



Agenda Item #1

Application 2024-25-CA

DETAILS

Location:

406 Wisconsin Avenue

Summary of Request:

Demolish existing one-story frame single-family residence. New Construction: Construct one-story frame single-family residence.

Applicant (as applicable):

Baumgardner House Raising, LLC,
d/b/a BHL Federal, LLC

Property Owner:

Essie Etheridge

Historic District:

Leinkauf

Classification:

Contributing

Summary of Analysis:

- The extant structure has been deemed not fit for rehabilitation under the *Home Recovery Alabama Program (HRAP)*.
- The proposed new construction is of similar size and form of the existing.
- The proposed new construction design incorporates elements that echo those of the original structure.
- The materials proposed for the new structure are compliant with the design guidelines for new construction.
- An addendum to the previous submitted structural report has been provided by the applicant.
- A timeline outlining the progress of the application and evolution of submitted drawings is provided in the Staff analysis.

Report Contents:

Property and Application History 2

Scope of Work 2

Applicable Standards 3

Staff Analysis 7

Attachments11

PROPERTY AND APPLICATION HISTORY

Leinkauf Historic District was initially listed in the National Register in 1987 under Criteria A and C for significant architecture and community planning; the district was expanded in 2009. The neighborhood was settled in the early 20th century as a streetcar suburb adjacent to Government Street and surrounding Leinkauf School (1904). Housing forms and styles in the district reflect the range of styles and forms popular from 1900 through 1955.

The property at 406 Wisconsin Avenue is a single-story wood-frame bungalow with a jerkinhead roof and a full-width porch across its primary (east) elevation. This section of Wisconsin Avenue was first platted in 1922, and Wisconsin Avenue is not listed in City Directories prior to 1924. The 1924 City Directory lists Edward Balzli as residing at 406 Wisconsin Avenue, and the 1925 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map shows a property with a similar footprint to the extant residence in the same location. An estimated construction date of 1924 is therefore appropriate for the residence. Stylistic evidence further supports a construction date of 1924, given the heavy square porch columns, exposed rafter ends, and the paired three-over-one windows, all of which are typical of modest dwellings of the early 1920s.

This property appeared before the Architectural Review Board (ARB) in May 2024 with the same application, to demolish the existing structure and construct a new single-family residence. The application was tabled with the provision that the applicant further consult with Historic Development staff to alter the design of the new construction to be more compatible with the historic character of the neighborhood and district. The application came again before the Board in July 2024 with altered drawings and additional inspection reports. The application was tabled again, with further recommendations provided for the new construction drawings, along with the request for more substantial structural evidence. A Design Review Committee meeting was conducted on August 7, 2024, at which time the applicant was asked to extend the driveway westward so that cars could be parked behind the front plan of the house.

SCOPE OF WORK

1. Demolish existing house.
2. Construct a single-family one-story residence.
 - a. The new structure would be oriented on the lot such that the front setback from the ROW on Wisconsin Avenue would measure 25'-2". Side yard setbacks on the north and south would measure 7'-2" and 14'-0" respectively.
 - b. The proposed one-story, three-bay dwelling would be rectangular in shape and would measure approximately 28'-10" wide by 52'-3" deep for a total of 1507 sf.
 - c. The structure would be topped by a gable/hipped roof with a full-width front porch under the gable. The roof structure would be clad in architectural shingles.
 - d. The house would sit on a 1'-6" high foundation of brick piers. Recessed wood lattice panels would be used for infill on the north, south, and west elevations. Recessed brick infill would be installed across the east (front) elevation.
 - e. Fenestration would be comprised of 14 single-hung one-over-one vinyl-clad wood windows and two steel paneled entry doors.
 - f. Plate height from the finished floor would measure 9'-0", with a roof ridge height of 17'-2 ½".
 - g. The house would be clad in fiber cement siding and trim.
 - h. A front porch would span the east façade. It would measure 28'-10" wide by 8'-3" deep and be supported by alternating paired and single wood square columns sitting on brick plinths. The outer paired columns would measure 2'-3 ½ wide in total; with the single inner columns each measuring 2'-3 ½ wide. A brick knee wall would enclose the porch. Approximately five (5) brick steps, measuring 7'-7 ½" wide, would access the front porch, centered on the elevation. Wood handrails and brick cheek walls would flank either side of the steps.

