Reviewed for Code Compliance
Inspections Division
Approved with Conditions
Date: 01/20/15

Memorandum

To: Zoning Administration, City of Portland
From: James Cabot
Date: November 14, 2014
Re: 57 Coyle Street, Portland Zoning

My wife and I recently purchased a c. 1900 Colonial Revival house on Coyle Street between Forest Avenue and the Back Cove. We selected the house on account of its location, design and historical authenticity. Significant elements of the house are in original condition, including beautiful woodwork and paneling in the front entrance, living room and dining room. We are only the third family to own this house since it was built more than 110 years ago.

In September, the Greater Portland Landmarks Preservation Services team visited our house. I am attaching their report to this memo. They suggest that the architect of the house may have been noted Portland architect Frederick A. Thompson.

In the weeks following our purchase of the house, we have worked with architect designer Brewster Buttfield to think about how to adapt the house to the needs of a modern family while preserving and restoring its historic character. As we worked on the design, we came to understand that there are several shortcomings with the house. Namely:

1. There are only two entrances to the house – the front door to Coyle Street and a back door that is reached via a long path from Coyle Street. There is not an entrance to the house on the side of the building that faces the yard and the garage (which was added c. 1915 according to City records)
2. Both entrances require climbing a half-flight of steps prior to entering the building. We have a young family with two children under the age of three, and my father is disabled and cannot climb stairs
3. The house currently does not contain mudroom and storage spaces of the type that a modern family with young children requires
4. There is an extensive basement that could be used as a mudroom and storage space, but it is only accessible via a steep and narrow (likely non-conforming) staircase and an external bulkhead door

We determined that the best response to these problems would be to create a third entrance to the house combined with improved access between the ground floor and the basement. This would:

1. Provide dramatically improved access between the house and the garage
2. Provide an at-grade entrance for children, strollers, disabled parents, etc.
3. Provide a connection to the basement enabling the use of the basement space as a mudroom and storage space for jackets, boots, sports equipment and the like

Given where the house is situated on the plot of land, the only buildable direction that does not conflict with existing setbacks is in a western direction toward our side yard, where a c. 1990 deck currently is located and toward a 125+ year old ash tree. Building in this direction, however, would require altering the historic side elevation, which is striking for its mix of geometric shapes and is visible from the street. This would also require modifying or destroying original interior elements, including original woodwork, radiators and the like. Building toward the ash tree may also damage the extensive root system and risks negatively impacting, or even killing, the tree. Rather than alter this side elevation, we plan to remove the c. 1990 deck, potentially rehang the historic shutters and restore the overall look of the house to something much closer to the way it would have looked when it was built.

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We propose to tuck a small addition onto the rear of the house, in an area that is currently fac by several neighboring garages and that is not directly visible from the street. This would require reduction with regard to the existing setback. I have spoken with our neighbors regarding our plans and they are all supportive.

We feel that our solution will enable us to achieve our goal of repurposing our house for modern family living while allowing us to preserve and restore the most vital elements and elevations of a historic structure.