

## Legislation Text

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**File #:** 21-692, **Version:** 1

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**PRESENTER:**

Caleb Chance Gasparek  
Historic Preservation Officer

**SUBJECT:**

**DM2021-2056** Discuss and consider a demolition permit for the dwelling located at 1020 Cole Ave., a non-landmarked building which potentially meets the criteria for historic designation under Chapter 66 Historic Preservation.

**DEPARTMENT:** Comprehensive Planning & Historic Preservation

**COUNCIL DISTRICTS IMPACTED:** District 4

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION:**

The subject property is located at the corner of Cole Ave. and W. Klingemann St. in the Landa Park Estates neighborhood. It is not located within a historic district and is not locally landmarked.

On June 6, 2021 staff received a demolition permit for the structure at 1020 Cole Ave., a non-landmarked single-family home built in 1946. Prior to receiving the demolition permit staff was made aware that the demolition permit was forthcoming. Staff had previously met with the owner on May 10, 2021 to inform them that the demolition of the structure would need to be reviewed and approved by the Historic Landmark Commission, as the building was found to potentially meet the criteria for designation found in Chapter 66-56 (attached), Criteria for the designation of historic landmarks and districts.

**HISTORIC CONTEXT:**

The dwelling at 1020 Cole Ave. was constructed in 1946 by “Modern Homes” for a price of \$5,000. The original owner of the house was R. V. Abshire, the director of Landa Park during that time. Abshire only lived in the house for 2 years.

The property is primarily associated with Colonel John E. Pickering who resided in the house from 1948 until 1959. While living at 1020 Cole, Pickering was stationed at Randolph Air Force Base in San Antonio. During the period of 1948 to 1959, Col. Pickering made several notable contributions to the fields of radiobiology, aviation medicine, and space medicine. Pickering also authored several textbooks as well as many scientific papers.

John Pickering was born on April 27, 1918 in Bisbee, Arizona. In 1942 he married Virginia Copeland and the couple had 2 daughters and a son. By 1945 Pickering had degrees in chemistry, engineering, and metallurgy. From 1946 to 1948 Pickering attended the University of Chicago to complete his Ph.D. in nuclear chemistry and physics, though he was called back by the Air Force before his studies could be completed. In 1948 he was stationed at Randolph Air Force Base to work on nuclear powered aircraft. His expertise in radiobiology and aviation medicine were crucial to the development of the NB-36H, the only US aircraft to be powered by a nuclear reactor. The program to develop nuclear power aircraft was short-lived and scrapped by President Kennedy in 1961, though the radiation shielding technology developed by Pickering and others would later be used in space shielding and nuclear technology. In 1955 Pickering founded the Health Physics Society serving

as the scientific non-profit's first director. The organization still operates to this date with the mission of "excellence in the science and practice of radiation safety." He also worked on research for the effects of flash blindness as a result of nuclear explosions during his residency in New Braunfels.

In 1958 Pickering was named the Director of Medical Research at the U.S. School of Aerospace Medicine in San Antonio, he was awarded the Legion of Merit that same year. Pickering and his wife Virginia would move to San Antonio a year later in 1959.

Other notable achievements by Pickering include his co-authorship of the "Cap Over the Wall" speech made by President JFK in 1963 and being assigned to the Office of Manned Space Flight for NASA during the space race of the 1960's. Pickering died on September 19, 1997 in Tijeras, New Mexico.

Building permits for the house note that it has been substantially altered over time. In 1966 600 sq. ft. of space was added onto the first story, and the porch was enclosed in 1972. That same year a bathroom was added onto the house. During the early 2000's several modifications were also made to the porch. The CAD indicates that the 2<sup>nd</sup> story was altered though building permits could not be found for these modifications.

**ISSUE:**

Chapter 66-60.1 (attached) requires that all applications for the demolition of non-landmarked structures be referred to the City Historic Preservation Officer for the purpose of determining whether the structure may have historical, cultural, architectural, or archaeological significance. If research indicates that the structure does potentially meet the criteria for designation, then the demolition application must go before the Historic Landmark Commission for review and approval.

If the Commission finds that the building does meet the criteria for landmark designation, then they can vote to initiate the landmark designation process in which the case goes before the Planning Commission and City Council. If the owner is in objection to the designation, then a three-fourths vote of the entire city council shall be required.

**FISCAL IMPACT:**

N/A

**RECOMMENDATION:**

Staff recommends approval of the demolition permit. The building has been substantially altered over time and the owner is in objection to landmark designation.

**ATTACHMENTS:**

- A. Location Map
- B. Submittal Documents
- C. Supplemental Documents
- D. Chapter 66-56: Criteria for the Designation of Historic Landmarks and Districts
- E. Chapter 66-60: Alteration Certificate Required for Demolition