are not at issue and are not included in the siding package.

The HPC recommended an “adverse effect” finding because they objected to the 6” width of the proposed compressed wood siding. The only member of the HPC which disagreed with this finding at the September 19, 2014 meeting was Mr. Freytag. He pointed out at the meeting and suggested I advise Legal and Finance of the fact that HPC has in the past approved similar wider width lap reveal siding on other homes in

WBHD. Indeed, I walk my dogs through the district daily and have seen numerous homes with historical features on the margins of the WBHD that have the wider width lap reveal siding.

The South Dakota Historic Sites Inventory of my home describes the siding as “clapboard” but does not specify a width. According to Wikipedia and other research I’ve done on the internet, “Clapboard in modern usage is an American English word for long, thin boards used to cover walls and (formerly) roofs of buildings.” It is typically 4½” to 6½” in width. Accordingly, the proposed compressed wood siding albeit wider in width than what is currently on the house would still fall into the definition of “clapboard” siding and comport with the historical description of the house.

Mr. Freytag also pointed out at the meeting and suggested I advise Legal and Finance of “embodied energy” which is a crucial “environmental component of sustainability” according to the Design Guidelines. At the meetings, I advised HPC that one of the main reasons I decided to apply new siding is because the house is poorly insulated; hot in the summer and cold in the winter with astronomical heating and cooling costs. There was no insulation in the original house or additions and what was added is inadequate. The inside frame consists of cross-boards not built to any standard and when insulation was added through holes in the exterior siding it did not spread throughout the walls. As is, there are large ugly plugs randomly placed all around the exterior siding of the house. Many of them have dropped out and the holes are now homes for squirrels and wasps. To enhance insulation to the house as is, as was suggested by HPC, I would have to increase the number of these unsightly holes everywhere around the house. However, with the compressed wood siding, insulation would be added underneath the siding all around the house to increase its energy efficiency and make it comfortable to live in.

Mr. Freytag said that “energy efficiency” as I described it is important but it also important to consider all the energy costs which went into building the house. He believed by adding the new siding to the badly deteriorated house I would also be preserving the house and all the “embodied energy” that had been used in its creation thus promoting the “environmental component of sustainability.”

Mr. Eixenberger gave me a quote of \$17-18 thousand dollars to replace the old cedar siding on the house with new and this did not include the cost of painting. With this option, the renovation of the house itself would cost at least 40% more without adding in the costs for storm windows. I simply am not able to afford this option.

I bought this house because I love old homes. I grew up in a 100 year old Victorian in Lead and my home in Long Beach was built in 1911. I also loved the property especially the large garden at the south end which gets sunshine all day long. Nicky has a bountiful harvest every year and we intend to continue this tradition when I retire. The proposed change to the siding will not change the historical significance of the house; it will still have clapboard siding but instead of looking run down and deteriorated, it will be beautiful and only serve to enhance the neighborhood.

I apologize to all involved for the manner in which this project got started. As I said, I did not know the house was historic and certainly would have gone through all the appropriate channels had I known. I also believe Mr. Eixenberger, in good faith, was not aware of the change in the law two years ago which required a building permit and licensing with the city for any siding project in the WBHD. I spoke to a couple of people in licensing who told me it is not uncommon for contractors like Mr. Eixenberger who have done work in an area for a long time to be unaware of changes in laws and regulations.

I believe in the work of the HPC. However, it is important to remember that this house is not a museum piece; it is a house in which someone lives and should be made habitable according to current standards. It is obvious throughout the house that it was built during the depression not according to any standards and every manner of building material was used in its construction. For example, once the siding was pulled off, the visible plate contained different sizes of boards nailed together. I agree with HPC that preserving even a modest home is valuable in the historic context and this is exactly what I intend to do with the proposed project.

I thank all of those working for the City for their gracious assistance in this matter.

Sincerely,

Constance Istratescu