

# Ramp Assessment

1020 5<sup>th</sup> Street, Oregon City, OR  
HR-22-00010



Historic Rehabilitation Development Planning

Heritage Consulting Group

**Prepared for:**

NW Custom Homes Inc.  
15730 SE Bybee Dr.  
Portland OR 97236

**Prepared by:**

Heritage Consulting Group  
(215) 248-1260  
[www.heritage-consulting.com](http://www.heritage-consulting.com)

**November 14, 2022**



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

NW Custom Homes Inc. is proposing to install an ADA accessible ramp at 1020 5<sup>th</sup> Street, Oregon City, OR, in order to provide barrier-free access to the first floor office and second floor residence. NW Custom Homes Inc. retained Heritage Consulting Group to complete an analysis of the alternative ADA options and the proposed design of the ramp as directed by the Historic Review Board on September 27, 2022.

The property at 1020 5<sup>th</sup> Street is located within the McLoughlin Historic Conservation District but is not a historic building as it was constructed in 2022. The construction of the property was approved by the Oregon City Historic Review Board. The proposed ADA accessible ramp is currently under review by the Historic Review Board which requested additional information regarding the Alternative Options Analysis, landscape plan, and revised design.

Per the request of the Historic Review Board, the proponent has reviewed the alternative options suggested to provide full ADA access to the building interior. The alternative options included the addition of an interior chair lift or residential elevator, the addition of exterior stairs and an exterior chair lift, the installation of the ramp at the southeast elevation using the natural topography, the use of alternative materials such as metal in the design as included in the final drawings that were proposed and approved as part of HR20-0001, reduction in the size of the rear porch and massing of the ramp, installation of a taller retaining wall, and revising the landscape design. The construction of the building is largely complete so any options that require major modification to the design including the installation of an interior chair lift or elevator would be cost prohibitive. Additionally, the applicant is concerned about the maintenance for these items and that they will be rendered useless during inclement weather or a power outage. The topography along the southeast elevation does not meet the code requirements for the rise of the ramp. A larger retaining wall would be more visually intrusive than the ramp itself and block the natural view shed.

That being said, a number of the suggested alternative options have been incorporated into the revised design. The applicant is proposing to utilize a painted metal railing rather than wood. The use of metal will allow for a lighter, airier railing. Additionally, the porch has been scaled back to serve as a covered landing at the entrance rather than a porch. The massing of the ramp at the rear has been significantly reduced limiting the number of switchbacks to the minimum required to meet code. The revised design incorporates planters that will help to limit visibility of the proposed ramp and the applicant will plant native and historically compatible plantings at the rear and side elevations. These design revisions have reduced the physical and visual impact on the adjacent properties as well as the Conservation District as a whole.

In conclusion, it is our professional opinion that the current design of the ramp is the option that provides the ADA access required while most sensitively addressing the potential impacts to the surrounding historic district. The proposed design merges the recommendations made by the HRB and planning staff including the use of alternative materials, reduction in massing, and suggested landscaping with the needs of the building's future occupants. In deference to the surrounding conservation district, the proposed ramp is in keeping with the guidance provided by the National Park Service's *Preservation Brief 32: Making Historic Properties Accessible* and will provide the safest, long-lasting, minimally invasive access to the subject building.

## REVIEW OF ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

In 2021 the Historic Review Board and the City planning staff provided alternative options for ADA access to the building as part of their response to the original application for the ramp (HR21-00020). On September 27<sup>th</sup>, 2022, the Historic Review Board and City planning staff reintroduced these alternatives in response to the appeal (AP21-00006). Below is an assessment of each alternative as it relates to the subject project:

1. *An interior ADA access from the ground floor through the garage, interior stairway, or other means.*

At this time, the construction of the building is largely complete. As construction is nearly complete, undertaking a change to the interior design to accommodate an interior means of ADA access would be cost-prohibitive on the part of the owner and is not feasible. The industry standard cost for a chair lift is approximately \$5,000. The industry standard cost for a residential elevator is approximately \$30,000. These prices do not include the cost of undertaking a change to the interior programming of the building. In addition, it is our understanding that the zoning of this area requires that the property be mixed-use (commercial and residential). As the building proposes a commercial use at the first floor and a residential use at the second floor, two separate points of entry are needed to ensure resident and building safety. Creating a shared interior lobby space would remove needed square footage from the commercial space and would not provide the residential space with a separate entrance. As there will be individual entrances to each floor, the currently proposed exterior ramp provides full ADA access to both floors.