- i. A 10'-3" wide by 7'-0" deep recessed porch would be located on the south end of the west (rear) elevation. The porch would access a rear paneled entry door which would measure 3'-0" wide by 6'-8" high. The rear porch would be enclosed by a wood handrail and accessed by five (5) wood steps on the west.
- j. Elevations would appear as follows:
 - East façade (from south to north)
Pair of one-over-one windows, each measuring 3'-0"x5'-0", centered on the porch columns; paneled door (sitting slightly south of center); pair of one-over-one windows, each measuring 3'-0"x5'-0", centered on the porch columns.
 - West elevation (from north to south)
Corner board; one (1) one-over-one window measuring 3'-0"x3'-0"; corner board; one (1) one-over-one window measuring 3'-0" wide by 3'-0" high; square post.
 - North elevation (from east to west)
Side profile of brick cheek wall and wood handrail; corner board; one (1) one-over-one window measuring 3'-0"x 5'-0"; one pair of one-over-one windows measuring 3'-0"x5'-0"; one (1) one-over-one window measuring 3'-0"x3'-0", somewhat regularly dispersed across the elevation; corner board
 - South elevation (from west to east)
Side profile of wood handrail; square post; six-paneled door; corner board; two (2) pairs of one-over-one windows, each measuring 3'-0"x5'-0", both located in the east half of the elevation; corner board; brick knee wall; brick plinth and wood column; side profile of brick cheek wall and wood handrail
3. Site improvements would include the following:
 - A 4'-0"-wide walkway would connect the sidewalk to the front porch steps. Just before the front porch steps, the walkway would widen to create a 5'-0"x5'-0" concrete pad.
 - Likewise, a 5'-0"x5'-0" concrete pad would also be installed at the base of the rear porch steps.
 - A 9'-0"-wide concrete driveway would replace the existing driveway on the south end of the lot. The driveway would widen to 12'-0" to match the width of the driveway apron.

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

1. **12.0** Demolition Guidelines
 - Consider the current significance of a structure previously determined to be historic.
 - Consider the condition of the structure in question. Demolition may be more appropriate when a building is deteriorated or in poor condition.
 - Consider whether the building is one of the last remaining positive examples of its kind in the neighborhood, county, or region.
 - Consider the impact that demolition will have on surrounding structures, including neighboring properties, properties on the same block or across the street or properties throughout the individual historic district.
 - Consider whether the building is part of an ensemble of historic buildings that create a neighborhood.
 - Consider the future utilization of the site.
 - If a development is proposed to replace a demolished historic structure, determine that the proposed replacement structure is consistent with the guidelines for new construction in historic districts.
2. **6.34** Maintain the visual line created by the fronts of buildings along a street.
 - Where front yard setbacks are uniform, place a new structure in general alignment with its neighbors.

- Where front yard setbacks vary, place a new structure within the established range of front yard setbacks on a block.
3. **6.35** Maintain the side yard spacing pattern on the block.
 - Locate a structure to preserve the side yard spacing pattern on the block as seen from the street.
 - Provide sufficient side setbacks for property maintenance.
 - Provide sufficient side setbacks to allow needed parking to occur behind the front wall of the house.
 4. **6.36** Design the massing of new construction to appear similar to that of historic buildings in the district.
 - Choose the massing and shape of the new structure to maintain a rhythm of massing along the street.
 - Match the proportions of the front elevations of a new structure with those in the surrounding district.
 5. **6.37** Design the scale of new construction to appear similar to that of historic buildings in the district.
 - Use a building height in front that is compatible with adjacent contributing properties.
 - Size foundation and floor heights to appear similar to those of nearby historic buildings
 - Match the scale of a porch to the main building and reflect the scale of porches of nearby historic buildings.
 6. **6.38** Design exterior building walls to reflect traditional development patterns of nearby historic buildings.
 - Use a ratio of solid to void that is similar in proportion to those of nearby historic buildings.
 - Reflect the rhythm of windows and doors in a similar fashion on all exterior building walls. The ARB will consider all building walls; however, building walls facing streets may face increased scrutiny.
 - Use steps and balustrades in a similar fashion as nearby historic structures.
 - Design building elements on exterior building walls to be compatible with those on nearby historic buildings. These elements include, but are not limited to: • Balconies • Chimneys • Dormers
 7. **6.39** Use exterior materials and finishes that complement the character of the surrounding district.
 - Use material, ornamentation or a color scheme that blends with the historic district rather than making the building stand out.
 - If an alternative material is used that represents an evolution of a traditional material, suggest the finish of the original historic material from which it evolved.
 - Use a material with proven durability in the Mobile climate and that is similar in scale, character and finish to those used on nearby historic buildings.

