



# Agenda Item #1

## Application 2024-17-CA

### DETAILS

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**Location:**

54 N. Cedar Street

**Summary of Request:**

Relocate historic structure to 265 N. Dearborn Street

**Applicant (as applicable):**

Douglas Kearley

**Property Owner:**

Janice Morrison  
Jaime Hobbs  
Darnisha Boykin

William Carroll (contingent owner)

**Historic District:**

Lower Dauphin Street Commercial

**Classification:**

Contributing

**Summary of Analysis:**

- The house at 54 N. Cedar Street is located in a locally designated historic district.
- The removal of the subject house would result in an empty lot, the equivalent of a demolition, and would impair the historic integrity of the district.
- The lot to which the subject house would be moved is not within a locally designated historic district. It is currently vacant but formerly was the site of a similar frame single-family residence.
- The proposed receiving lot is part of a redevelopment and infill project initiated by the Downtown Mobile Alliance.
- The proposed addition, alterations and site improvements would be in conformance with the *Guidelines*, if the *Guidelines* were applicable.

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## PROPERTY AND APPLICATION HISTORY

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Lower Dauphin Street Commercial Historic District was initially listed in the National Register in 1979 under Criteria A (historic significance) and C (architectural significance) for its local significance in the areas of commerce and architecture. The district is significant for its unique character stemming from the high concentration of closely spaced two- and three-story brick buildings and as Mobile's nineteenth century commercial thoroughfare. The district boundaries were expanded in 1982, 1995, 1998, and 2019.

The contributing dwelling at 54 N. Cedar is a wood-frame shotgun type house with a rear projection on its south elevation. The 1878 City Directory, along with the 1891, 1904, and 1924 Sanborn maps, depict a large brick commercial building at 54 N. Cedar. This east side of the block remained predominately comprised of commercial structures through 1924. The subsequent Sanborn overlay, which occurred in 1955, depicts a domestic structure at 54 N. Cedar in a form that appears to be that of the existing dwelling. According to one of the owners, Ms. Morrison, the subject structure was moved to its current location. The original location is unknown. Aerial photography reveals that the house may have been extant at 54 N. Cedar in 1952. The National Register nomination dates the structure to c. 1900.

A rear porch and carport on the north elevation were added to the structure at an unknown date. These were demolished in 2017.

Historic Development Department records show that the property has appeared once before the Architectural Review Board (ARB). In 2017 an application was approved to remove the roof of a collapsing carport and portions of later additions.

## SCOPE OF WORK

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1. Move frame house at 54 N. Cedar Street to the vacant lot at 265 N. Dearborn Street  
*Cardinal directions discussed here and shown on the plans refer to the proposed placement of the house at 265 N. Dearborn Street, and not to its current location.*
  - a. The structure would sit on the lot 16'-0" west of the N. Dearborn Street ROW. Side yard setbacks on the north and south would be 12'-0" and 8'-0", respectively.
  - b. The building would be placed on masonry piers. Grade to finish floor height would be 2'-8". Framed wood lattice panels would be installed between the piers as infill.
  - c. The existing metal roof would be replaced with a new 5 V Crimp standing seam metal roof.
  - d. Existing wood siding would be repaired and replaced with new wood siding to match where needed.
  - e. Repairs and alterations to the existing elevations would be as follows:
    - East façade  
A wood front porch would replace the existing concrete porch.  
Scrape, prime, and repaint the extant iron columns, valence, brackets, and rail on front porch.  
Retain masonry steps and brick walls.  
Retain and repair existing door, transom, and windows.
    - West elevation  
Additions to this elevation are described below
    - North elevation  
Retain and repair existing windows.
    - South elevation  
Retain and repair existing windows.  
Install a new two-over-two wood sash window which would measure 2'-10" wide by 5'-8" high, and would fit the existing opening.

## APPLICABLE STANDARDS (*Design Review Guidelines for Mobile's Historic Districts*)

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1. Impact on the Street and District
  - Consider the impact of removing the historic structure relative to its context.
  - Consider whether the building is part of an ensemble of historic buildings that create a neighborhood. (12.0)
2. Nature of Proposed Development
  - Consider the future utilization of the site. (12.0)
3. Relocation Guidelines
  - New Location: Consider whether or not a structure will be relocated within the same district and in a similar context. Relocation may be more appropriate when the receiving site is in the district. Relocated buildings shall be placed in situations that do not impair the architecture or the historic character of the surrounding buildings and district.
  - Building Placement: When relocating a building, maintain its general placement and orientation on the new site so as to maintain the architectural and historical character of the streetscape and district.
  - Where possible, relocate a building to a site that is similar in size as perceived from the street. (12.0)

## STAFF ANALYSIS

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The application involves relocating the historic structure at 54 N. Cedar Street to 265 N. Dearborn Street, constructing a rear addition, and carrying out site improvements. Mr. Carroll has purchased the house from the owners, with the contingency that if the Architectural Review Board does not approve its relocation to 265 N Dearborn, ownership will revert back to Ms. Morrison, Ms. Hobbs, and Ms. Boykin.

