

This old house

S.L. should try to save more of them

Tribune Editorial

Salt Lake Tribune

Updated:08/07/2009 06:28:58 PM MDT

It's too late to save Thomas Hulbert's lovely old Tudor house at 1547 E. Yale Ave. in Salt Lake City. He demolished it last month, as is his right within existing law, to make way for a much larger place. But if the City Council were to enact a historic overlay zone for the Yalecrest neighborhood, similar homes could be spared the same fate.

Yalecrest already has district status on the National Register of Historic Places, but that title is largely honorary. To bring its cherished homes under the jurisdiction of the city's Historic Landmark Commission, an overlay zone must be created. That would lead to the commission reviewing demolition permits.

The Hulbert case is a poster child for why an overlay zone is necessary. We say this advisedly, because historic preservation is a little like pornography. It's a matter of taste, values and context. One person's architectural gem may be just another old house in the eyes of someone else. We happen to agree with Hulbert's neighbors that his old house had the kind of character that was worth preserving, particularly on Yale Avenue. But Hulbert, the owner, obviously saw it differently.

Nor can we say that the new home Hulbert has obtained a permit to build won't be a classic in its own right someday. We haven't seen the plans, though it is said to be about 7,000 square feet; its predecessor was about 2,700 square feet.

What we do know is that in too many cases, charming old homes in the city have been torn down to make way for monstrosities that are too big for their surroundings and completely out of character with neighboring homes. The aptly named "Garage Mahal" at 1788 E. Hubbard Ave. is the prime example, but there are others.

That said, there have been other homes demolished in the neighborhood to make way for new ones that pay homage to traditional styles and fit quite nicely.

In the case of Hulbert's new house, we know that it complies with the restrictions of the Yalecrest Compatible Infill Overlay District. That law was written in response to the "Garage Mahal" and sets limits for building and roof heights, garages and front yards in an effort to keep new homes roughly in scale with their older neighbors.

However, that overlay district was not enough to dissuade Hulbert from tearing down a classic house. Nor was a last-minute offer of \$875,000 from his neighbors, who tried in vain to preserve the home.

To reach that goal, a historic overlay zone and the staff to administer it must be put in place.

Close Window

Send To Printer