



TO: Clark County Historic Preservation Commission  
FROM: Sharon Lumbantobing, Planner II  
DATE: November 7, 2018  
SUBJECT: **HST2018-00005 , DESIGN REVIEW:** Certificate of Appropriateness for proposed exterior staircase at the Blair Building (1801 Main Street, Washougal, WA)

---

## I. SUMMARY

The historic **Blair Building** is located at 1801 Main Street, Washougal, WA (Tax Assessor's Parcel # 73810000) and is listed on the Clark County Heritage Register. The property owners, Bruce and Heidi Kramer, have applied for a Certificate of Appropriateness for exterior modifications. Modifications to the building will be reviewed by the Historic Preservation Commission to ensure there is no significant impact to the historic site.

The application states that there will be exterior modifications, including:

1. Removal of the existing exterior wood staircase and roof, located on the eastern façade (not built to current code).
2. Installation of new exterior staircase, with stair tread options that include steel or concrete, with a new roof to be made of standing seam metal over a steel frame. The proposed stair design is free-standing.

## II. BACKGROUND

The Blair Building, built circa 1925, is a rectangular, two-story, brick commercial building standing at the northeast corner of the intersection of Main Street (formerly B Street) and Love in downtown Washougal. The Blair Building is one of the oldest buildings remaining in Washougal's traditional downtown core, has a high level of integrity, and is the most intact of all remaining older brick commercial buildings in the nearby vicinity.

The Blair Building is significant for its associations with builder John Edgar Blair, who was active in commercial and political activities in Washougal; for its distinctive architecture featuring intricate, artistic, well-preserved brickwork; and for being a rare remaining example of early twentieth century commercial buildings in downtown Washougal. The period of significance dates of 1925-1968 represent the time period of ownership by John and Georgia Blair.

The existing wooden exterior staircase, built in the 1990's, is not built to current code. It has a straight run and a 15 foot rise from ground level to the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor studios' entry door. It is the building's only egress from the second floor apartments and it is made of wood. It has a metal roof above the second floor landing. The proposed new exterior staircase would be a free-standing steel frame

staircase, with stair tread options constructed of steel or concrete, and it would wrap around the NE corner of the building. A straight run would extend the stairs too far into the parking lot. The new design creates an additional landing, and the rise and run meet current codes. The shed roof over the stairs would be constructed with a standing seam metal over a steel frame.

### **III HISTORIC NAME**

The Blair Building

### **IV. COMMON NAME(S)**

The Blair Building

### **V. BOARD RESPONSIBILITY**

Under Clark County Code 40.250.030(F) Historic Preservation Ordinance, the Clark County Historic Preservation Commission has the responsibility for conducting design review of Register properties within the County and for jurisdictions with which there is a valid intergovernmental agreement.

### **VI. PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION**

The Blair Building is a rectangular, two-story, brick commercial building standing at the northeast corner of the intersection of Main Street (formerly B Street) and Love in downtown Washougal. The Blair Building is oriented with its primary elevation facing south. There is a parking lot to the rear which is part of this nomination.

The first floor main (south) façade has three principal divisions delineated by brick piers from the street level up to an outline of flush arches created by glazed enders. A full-width flat awning provides rain coverage. The two commercial spaces have large metal-trimmed display windows over concrete bases. The windows and metal-framed door to the eastern commercial space reflect alterations undertaken in the 1950s or early 1960s. On the second floor facades, there are casement windows, each having 24-light wood-framed inset casements, which have simple brick surrounds on the top and sides and red brick soldier rows at the bottom.

As is typical for a corner location, the south (front) and western facades are equally ornamented. The less-prominent north (rear) and eastern façades are constructed of clay tile and have the same casement windows as the south and west facades. The eastern façade has a central wooden door with a small arched roof above, and a mural of bear cubs with a buckskin-clad human arm reaching for them is painted over most of the façade.

The less-prominent north (rear) and eastern façades are constructed of clay tile. On the first floor level of the north facade, there are two entry doors. The aluminum-framed full-light door located centrally in the western half of the building leads into the kitchen (rear) of The Sushi Joint restaurant. The metal security door in the eastern half, which is close to the center of the north facade, leads into the kitchen (rear) portion of Chinese Café. Three casement windows are placed symmetrically across the second story. A wooden stair case on the eastern third of the façade rises to a shed-roofed wooden landing leading into the second floor. A wooden door with a single light in the top portion provides access.

The building is built out to the lot line on the south and east facades; there is a parking area to the rear. A contiguous parking lot to the east serves the building but is a separate lot from a legal perspective and is not part of this nomination.

A full description of the historic and current condition of the building can be found in the nomination.

