



City of Portland, Oregon
Bureau of Development Services
Land Use Services
FROM CONCEPT TO CONSTRUCTION

Ted Wheeler, Mayor
Rebecca Esau, Director
Phone: (503) 823-7300
Fax: (503) 823-5630
TTY: (503) 823-6868
www.portlandoregon.gov/bds

MEMORANDUM

Date: February 14, 2020
To: Historic Landmarks Commission
From: Hillary Adam, Design / Historic Review
hillary.adam@portlandoregon.gov, 503-823-3581
Re: Briefing on the Cast Iron Collection
February 24, 2020 Historic Landmarks Commission hearing

Attached is a brief document on the City's cast iron collection. The document was prepared by Bill Hawkins and includes a brief history of the Skidmore/Old Town Historic District, images of reinstated cast iron elements within the district, drawings of former buildings that contained elements that are included in the City's cast iron collection, and a list of priorities for redeployment of these cast iron elements. Also included in the packet is a letter from Chrissy Curran of the State Historic Preservation Office with regard to the issue of reintegration of cast iron.

Following approval of the PAE Building at the NW corner of 1st and Pine, Prosper Portland reached out to BDS staff to inquire why the existing cast iron pieces from that block were not incorporated into the design of the new building, citing the [Skidmore/Old Town Historic District Design Guidelines](#). Specifically, guideline A3 states: "Reintegrate Cast Iron into the District." Page 32 of the guidelines state that guideline A3 may be accomplished by "Appropriately reusing or reproducing cast iron elements from the collection on new buildings, particularly within the areas described above."

These areas are described in the Background statement for this guideline. It is copied below.

"The advent of cast iron as a building material signaled a new era in architecture. Stronger than masonry construction, cast iron allowed for more transparent lighter feeling façades, which were especially employed on the ground floors of buildings. Being essentially a pre-cast kit of parts, it also made elaborate details and transportation to job sites more economical for buildings of this era. The District contains one of the largest collections of cast iron front buildings in the western United States. At one time there were 41 buildings in the District that featured cast iron façades. Today only 20 of these buildings remain. Over time some of the cast iron elements were collected from demolished buildings. These are now in public and private ownership such as the Eric Ladd Cast Iron Collection, which is owned by the Portland Development Commission (PDC).

Pieces from these collections can be used to create patterns allowing for the reproduction of documented historic façades from Portland's cast iron buildings. Actual historic artifacts from the Eric Ladd Collection or other may be available for reuse in appropriate projects or exhibits in the District. The sensitive reintegration and reproduction of these pieces will reinforce the District's history of cast iron use.

While any successful reintegration and reproduction of the cast iron façades would be positive, its reuse will have the greatest impact on projects located around the Skidmore Fountain and along First Avenue between Burnside and Oak. In addition to its reproduction on buildings in these areas there may also be opportunities for reusing elements of the cast iron collection along Naito Parkway between Oak and Ash, and potentially within portions of Waterfront Park.

These cast iron elements create a signature style that can be used to replicate historic cast iron façades in the District. Every effort should be made to reuse the cast iron collection to replicate historic cast iron façades in the District. New buildings should draw inspiration from the defining characteristics of the cast iron era in their conception and construction. In this way, the unique character of the District will be strengthened as it continues to develop and evolve into the future."

In early January, BDS staff met with Eric Jacobson of Prosper Portland, Bill Hawkins, and Stephanie Whitlock of the Architectural Heritage Center to discuss the PAE review and the City's responsibility for reintegrating the cast iron collection back into the district. BDS staff reviewed prior proceedings of the Historic Landmarks Commission on PAE and concur that the applicant was not held to demonstrating how this new guideline was met, particularly because the remnant pieces associated with this block still exist and were known to exist at the time of the first Design Advice Request (DAR). The staff summary of the first DAR included the following comment: *"The Commission was open to the use of cast iron elements from the site's original historic building but inside the proposed building, as the style of the new building is not lending to the cast iron aesthetic look."*

Both BDS staff and the Historic Landmarks Commission must ensure that all guidelines are met and challenge applicants to find creative solutions that incorporate cast iron in a sensitive, meaningful, and coherent way. The applicant team for the PAE project could have focused more on this issue with staff and the Commission pushing for it.

Prosper Portland requested this Briefing in order to have a discussion with the Historic Landmarks Commission in order to request a renewed commitment to reinstating cast iron within the Skidmore/Old Town Historic District when possible.

Encl: Cast Iron Status Report -2019