ACCEPTABLE MATERIALS

Materials that are compatible in character, scale and finish to those used on nearby historic buildings are acceptable. These often include:

- Stucco
- Brick
- Stone
- Wood (lap siding, shingles, board and batten)
- Concrete siding
- Cement fiber board siding
- Skim stucco coat

UNACCEPTABLE MATERIALS

Materials that are incompatible in character, scale and finish to those used on nearby historic buildings are unacceptable. These often include:

- Metal siding
- Vinyl siding
- Unfinished concrete block
- Plywood

- Masonite
 - Vinyl coatings
 - Ceramic coatings
 - Exterior insulation and finishing system (EIFS) wall systems
8. **6.40** Design a roof on new construction to be compatible with those on adjacent historic buildings.
- Design the roof shape, height, pitch and overall complexity to be similar to those on nearby historic buildings.
 - Use materials that appear similar in character, scale, texture and color range to those on nearby historic buildings.
 - New materials that have proven durability may be used.

ACCEPTABLE ROOF MATERIALS

Materials that are similar in character, scale, texture, and color range to those used on nearby historic buildings are acceptable. These often include:

- Asphalt dimensional or multi-tab shingles
 - Wood shake or shingle
 - Standing seam metal
 - Metal shingles
 - 5-V crimp metal
 - Clay tile
 - Imitation clay tile or slate
9. **6.41** Design a new door and doorway on new construction to be compatible with the historic district.
- Place and size a door to establish a solid-to-void ratio similar to that of nearby historic buildings.
 - Place a door in a fashion that contributes to the traditional rhythm of the district as seen in nearby historic buildings.
 - Incorporate a door casement and trim similar to those seen on nearby historic buildings.
 - Place and size a special feature, including a transom, sidelight or decorative framing element, to complement those seen in nearby historic buildings.
 - Use a door material that blends well with surrounding historic buildings. Wood is preferred. Paneled doors with or without glass are generally appropriate.
10. **6.42** Design a porch to be compatible with the neighborhood.
- Include a front porch as part of new construction if it is contextual and feasible.
 - When designing a porch, consider porch location, proportion, rhythm, roof form, supports, steps, balustrades and ornamentation relative to the main building and porches in the district.
 - Design the elements of a porch to be at a scale proportional to the main building.
 - Where a rhythm of porches exists on a street or block, design a porch that continues this historic rhythm.
 - Design a rear or side porch that is visible from the public right-of-way to be subordinate in character to the front porch.
11. **6.43** Design piers, a foundation and foundation infill to be compatible with those of nearby historic properties.
- Use raised, pier foundations.
 - If raised foundations are not feasible, use a simulated raised foundation.
 - Do not use slab-on-grade construction. This is not appropriate for Mobile's historic neighborhoods. If a raised slab is required, use water tables, exaggerated bases, faux piers or other methods to simulate a raised foundation.
 - Do not use raw concrete block or exposed slabs.
 - If foundation infill must be used, ensure that it is compatible with the neighborhood.
 - If solid infill is used, recess it and screen it with landscaping.
 - If lattice is used, hang it below the floor framing and between the piers. Finish it with trim.

- Do not secure lattice to the face of the building or foundation.
- Do not use landscaping to disguise inappropriate foundation design.