2. *A noncommercial interior chair lift or residential-scaled elevator.*

As explained in item 1, the construction of the building is nearly complete and therefore the addition of an interior chair lift or residential scaled elevator would require major modifications to the home and would be cost-prohibitive on the part of the owner. In looking into these alternatives, the home owner expressed concern about the necessary upkeep and maintenance of an interior chair lift and residential-scaled elevator for providing ADA access as both options would be rendered unusable during power outages or inclement weather.

3. *A chair lift accommodation along exterior stairs that hugged the building.*

In exploring the option of installing a chair lift at the exterior stairs, it was determined that the addition of the exterior stair, chair lift, and associated mechanical equipment would add a great deal more visible massing to the building and would have a larger visual impact to the surrounding district than the proposed ramp solution. As currently designed, the proposed exterior ramp is minimally intrusive to the surrounding district with much of it located at the rear of the property. In addition, there is concern that an exterior chair lift would be rendered unusable during power outages or inclement weather and would thus not provide full ADA access to the building. Finally, the installation of an exterior chair lift would be cost-prohibitive and would require many changes to the already constructed property, rendering it not feasible.

4. *An ADA-compliant design relying on the existing uphill topography on the left or southeast side elevation.*

The applicant explored the potential of constructing the exterior ramp at several different locations around the building. The southeast side of the building cannot be used as the grade of the topography does not meet the code requirements for rise of the ramp. Additionally, the proposed ramp provides ADA access to the first floor office space as

well as the second floor residential space and the first floor entrance is located on the opposite side of the building. As such the current proposed design provides full ADA access to the interior in a location that is facing the rear of the building and is the least visually intrusive to the surrounding district.

- 5. The use of materials and design that create a lighter, airier appearance, such as painted metal.*

In response to the comments received, the design of the ramp has been revised to utilize a painted metal railing rather than wood. The use of metal will allow for a lighter, airier railing and will match what is already installed along the garage roofline. The simple Alumarail by Precision Rail railing design (as shown in the photograph below) is compatible with the conservation district and the Craftsman design of the subject building. Additionally, this type of railing was previously approved for the subject building and therefore will provide a consistent appearance and aesthetic.



Photo of garage showing existing garage railing with use of Alumarail by Precision Rail

- 6. Consider whether the removal or reduction in the depth of the rear porch would reduce the massing of the ADA ramp.*

In response to the comments received, the applicant has revised the design of the rear porch to be smaller in scale and to serve merely as a covered landing at the second floor entrance. Additionally, the massing of the rear ramp has been significantly reduced, limiting the number of switchbacks to the minimum required to meet code. The proponent will add planters facing the rear to further minimize the visibility of the ramp to the surrounding district and adjacent neighbors.

- 7. Utilizing a taller retaining wall (assuming that it is made of appropriate materials) toward the rear along the side to provide some level of initial screening that can be further subsidized with plantings.*

In response to comments received, the applicant has explored the option of a taller retaining wall at the rear of the ramp. While a taller wall would provide additional screening, the construction of a taller retaining wall would be more visually intrusive to the surrounding district. In contrast, the metal railing of the ramp, as proposed, is minimally intrusive to the surrounding district and is low in height. This solution allows more of the previously approved building to remain exposed and does not create a large,

visual barrier. The design of the ramp is in keeping with the NPS guidance from Preservation Brief 32, which dictates the use of, compatible yet distinguishable materials. A larger retaining wall would draw further attention to the area and obscure the natural view shed. In addition to the planters the applicant will plant native and historically compatible plantings at the rear and side of the building to further screen the ramp.

8. *Provide a revised landscape plan that incorporates the proposed replacement retaining wall and mitigation planting along with some indication that the selected plant types are appropriate for the location.*

The applicant has discussed the proposed landscape plan with staff and understands that the landscaping will need to be compatible with the conservation district. It is our understanding that the plantings will either need to be native to the area or historically compatible and of the English garden variety and will further follow up with staff regarding proposed plantings to ensure they are compatible with the district.

