

HDRC Approves Multi-Family Development in River Road

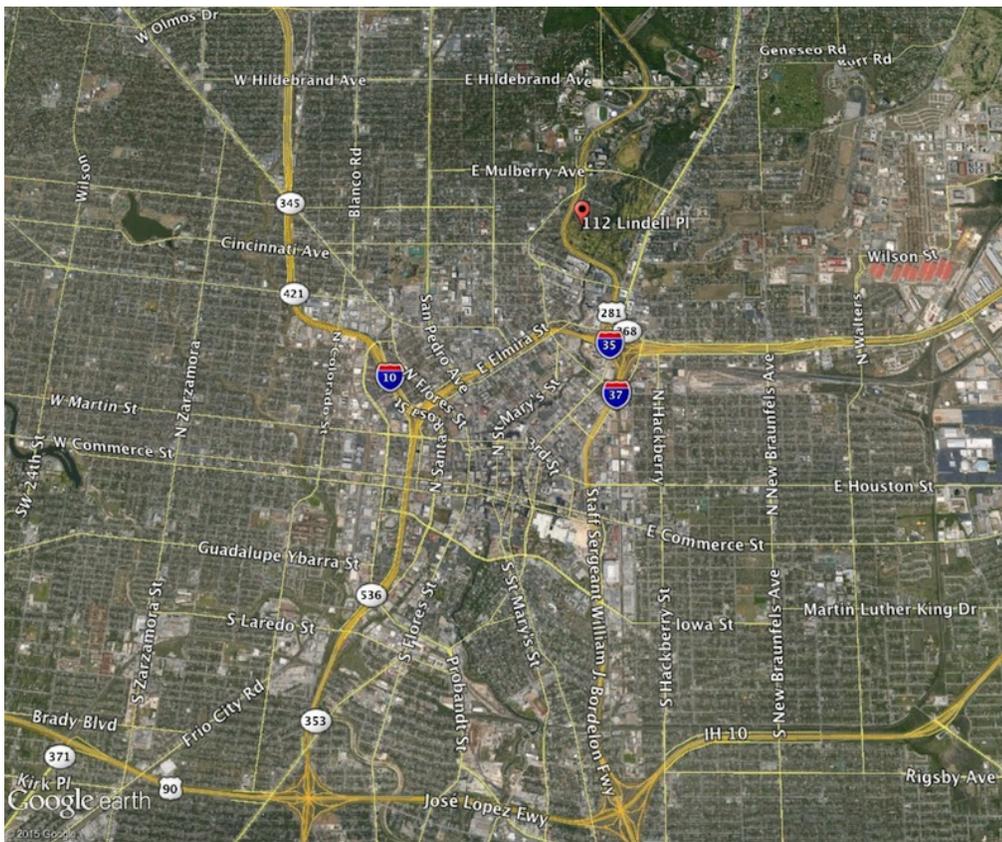
IRIS DIMMICK on 19 November, 2015 at 03:33



More than a dozen residents of the historic River Road neighborhood, nestled between Brackenridge Park Golf Course and Highway 281, showed up to the **Historic and Design Review Commission** meeting on Wednesday to oppose a local developer's plan to build a six additional units on a lot with an existing historic home.

Ultimately, the HDRC found that designs for a two-story, six-unit complex and plans to partially demolish and renovate the home was in line with the neighborhood's "historic fabric," and unanimously approved the project.

Strained talks between neighbor and owner representatives broke down over the summer, resulting in raised voices and passionate exchanges during Wednesday's meeting. An attempt was made about five years ago to completely demolish the historic home at **112 Lindell Place** and replace it with a nine-unit, multi-family complex and animosity has been building ever since.



Google Earth map of 112 Lindell Place.

Since receiving conceptual approval in April, the design addresses several neighborhood concerns about number of windows facing neighboring property, drainage, driveway speed, fencing, and the preservation of an anacua tree, said Daniel Ortiz, an attorney representing the property owner, but at the end of the day, the neighborhood just doesn't like the idea of seven units on the property.