ACCEPTABLE FOUNDATION MATERIALS

Materials that are similar in character, texture and durability to those used on nearby historic buildings are acceptable. These often include:

- Brick piers
- Brick infill
- Wood (vertical pickets)
- Framed lattice infill

UNACCEPTABLE FOUNDATION MATERIALS

Materials that are not similar in character, texture and durability to those used on nearby historic buildings are unacceptable. These often include:

- Mineral board panels
- Concrete block infill
- Metal infill
- Plywood panel infill
- Plastic sheeting infill
- Vinyl sheeting infill

12. **6.44** Use details and ornamentation that help new construction integrate with the historic buildings in the district.

- Use a decorative detail in a manner similar to those on nearby historic buildings. A modern interpretation of a historic detail or decoration is encouraged.
- Do not use a decorative detail that overpowers or negatively impacts nearby historic buildings.

13. **6.45** Locate and design windows to be compatible with those in the district.

- Locate and size a window to create a solid-to-void ratio similar to the ratios seen on nearby historic buildings.
- Locate a window to create a traditional rhythm and a proportion of openings similar to that seen in nearby historic buildings.
- Use a traditional window casement and trim similar to those seen in nearby historic buildings.
- Place a window to match the height of the front doorway.
- Place a window so that there is proportionate space between the window and the floor level.
- Do not place a window to directly abut the fascia of a building.
- Use a window material that is compatible with other building materials.
- Do not use a reflective or tinted glass window.
- Use a 1/1 window instead of window with false muntins. A double paned window may be acceptable if the interior dividers and dimensional muntins are used on multi-light windows. A double paned 1/1 window is acceptable.
- Do not use false, interior muntins except as stated above.
- Recess window openings on masonry buildings.
- Use a window opening with a raised surround on a wood frame building.

ACCEPTABLE WINDOW MATERIALS

Materials that are similar in character, profile, finish and durability to those used on nearby historic buildings are acceptable. These often include:

- Wood
- Vinyl-clad wood
- Aluminum-clad customized wood
- Extruded Aluminum

UNACCEPTABLE WINDOW MATERIALS

Materials that are not similar in character, profile, finish and durability to those used on nearby historic buildings are unacceptable. These often include:

- Mill finish metal windows
- Snap-in or artificial muntins
- Vinyl

14. **10.5** Visually connect the street and building.

- Maintain or install a walkway leading directly from the sidewalk to the main building entry.

15. **10.7** Minimize the visual impact of parking.

- Locate a parking area at the rear or to the side of a site whenever possible.
- Use landscaping to screen a parking area.
- Minimize the widths of a paved area or a curb cut.
- If a curb cut is no longer in use, repair the curb. In some areas, granite curbs may be required.
- Do not use paving in the front yard for a parking area. Paving stones might be acceptable in certain instances.
- Do not create a new driveway or garage that opens onto a primary street.

ACCEPTABLE WALK AND PAVING MATERIALS

Materials that have a similar character, durability and level of detail to walks and paved areas associated with historic properties in the district are acceptable. These often include:

- Gravel or crushed stone
- Shell
- Brick
- Cobblestone
- Grasspave or grasscrete (mix of grass and hard surface paving material that provides a solid surface)

16. **10.10** Provide a landscaped front yard for a residential property in a historic district.

- Maintain a predominant appearance of a planted front yard/lawn.
- Minimize paved areas in a front yard.
- Consider using decorative modular pavers, grass and cellular paving systems in order to minimize the impact of hard surface paving where grass or other plant materials are not used.
- In commercial areas, consider using landscaping to screen and soften the appearance of surface parking areas. Use an internal and perimeter landscaping treatment to screen a fenced or walled parking area.
- Do not use landscaping to hide a design feature that is inconsistent with these Design Review Guidelines.

STAFF ANALYSIS

The application proposes the demolition of the structure at 406 Wisconsin Avenue and the subsequent construction of a new one-story single-family residence.