## **RAMP ASSESSMENT**

While the subject property is not a historic property, it is located within the McLoughlin Historic Conservation District and the design of the new construction and ramp are in keeping with the requirements of the surrounding district. Historic districts and their associated properties were not always designed with ADA access in mind. With the introduction of the Americans with Disabilities Act in 1990 many historic properties required modifications to allow for ADA access and to keep up with current codes. The NPS has released guidance on the intersection of ADA and Preservation, most notably *Preservation Brief 32: Making Historic Properties Accessible*. While the subject property is not a historic property, and the premise of a Conservation District instead of a Historic District, in essence is to afford additional flexibility so long as the character of the district is retained, this Preservation Brief was utilized for guidance on how to design historically compatible ADA access within a historic setting. Preservation Brief 32 states “Solutions should provide the greatest amount of accessibility without threatening or destroying those materials and features that make a property significant.” The Brief also states:

“Modifications to improve accessibility should generally be based on the following priorities:

- 1) Making the main or a prominent public entrance and primary public spaces accessible, including a path to the entrance;
- 2) Providing access to goods, services, and programs;
- 3) Providing accessible restroom facilities; and,
- 4) Creating access to amenities and secondary spaces.”

The subject property has two levels with different uses that require ADA access. The first floor office space that is required by zoning is being accessed by the ramp at the northwest elevation. The second floor residence is accessed at the rear southwest elevation. The placement of the ramp leading to these entrances is minimally visible from public rights of way, located on secondary and rear elevations, and compatibly designed, which is in keeping with National Park Service (NPS) Guidance. NPS guidance states, “New accessible features such as ramps, lifts, elevators, and elevator towers should be added in the least intrusive locations. Adding these features to primary elevations and significant interior spaces is discouraged.”

The design of the ramp has been modified in response to comments received from the Historic Review Board to reduce the massing at the rear of the building and limiting the switchbacks to meet minimum code requirements. NPS guidance states, “The steepest allowable slope for a ramp is usually 1:12 (8%), but gentler slopes should be used whenever possible to accommodate people with

limited strength. Greater changes in elevation require larger and longer ramps to meet accessibility scoping provisions and may require an intermediate landing.” The natural topography surrounding the building presents challenges in providing ADA access and a longer ramp is required to provide the gentle slopes needed. That being said, the proposed design has the smallest number of switchbacks and landings required to meet current code requirements without creating too steep a slope. The length and massing of the ramp is required to provide code compliant ADA access to the first and second floors.

Preservation Brief 32 indicates “the design of new features should also be differentiated from the design of the historic property.” In terms of the subject property, while the use of a painted metal railing in the district may seem atypical, its simple design is clearly distinguishable from adjacent historic properties and is compatible with the Craftsman design of the subject building and buildings throughout the district. Additionally, the use of metal allows for a more streamlined look that reduces the appearance of massing to the ramp and building and allows the ramp to read as a more open space. The use of native and historically compatible plantings along the ramp at the northwest and southwest elevations will further obscure the appearance of the ramp and further lessen any potential visual impacts to the surrounding district.

It is our professional opinion, that of the proposed alternative options and previous versions of the ramp design, the current proposed design is the best option available for providing ADA access to the subject building while protecting the visual character that defines the conservation district. The design merges the needs of the Americans with Disabilities Act and the need for preservation by providing a minimally intrusive design that meets the minimum code requirements. Thoughtful consideration has been put into the recommendations made by the HRB and planning staff. The proposed changes to the ramp’s materiality, massing, and landscaping will provide the building’s occupants with safe access to the property while maintaining the character defining character of the McLoughlin Historic Conservation District.

## HERITAGE CONSULTING GROUP

Heritage is a national firm that assists the owners and developers of older and historic buildings in understanding the relative significance of their resources, navigating the regulatory redevelopment processes, and securing financial opportunities from federal, state and local incentives. The firm is staffed by seasoned historic preservation professionals who meet the Professional Qualifications Standards under the category of *Historic Architecture* and *Architectural History* in the Secretary of the Interior's Standards and Guidelines, *Code of Federal Regulations, 36 CFR Part 61*.

*Heritage does not provide accounting services, tax advice, or legal advice. You are urged to review any accounting, tax or legal matters which may be involved in the historic consulting advice provided by Heritage with an appropriate accountant or lawyer. Additionally, Heritage is not responsible for incorrect facts provided to Heritage by the client or its architect, design professionals, contractor, or consultant.*