



1 March 2024

Ms Kathy Rose
Director of Zoning and Building
City of Bexley
2242 East Main Street
Bexley, OH 43209

Re: Review of 236 North Columbia Avenue

Dear Ms Rose:

As a licensed architect in the State of Ohio who has done contextual additions in Bexley and as a teacher of architecture, I have been asked to comment on the character and quality of the structure at 236 North Columbia Avenue.

I have examined the building and reviewed the City of Bexley Zoning Ordinance Criteria to determine preservation significance. I will organize my comments relative to the list of criteria:

1. *The age and the condition of the structure:* The building is definitely in need of updating. Unfortunately, the requirements for a home in 1953 were significantly different than the expectations would be in 2024. Any attempt to rehabilitate the house would require an extreme intervention, and some things would just not be possible. Two issues would be the low ceiling heights and the tiny bathrooms. Obviously, nothing can be done about the ceilings, and to make the bathrooms more accommodative, not to mention accessible, would require imposing upon the adjacent living spaces which in turn would make them less habitable.
2. *The quality of the structure's architectural design, detail, use of materials or construction:* The architect of the house, Noverre Musson, was a good friend and a great architect. Unfortunately, we all have better and lesser designs, and this is not one of Noverre's better projects. If one compares this house to the Miller house or indeed his own house, both in Bexley, it does not measure up. Noverre studied with Frank Lloyd Wright and, dare I say, brought the Prairie Style to Columbus. But the characteristics of the Style are low, sleek and simple with lots of spatial extensions. There are some spatial extensions/overlaps with the wrap-around windows in the living room, dining room, library, and garden porch spaces, but the rest of the house is just jammed in. Not to be rude, but in defense of Noverre, there might have been too much value engineering, or someone might have miscalculated on the size of the spaces. Although FLW was famous for making low spaces because he was short, they tended to work. The fact that one must duck to get up or down the main staircase in this house is just not acceptable.

3. *The importance of the structure to the character and quality of the neighborhood:* For me, this is one of the major detriments of the house. The house is sited to have its main façade face the driveway vs the street. Already low relative to the majority of the houses on the street, it faces the street with a narrow side elevation. This has three important impacts on the neighborhood. First, the house lacks a presence in the neighborhood; second the siting leaves a big gap between this house and the neighboring house to the south; and third it lacks the scale of the other houses on the street. The property is actually two lots, and while many of the other houses on the street are more than one lot, they fill their combined lots. Put simply, there is a pattern to the development of the houses on the street and this house breaks the pattern.
4. *The significance of the design or style of the structure to the historical architectural or cultural development of the City, Central Ohio, the State or nation:* As I have mentioned, Noverre was the first person to bring Prairie Style Architecture to Central Ohio. The good news is that he was a prolific architect and there are many much better examples of his work. Therefore, given both the house's lesser architectural quality and general disrepair, I would offer that this house does not qualify as a significant structure.
5. *The impact on the City's real property tax base of restoration versus replacement and/or removal:* I have not seen the design for the replacement house, but I understand that its primary façade will face the street, which in itself would be a big improvement. In addition, given the state of the existing house and the increased size of the proposed house, it cannot help but improve on Bexley's property tax base.

It is for these reasons that I would recommend that the Bexley Architectural Review Board allow the demolition of 236 North Columbia Avenue. If you would like further elaboration or clarification, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,



Robert S. Livesey FAIA FAAR
Professor and Director Emeritus