The *Guidelines* state that when demolition is contemplated, the current significance of the structure should be considered. The subject house is considered a contributing property in the locally-only designated portion of Leinkauf Historic District. The one-story wood-frame bungalow represents a style which became widely popular in Mobile in the early twentieth century, after the First World War. The flexible plan, wide porches, protective overhangs, and simple decoration made this style easy to build and affordable for the up-and-coming middle class. The modest interpretation of the Craftsman style at 406 Wisconsin is a character-defining feature of Mobile's built heritage, and variations of it can be seen throughout the city's historic districts. Elements such as the square porch columns, masonry knee and cheek walls, exposed rafters, and three-over-one windows serve to define this house as an example of the vernacular interpretation of Craftsman style architecture in Mobile.

Per the *Guidelines*, "the condition of the structure in question" should be considered. "Demolition may be more appropriate when a building is deteriorated or in poor condition." In the case of the subject property the building

has sustained some superficial deterioration including areas of rotten or missing siding, along with damaged roof rafters and mortar corrosion between brick courses on foundation piers. There is some visual evidence of sunken piers signifying settling of the structure over time, which is common for historic homes in this region. A structural assessment report was submitted with the application which notes areas of deficiencies. The noted items in the report are typical of an aging building and do not indicate that the building cannot be rehabilitated or that it is a public hazard. **As stated in the application history above, the applicant was asked at the July 17th ARB meeting to provide a structural assessment that contains more bolstered argument for the demolition of the existing structure. The original assessment from Cobalt has been submitted containing an addendum addressing further structural deficiencies and danger as well as an account of the qualifications of the inspector.**

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 to allow or disallow demolition in a historic district. As stated above, the Craftsman style was enthusiastically embraced in Mobile during the early 20th century, as the simple design and the climate was well suited to this architectural trend and to Mobile’s post-war growth. The 1956 Sanborn map reveals that after the subdivision of this section of Wisconsin Street in 1922, nineteen single-family homes were built along both sides of the street between Eslava Street on the north and Ohio Street to the south. Almost all of these residences denote a form very similar to 406 Wisconsin. All of the homes are extant, with few modifications, with the exception of 405 Wisconsin, which was replaced with a new home around 1990. The demolition of the historic home at 406 Wisconsin would diminish the integrity of this minimally altered example of pre-World War II planned development in the Leinkauf Historic District.

Another consideration directed by the *Guidelines* is the impact that a demolition would have on surrounding structures. In this case, the applicant has submitted plans for the construction of a new single-family residence. The plans are analyzed against the *Guidelines* below. (12.0)

The *Design Review Guidelines* provide directives for new construction within Mobile’s historic districts. Front yard setbacks of a new residential structure should fall within the range established on the street. The new structure proposed for 406 Wisconsin would sit similarly on the lot as the existing house and the neighboring properties. With a proposed front setback of 25’-2” and side yard setbacks of 7’-2” and 14’-0”, the proposed structure would sit similarly on the lot as the existing historic house and would also fall within the established range that occurs on surrounding lots. (6.34, 6.35)

The historic structures in the immediate vicinity of the subject property vary slightly in size and details but are fairly consistently one-story structures, rectangular in shape, some with off-set front or side projections. The proposed design for the subject lot is fairly consistent in massing, proportions, and height with neighboring historic structures, with a lack of offset side walls along the elevations expressed on many of the surrounding buildings, which creates a pattern of projections and recesses. The contributing buildings in its immediate vicinity sit on raised foundations which appear to be comparable in height to that proposed for the subject property. The intended use of masonry piers and lattice infill is likewise compatible with the historic neighborhood. (6.36, 6.37, 6.43).

