



STATE HISTORICAL FUND

*Grants for Historic Preservation*

November 30, 2007

Mr. George Eckhardt  
Asst. Dir. Of Facilities Services  
Colorado College  
14 E. Cache la Poudre  
Colorado Springs, CO 80903

Dear George,

Enclosed please find a memo regarding my visit last July to your campus with respect to the proposed demolition of several homes in the National Register of Historic Places North Weber Street-Wahsatch Historic Residential District. My apologies for taking so long in issuing this memo.

Sincerely,

Mark Wolfe  
Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer  
Director, State Historical Fund

*A Grants Program of the*  
**COLORADO HISTORICAL SOCIETY**

## MEMO

**TO: GEORGE ECKHARDT**

**FROM: MARK WOLFE**

**RE: MEETING JULY 27, 2007**

**DATE: NOVEMBER 30, 2007**

On Friday, July 27, 2007 I had the opportunity to meet with representatives from Colorado College and to walk the portion of the National Register of Historic Places North Weber Street-Wahsatch Historic Residential District to discuss their plans for the development of a housing project in that vicinity. These comments are provided from my personal observations, and are not intended as an official opinion under either the State Register Act or the National Historic Preservation Act. If state or federal licenses, permits, funding or other actions are involved in this project at any level, an official opinion must be sought from the Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation pursuant to those laws.

The North Weber Street-Wahsatch Historic Residential District is a long, narrow district consisting primarily of two-story frame residences. Many of the houses in the district were built as rental housing. Some later housing (still built during the district's period of significance) is smaller in scale, more typically one-story in height, and more horizontal in design than their predecessors. Most of the houses retain their integrity and have been well cared for over the years, although many are showing signs of deferred maintenance. The College's plan calls for the demolition of approximately thirty houses, found on three consecutive blocks of North Weber Street between Uintah and Cache La Poudre Streets, and houses on Uintah Street between North Weber and Nevada.

The houses proposed for demolition are in the heart of the historic district. The district extends almost exactly the same distance to the north and to the south of the blocks in question. Because the district is so narrow (only two blocks wide) the proposed project area also makes a large incursion into the width of the district. Taking this big of a bite out of the historic district would be very unfortunate, and would threaten the integrity of the remaining district. The district boundaries were very carefully drawn down alley lines to insure that buildings facing each other across North Weber and North Wahsatch Streets would be included. The demolition of houses on North Weber would impact the integrity of the houses opposite, where elements of setting, feeling and association (elements of "integrity" as defined by the National Register) would be degraded. The same can be said of the houses on Uintah and the other side streets. The loss of this designation could prevent homeowners in the district from taking advantage of the state and federal income tax credit programs, incentives offered only to designated properties. It could also prevent them from accessing the State Historical Fund grants program, which is also available only for physical work on designated buildings.

The houses proposed for demolition are typically in good repair in comparison to other historic homes in the vicinity. With one or two exceptions, they show a high level of architectural integrity. Their historical significance is unknown, as no detailed survey has apparently been conducted. This should be the first step in any process to assess alternatives.

College staff acknowledged that one block of these residences appeared to be of higher quality than the other blocks, and suggested that their project might seek to cause less of an impact to that block. This sensitivity is appreciated, although it also suggests that only buildings that are larger or more

highly decorated are worth preserving. That is certainly not the case. The variety of house types, styles and sizes and the history that variety expresses is one basis for the creation of the National Register district. The loss of two blocks is obviously better than the loss of three blocks, but the loss of two blocks of historic homes would still be unfortunate.

Proposals have been expressed to construct new housing in the center of the blocks, connecting into the historic houses and preserving some amount of the front of each house. Although this may be somewhat better than losing the houses entirely, I'm not convinced that this is a valid alternative. If one of the reasons for replacing these houses with new housing is the cost of their maintenance, this wouldn't address that issue. And the end product would be an absurdity architecturally. The character of the houses would be changed to such an extent that they would lose much of their integrity.

Another proposal suggests construction of new housing behind the existing houses without connecting physically to them. This would be a better alternative than trying to achieve some kind of physical connection. It would still disrupt the context of the historic district, but that disruption would be less than the removal of the houses.

The Core Values of the College include "serve as stewards of the traditions and resources of Colorado College" and "nurture a sense of place". Colorado College has certainly earned its reputation as an institution that respects its historic resources. This is illustrated by several statements in the second draft of the Long Range Development Plan for the College dated June 21, 2004. The section on Planning Principles and Objectives: Academic/Student Life Program acknowledges the campus' location within the context of the historic North End neighborhood. It purports to support sustainable construction principles for new buildings, but fails to acknowledge that the greenest building is that one that already exists. In the Financial Program section, it says that the Plan should insure "the continued health and functionality of existing College buildings". And the Physical Program section states that the physical growth of the campus should respect its neighbors. That section also states that "the Plan should respond to the important role that the campus plays in the historic development of Colorado Springs, acknowledging – among others – Tejon Street, Monument Valley Park, the North End neighborhood and historic Colorado College buildings." The notes from the Alumni Roundtable Forum held on April 24, 2004 include the statement that "The experience of living in small, historic homes on campus was a good one" and that "The scale of buildings across campus should reflect the openness of Colorado. High-density development should be discouraged." A statement in the Summary of Constituent Interviews – Financial Program says "Rental properties on the east campus should be brought back to College management and used for theme houses, student housing, faculty and staff housing, etc." The 2003 Campus Mapping, Campus Theme Goals and Objectives include historic preservation. And the restatement of the 1995 Master Plan Guiding Beliefs and Their Application includes a statement that "we must be a good neighbor in Colorado Springs" with a responding comment that "the Plan emphasizes the sensitivity to neighborhood scale, preservation of historic buildings and a new performing arts facility."

These statements, found throughout the planning document, appear to be at odds with the proposal to destroy historic homes on the campus perimeter. Such a project would also impact the College's reputation as an institution that cares about historic resources, and could affect its ability to access grant funds for future campus projects.

I would urge the College to seek other sites for its planned residential development. The proposed demolition of existing nonhistoric buildings elsewhere on campus should be examined as a potential site for more dense housing development. If the subject blocks are developed for housing, the program should include preservation of the existing historic housing on its current site, although some relocation of houses within those blocks might be acceptable.