

March 12, 2026

Ann Arbor Historic District Commission
c/o Jill Thacher, Historic Preservation Coordinator
City of Ann Arbor Planning & Development Services
301 E. Huron Street
Ann Arbor, MI 48104

Re: Certificate of Appropriateness Application HDC26-0006

**Proposed New Single-Family House in Rear Yard of 717 West Liberty Street
(Lewis Greenspoon Architects, Michael Bielby applicant)**

Hearing Date: March 12, 2026

Dear Ms. Thacher -

Please include this letter in the record and circulate it to the Commission for the March 12, 2026 hearing on HDC26-0006.

I am a property owner in the Old West Side Historic District. I support the rehabilitation of the contributing house at 717 West Liberty and the already-approved one-story addition. My objection is limited to the proposed new house in the rear yard. I respectfully ask the Commission to deny a Certificate of Appropriateness for that portion of the application.

Under Chapter 103, the Commission must apply the Secretary of the Interior's Standards and the City's Design Guidelines. Those standards require new construction to preserve historic spatial relationships and to be compatible in size, scale, massing, proportion, and site relationship. Rear-yard placement alone does not make a full-size second dwelling subordinate to a contributing historic house.

To the extent the applicant relies on the fact that some rear outbuilding may once have existed on this lot, that does not justify the proposal now before the Commission. At most, it supports consideration of a subordinate accessory-form building. The City's Design Guidelines treat carriage houses as accessory buildings, not principal structures. The application here, however, identifies the rear building as a new principal structure. That distinction matters.

The submitted plans show why the proposal is not subordinate. The revised February 18 plan set shows a two-story rear house with 1,075 square feet on the first floor and 1,350 square feet on the second floor, for 2,425 square feet total, plus an attached garage. The January 23 version was smaller, at 2,155 square feet. The January materials also state that the existing second floor of the historic house will be removed and identify the pre-1945 house footprint as 710 square feet. The new rear building's first floor alone therefore exceeds that historic footprint. The combined elevations further state that the existing roof and new roof match in height. And at 2,425 square feet, the rear house would be larger than the approved new front house, which in the January materials,

shows 1,235 square feet. The proposed accessory is much *larger* than the thing to which it should subordinate. On this record, the proposed rear house does not read as subordinate to the contributing house.

The proposal also changes the historic hierarchy of the site. Instead of one contributing principal house with secondary rear-yard features, the lot would read as two primary building masses, with a new driveway, attached garage, deck, patio, and retaining walls serving the rear house. The issue is not simply whether some new construction can be placed at the back of a deep lot. The issue is whether the particular structure now proposed preserves the historic relationship between the house, the yard, and the open space on the site. It does not.

This does not foreclose all rear-lot construction. It means only that the specific proposal before the Commission is too large and too equal in status to the historic house to satisfy the standards for appropriateness. I therefore respectfully request that the Commission deny a Certificate of Appropriateness for the proposed rear principal house, without prejudice to a future proposal that is materially smaller, clearly subordinate, and consistent with the historic hierarchy of the site.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Greg Gage". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Greg" being more prominent than the last name "Gage".

Greg Gage
727 W. Liberty
Ann Arbor, MI 48103