The Code of the City of Mobile (Chapter 44, Article IV, Sec. 44-80) requires that the ARB not grant a Certificate of Appropriateness “for the demolition or relocation of any Historic Property or property within a local Historic District unless the Board finds that the removal or relocation of such building will not be detrimental to the historic or architectural character of the District.”

The structure to be moved is located in the Lower Dauphin Street Commercial District. The house would be removed from its current site, subsequently producing an end result for N. Cedar Street identical to a demolition. Therefore, when relocation is considered, the *Guidelines* direct consideration of the following: the significance of the structure, the condition of the structure in question, the impact on the street and district, the nature of proposed development at the origination property, the new location, and the building placement of the relocated building. (12.0)

### The significance of the structure

The house at 54 N. Cedar is listed as a contributing property in the Lower Dauphin Street Commercial District National Register nomination. The shotgun dwelling type, which features single room width and multiple room depth, represents a vernacular form common mainly in urban areas throughout the Southeast. The subject property is a hipped-roof structure consisting of an off-set perpendicular rear wing, which represents a typical variation of the shotgun form, intended to create more living space.

### Condition

The structure at 54. N Cedar is found to be in a deteriorated state. A visual inspection performed by Staff and photos provided by the applicant reveal missing windows, peeling paint, rotten framing and siding, openings created by missing soffit boards and framing materials, boarded-up openings in exterior walls due to deleted additions, etc. Historic Development Department vertical files show that, due to collapse, both the rear porch and carport were removed in 2017. Records further contain a structural engineering inspection report which states

that the structure is unsalvageable and should be demolished, along with a notice from Municipal Enforcement informing the owner of the deteriorated state of the dwelling. It has become apparent that the owners (Ms. Morrison, Ms. Hobbs, and Ms. Boykin) are not motivated and/or do not have the capacity to rehabilitate the house. Relocation may be an appropriate last option action to safeguard this historic structure from falling into irreparable ruin.

#### Impact on the Street and District

The *Guidelines* state that whether the building in question is “one of the last remaining positive examples of its kind in the neighborhood, county, or region” should be factored into any decision involving the removal of a structure within a historic district. As stated above, the shotgun house, such as the one located at 54 N. Cedar, is common to this region, and the prevalence of its form is a defining feature of Mobile’s historic built environment. Although many can still be seen throughout Mobile’s historic districts and beyond, a substantial number have been and continue to be lost. While the contributing dwelling did not originate at this location, it contributes to the district as a historic structure, as it has sat at 54 N. Cedar for over fifty years, and well before the district was listed on the National Register. Previously, a large one-story brick commercial building sat on the lot from at least 1885. Since 1955, widespread demolition along adjacent properties and surrounding blocks mainly to the north, has resulted in vacant lots and the construction of new, large commercial structures. Included in the vacant lots are the two lots directly across N. Cedar from the subject property, along with the abutting lot to its north. Currently, 54 N. Cedar is one of two remaining residential properties on the immediate block.

The *Guidelines* further instruct that the impact of a structure’s demolition on surrounding structures, including neighboring properties, properties on the same block or across the street, or properties throughout the individual historic district should be taken into account. The immediate vicinity has historically been a mix of commercial and residential, consisting of larger commercial and multi-tenant structures, and smaller one- or two-story single-family and duplex cottage dwellings, mostly of frame construction. Because most of the residential structures along North Cedar Street north of St. Francis Street have been removed, 54 N. Cedar creates a boundary that contributes to safeguarding the historic interpretation of the immediate block, which includes the Bettie Hunter home (part of the Dora Franklin Finley African American Heritage Trail) at 504 St. Francis, to the southeast. Along the adjacent block to the south (bounded by St. Francis and Dauphin Streets), the historic pattern of mixed residential and commercial remains mostly intact on the west side of N. Cedar, whereas all of the residential buildings formerly on the east side are no longer extant. Therefore, the location of the subject dwelling, also on the east side of N. Cedar, helps to underpin the historic built pattern of the street and the district.

#### Nature of proposed development at the origination property

The *Guidelines* instruct that the future use of a cleared site should be considered. No plans for future development of the lot at 54 N Cedar were submitted with this application. Conceptual plans for a pocket park were submitted as attachments to the applicant’s Consolidated Review Committee (CRC) application, but those plans were not submitted for ARB consideration.

#### Relocation Guidelines: New location

In regard to the receiving location, the *Guidelines* state, “Consider whether or not a structure will be relocated within the same district and in a similar context. Relocation may be more appropriate when the receiving site is in the district. Relocated buildings shall be placed in situations that do not impair the architecture or the historic character of the surrounding buildings and district.” The receiving site, 265 N. Dearborn, is not located in a historic district, which would place a contributing historic building outside the purview of the ARB, meaning any exterior changes or demolition proposed for the property in the future would not be subject to review under the City’s preservation ordinance.