## VII. STAFF REVIEW AND COMMENT

### Design Review Criteria:

The design review criteria are listed in the adopted rules and procedures of the Clark County Historic Preservation Commission (April 8, 2008). The standard used is that of the Secretary of the Interior.

### Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation:

1. **Every reasonable effort shall be made to provide a compatible use for a property which requires minimal alteration of the building, structure or site and its environment, or to use a property for its originally intended purposes.**

**Findings:** The exterior wood staircase is estimated to have been constructed in the 1990s. It is the only egress to the upstairs studio apartments and is considered a safety hazard, by the City of Washougal, and the owners would like to bring them up to code as it is constructed of wood, does not have landing platforms, and has a steep rise and run that does not meet current city codes. The second floor apartments were an original use of the building, but primarily have been used as storage, except for one unit, since 1974. Providing access to them supports the effort to use the property for its originally intended purposes.

2. **The distinguishing original qualities or character of a building, structure, or site and its environment shall not be destroyed. The removal or alteration of any historic material or distinctive architectural features should be avoided when possible.**

**Findings:** The exterior wood staircase is not original to building, but was constructed in the 1990s. The wood staircase is considered a hazard as it is not up to current code and is the building's only egress from the second floor studio apartments. The proposed exterior staircase would not alter or remove any historic material or distinctive architectural features.

3. **All buildings, structures, and sites shall be recognized as products of their own time. Alterations that have no historical basis and which seek to create an earlier appearance shall be discouraged.**

**Findings:** Staff does not believe that the removal of the existing exterior wood staircase and replacement with an exterior metal staircase will significantly alter the historic site. The design and materials of the proposed exterior staircase does not visually stand out in appearance from the historic building and the proposed design does not seek to create a staircase design from an earlier period of time.

4. **Changes which may have taken place in the course of time are evidence of the history and development of a building, structure, or site and its environment. These changes may have acquired significance in their own right and this significance shall be recognized and respected.**

**Findings:** The exterior wood staircase is not original to the historic main structure, and was constructed in the 1990s. Staff does not believe that the materials and construction have historic significance in their own right.

5. Distinctive stylistic features or examples of skilled craftsmanship which characterize a building, structure, or site shall be treated with sensitivity.

**Findings:** N/A

6. Deteriorated architectural features shall be repaired rather than replaced whenever possible. In the event replacement is necessary, the new material should match the material being replaced in composition, design, color, texture and other visual qualities. Repair or replacement of missing architectural features should be based on accurate duplications or features, substantiated by historic, physical or pictorial evidence rather than on conjectural designs or the availability of different architectural elements from other buildings or structures.

**Findings:** The existing 1990s staircase is not original to the building.

7. The surface cleaning of structures shall be undertaken with the gentlest means possible. Sandblasting and other cleaning methods that will damage the historic building materials shall not be undertaken.

**Findings:** N/A

8. Every reasonable effort shall be made to protect and preserve archeological resources affected by, or adjacent to any project.

**Findings:** The proposed removal and replacement of the exterior stairs will not affect any archaeological resources.

9. Contemporary design for alterations and additions to existing properties shall not be discouraged when such alterations and additions do not destroy significant historical, architectural or cultural material, and such design is compatible with the size, scale, color, materials, and character of the property, neighborhood or environment.

**Findings:** Staff does not find that the proposed changes destroy any historical, architectural or cultural materials of the property. The staircase will be freestanding and will not negatively impact the main structure.

10. Wherever possible, new additions or alterations to structures shall be done in such a manner that if such additions or alterations were to be removed in the future, the essential form and integrity of the structure would be unimpaired.

**Findings:** The proposed exterior staircase can easily be removed in the future without impairing the integrity of the existing main structure and its landscape.

## **VIII. STAFF CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS**

Staff believes that the proposal meets the applicable criteria as stated above.

In accordance with CCC 40.250.030 and the Clark County Historic Preservation Program Rules and Procedures, and the findings stated under the design review criteria above, staff recommends that the commission approve the certificate of appropriateness application for the proposal as submitted.

**NEXT STEPS:** If the commission approves the Certificate of Appropriateness application, the conditions, if any, will have to be filled out on the Certificate and signed by the Chair at the meeting. This document will be forwarded to the Washougal Community Development's Building Division. If there are conditions, the applicant/designated agent will have to sign the conditions of approval form.

APPEAL PROCEDURES: If the owner/applicant or other interested parties disagree with the Commission's decision, an appeal may be made to the Superior Court of Clark County, per Clark County Ordinance 40.250.030 (G).

**IX. ATTACHMENTS**

- A. Blair Building Certificate of Appropriateness application packet
- B. Blair Building Clark County Heritage Register Staff Report and Nomination packet