The street on which the subject property is located, along with immediate cross streets, is predominately populated with one-story gable or hipped-roof bungalows of three or four bays sitting on raised foundations and comprised of full or half-width front porches and restrained Craftsman style detailing such as exposed rafters, square columns, decorative brick detailing, and masonry knee walls. The majority of these residences possess long side elevations, many with occasional projections and recesses, and varying fenestration patterns. Proposed features of the three-bay, one-story bungalow-like design such as the gabled facade, full-width front porch, and foundation design reflects the design of the existing structure, uphold conventions of the district, and assimilate the proposed new construction with neighboring historic buildings, as the *Guidelines* advise. The proposed materials of fiber cement siding, wood, and shingles are acceptable building materials for new construction within

Mobile's historic districts, which respect the traditional building materials observable on nearby historic structures and throughout the historic district. The applicant has stated that the front and rear paneled entry doors would be of steel construction. Vinyl clad wood, proposed for the windows, is an approved window material for new construction under the *Guidelines*, though a three-over-one lite configuration would be more appropriate than the proposed one-over-one pattern. The solid-to-void ratios along the side and rear elevations are not entirely compatible with those of nearby historic structures. Expanses of blank walls such as those seen on the south and west elevations in the submitted plans are not present on historic bungalows in the neighborhood; however, the full-width front porch and recess created by the rear porch serves to visually create variation along the elevations. (6.38 - 6.42, 6.44, 6.45).

The proposed installation of a concrete walkway connecting the existing sidewalk to the façade is a practice directed by the *Guidelines*. However, the 5'x5' concrete pad proposed for the west end of the walkway is not a common feature seen at surrounding historic properties. The replacement of the existing driveway would provide parking to the side and rear of the building, as called for in the *Guidelines*. (10.5, 10.7)

The key features of the façade and front porch have evolved over the course of the Board's review of the application in order to comply with recommendations provided by the Board to create a more appropriate design that better conforms to the *Guidelines* and visually brings the proposed new construction into closer harmony with the historic streetscape so as not to impair the architectural integrity of the surrounding area. The application with new construction drawings has appeared twice before the ARB and once in a Design Review Committee. The most recent alterations to the drawings include adding a faux louvered vent in the gable above the porch and two exposed brackets under the ridge on the façade, centering each pair of façade windows between the porch columns, expressing split columns on the north and south end plinths of the porch, and adding larger columns to the inner plinths. (6.38 – 6.42)

Summary of evolution of new construction drawings for 406 Wisconsin:

- **May 15, 2024: ARB Meeting**
 - The application to demolish the structure at 406 Wisconsin Avenue and construct a new structure on the site came before the Board. Plans included a hipped roof 5'-8" deep front porch spanning the façade's two southern bays and a projecting northern bay.
 - The minutes show that feedback from the Board was focused on the plate height and finished floor heights matching those of the existing and of the surrounding historic structures. Conversation also centered around the façade and the fact that a full-width porch would be more appropriate. The applicant was advised to temporarily withdraw the application and engage in further talks with Staff.
- **July 17, 2024: ARB Meeting**
 - Revised drawings were presented to the Board and included a gable roof and an 8'-3" deep full-width front porch supported by square columns resting on brick plinths, which better match those of the existing and surrounding structures.
 - Board comments mainly centered around the gap between the top of the windows and bottom of the roof, which was too large in comparison to the surrounding historic structures, the suggestion of placing a faux louvered vent in the front gable, and the issue of the windows not being centered between the porch columns.
- **August 7, 2024: Design Review Committee**
 - The applicant met with a Design Review Committee, which included Board members Mr. Stephen Howle, Ms. Jennifer Roselius, and Mr. Stephen McNair.
 - The presented drawings included the addition of a faux louvered vent in the front gable, the centering of each pair of façade windows on the porch columns, and the addition of larger columns on the inner porch plinths.

- The applicant was asked if it was possible to extend the driveway farther west in order that cars could be parked to the side of the house and not forward of the front plane of the building. It was also noted that there would be no objection to using gravel rather than concrete if necessary.

Site Location – 406 Wisconsin Avenue

ARCHITECTURAL REVIEW BOARD VICINITY MAP



APPLICATION NUMBER 1 DATE 9/4/2024
APPLICANT Baumgardner House Raising, LLC d/b/a BHL Federal, LLC
PROJECT Demolition of 1-story frame house. New construction: 1-story single-family residence



NTS

Site Photos - Submitted by applicant - 406 Wisconsin Avenue



1. View of property, looking northwest



2. View of property, looking southwest



3. North elevation



4. South elevation



5. Rear (west) elevation



6. View of Wisconsin Street, looking east from subject property