Donna Martin, who will share a new fence line with the development, said she felt like she was being "sand-bagged" by the developers. She wanted "speed bumps and an eight-foot fence" for driveway speed and noise mitigation. Instead, the design features two sharp turns in the driveway to reduce speed and a solid six-foot fence to comply with design standards. The Commissioners felt Martin's concerns and those of the neighborhood had been met at least halfway.

"We were trying to incorporate as much (neighbor feedback) as we could," Ortiz said. "It's not the driveway, it's not keeping the anacua, it's not the drainage, it's not the fence, it's not the parking. It's always going to be too (many units)."

The .275-acre lot, however, is zoned for a maximum density of 33 units per acre, which would allow for a much larger development.



Business owner and jazz musician Jim Cullum, who chairs the [River Road Neighborhood Association](#), and attorney Mark Cannan, who was hired to represent the association around the same time talks broke down, led the neighborhood's argument against the development. The project is relatively small compared to many apartment buildings going up or proposed around the city, but in a neighborhood as small and tight-knit as River Road, Cullum said, it's huge.

“(Historic districts) distinguish us from the rest of all the other big cities in America,” Cullum said. “There’s more than pure aesthetics at stake here. ... People come here because we’re different, because we haven’t torn down all our old buildings.”

“It would be the largest structure in the neighborhood,” River Road resident Raleigh Wood said, echoing Cullum’s concerns. “(The new building would) become a focal point that detracts from other historic

buildings in the neighborhood. ... We're not against development, but what we want is something that enhances the neighborhood rather than something that distracts from it."

Alamo Architects Associate Principal Jim Bailey, hired by the owner to design the small complex, said concerns of massing and scale were already addressed when the project received conceptual approval months ago.

"We're coming back for final approval with 70-80% construction documents," Bailey said. "At which time, there's still time to change things like paint colors, window locations, sidewalk locations, materials."

But neighbors could still not accept a project that included more than four units in addition to the historic house and declined to meet with developers when it became clear that the six-unit design – seven, including the house – wouldn't be changed.

HDRC Chair Michael Guarino said that despite the neighborhood's continued objection to the project, it's the HDRC's job to consider the facts of zoning and design, not the he-said, she-said of communication between the developer and neighbors.

"We don't really care, necessarily, whose registered letter has gone into which mailbox," Guarino said. "It's clear that there has been some sort of break down of communication, but frankly that's not our affair ... our affair is to stick to the facts."

Primary to this case is that the zoning more than allows for the number of units and the amount of yard space/vacancy on this lot is an anomaly for the neighborhood, he said, as most lots have large and modest-sized homes that are set close to the street. "(This house) is more like a carriage house or garage. ... And I'll note that there are at least two other multi-family structures nearby."



Google Earth map of 112 Lindell Place.

Cannan took issue with the proposal’s use of the terms “renovate and remodel” instead of “demolition” when describing what would happen to a part of the existing home that was deemed “non-contributing” to its historic status. About one-third of the structure, found to be a more contemporary add-on by City staff, will be demolished.

“To allow a demolition to be camouflaged as something else ... (is) making a mockery of the process itself,” Cannan said.

Office of Historic Preservation Director Shanon Shea Miller, who recommended approval of the project, said partial demolition is a common feature of a “renovation and remodel.” She added that due process was given to the historic relevance during staff’s investigation which used antique Sanborn maps and other documents that found the portion of the house that will be demolished is actually an add-on to the original structure.

“The commission routinely looks at removal of one addition in exchange for another as part of a larger rehabilitation plan,” she said. “This particular case is being handled and reviewed the same way as all other

similar cases.”

The owner, Asher Reilly of Dallas-based **Reilly Brothers** real estate company, lives and works in his company’s San Antonio office. He was present during the meeting but did not address the Commission.

Attorney Cannan was not sure if the neighborhood association would vote to appeal the decision with the **Board of Adjustment**.

“(The owner) fully expects that we’ll have to go to court” to respond to an appeal, Ortiz told the Commission.



IRIS DIMMICK

Iris Dimmick is managing editor of The Rivard Report. Contact her at iris@rivardreport.com

[WEBSITE](#) [TWITTER](#) [FACEBOOK](#)