The subject lot on N. Dearborn Street is located two blocks west and four and a half blocks north of 54 N. Cedar Street. Historically, the architectural context of the proposed new location was similar to the one to which the subject structure currently belongs. The Sanborn map reveals that there were several houses of the same massing and form as 54 N. Cedar. The structure previously extant at 265 N. Dearborn was a frame double shotgun form

with a full-width front porch. Aerial photography shows this structure present on the lot through 1985. It is not extant in the subsequent 1997 photo. Like the area around 54 N. Cedar, both the east and west sides of the receiving block on N. Dearborn have witnessed high rates of building loss, with only four houses remaining out of the sixteen to eighteen that existed on the block between 1904 and 1955. The block is now comprised predominantly of vacant lots.

The lot at 265 N. Dearborn is owned by Historic Mobile, a non-profit subsidiary of the Downtown Mobile Alliance (DMA), and is part of a redevelopment initiative by the DMA to repopulate and preserve eight home sites on the west side of N. Dearborn Street between Congress and State Streets, which has experienced extensive disinvestment. Currently, this infill and preservation initiative has resulted in the current rehabilitation of the two extant historic structures remaining on this section of the street, and four out of the remaining six lots are under development agreements with DMA for new construction projects, two of which have already begun at 269 and 261 N. Dearborn. All of the projects proposed for these eight sites are required to obtain the approval of the Consolidated Review Committee, as they are located in the Downtown Development District.

The lot at 265 N. Dearborn sits south of the historic home at 267 N. Dearborn, which is slated for rehab, and it sits north of a new single-family home under construction at 261 N. Dearborn. Like its historic context, the projected architectural context of the proposed new location would be comparable to the one which the building currently belongs to, i.e., modest frame single-family residences. Because of the reinvestment initiatives, the age of the surrounding houses would range from the turn of the twentieth century to new construction. There are four historic single-family homes extant on the east side of the street. The proposed location provides a suitable context for the historic structure at 54 N. Cedar, and its inclusion on the block would provide balance to the mix of historic and new construction on this section of the street, which appears to align with the goals of Downtown Mobile Alliance's redevelopment project.

Although, as stated above, relocation might be a fitting option to preserve the historic resource at 54 N. Cedar, moving it to a location outside of a historic district is not compliant with the *Guidelines'* directives for relocation.

#### Relocation Guidelines: Building placement of the relocated building

The proposed new placement for the subject building would reflect its current placement and orientation on N. Cedar street. A proposed front setback of 16'-0" sits within the proposed setback range that will be established with the mix of existing historic properties and planned new construction. Likewise, the lot on N. Dearborn street is of a similar width but is significantly deeper. However, it is of an appropriate depth to accommodate the proposed additions for the rear of the original structure and would appear of a comparable size from the street, as directed in the *Guidelines*.

All repairs proposed for the structure are in-kind replacements which are in conformance with the *Guidelines*. The application also proposes the installation of a new two-over-two wood sash window to fit the existing opening. This replacement would not impair the established fenestration pattern on the elevation. (5.6-5.17, 6.5-6.8)


The *Guidelines* call for an addition to an existing historic structure to be subordinate to and compatible with the main structure in placement, massing, scale, and rhythm. This application achieves these objectives with the placement of the one-story addition to the rear of the property, which does not disrupt the existing massing and scale of the property. The footprint of the addition would increase the original structure's square footage to 1514, which is almost double its original footprint of approximately 800 sf. The roof design proposed for the addition would be appropriately incorporated to the existing roof design, and the change would be minimally visible from the street. Foundation and ceiling heights proposed for the addition match those of the existing house. (6.9 - 6.11, 6.14, 6.15, 6.19)

All exterior materials intended for the addition match the original historic structure and are of appropriate design, to include the wood siding, wood windows, and trim, along with matching masonry foundation piers and lattice infill panels. (6.13, 6.19, 6.21)

Site improvements proposed for 265 N. Dearborn include a brick walkway linking the front steps to the sidewalk, and a concrete driveway located to the north of the house. Both the walkway and driveway would be created in accordance with the *Guidelines*. (10.2, 10.5, 10.7)


## ARCHITECTURAL REVIEW BOARD VICINITY MAP



APPLICATION NUMBER <u>1</u> DATE <u>5/1/2024</u>	 NTS
APPLICANT <u>Douglas Kealey on behalf of William Carroll</u> Relocate contributing house from Lower Dauphin St Commercial District to	
PROJECT <u>261 N Dearborn (no district). Construct rear addition &amp; site improvements at new location</u>	

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## Site Photos – 54 N. Cedar Street



1. West (front) elevation



2. Southwest view



3. Northwest view



4. Rear projection on south elevation



5. Detail of deterioration



6. Detail of rear elevation

## Site Photos – 265 N. Dearborn Street



1. View of N. Dearborn Street, looking S-SE



2. View of Dearborn Street, looking NE



3. View of vacant lot at 265 N. Dearborn, looking SW



4. View of vacant lot at 265 N. Dearborn, looking NW



5. View of historic home at 259 N. Dearborn, undergoing rehabilitation



6. View of Dearborn Street, looking NW