

Making Changes to Your Home – the Right Way

By Marcie Osborn

I moved into my north end home in August of 2012. I knew before moving in that any changes I wanted to do to the exterior of my house would require approval from the Landmark Preservation Commission. I wasted no time putting this process to the test.

My project was to expand my existing very tiny deck (2' x 10') into a more reasonably sized deck. I started by going to the Landmark Preservation website <http://www.tacomaculture.org/historic/about.asp> and read about the required historic standards, design reviews, and I downloaded the *Application for Design Review*. This application walks you through the necessary steps. If you still have questions, Reuben McKnight, Landmarks Preservation Officer and his assistant are happy to answer your questions.

After I completed the application I submitted it to the Permit folks in the Planning & Development Services. This was a crucial step for me. My design was to extend my deck out 10', however after meeting with this department I learned about set-backs, and the maximum the deck could extend was 7' without going through a variance process. I was not interested in applying for a variance so I changed my design to the smaller size. I next met with the structural folks at the city. They told me the types of structural reinforcement that was needed to ensure the balcony did not fall down in an earthquake. ☺

After I had the necessary signatures I was scheduled to attend the next Commission meeting to present my plans. The Landmarks Commission meets twice a month so it is usually fairly easy to get on the agenda. My plans were presented to the Commission and they had questions and recommendations but it was an easy process.



With the Commission approval I was ready to start the actual project. My balcony was built and I love it. My builder assured me that with the structural recommendations made by the city, the house would fall down before the balcony.

Bottom line, this process, although not painful, did take some time. I really appreciated the resources available on-line at tacomaculture.org. Also, both Reuben and Tonie Cook, (since retired), were always willing to answer my many questions.

So, you have a project you want to do? Go for it! Just remember we live in a historic neighborhood and we want to keep it that way!