



AGENDA MEMORANDUM

Planning Department

Historic Preservation Committee Meeting Date: February 2, 2023

To: Historic Preservation Committee

From: Kim Ruiz, Planner

Date: January 25, 2023

REQUEST UNDER CONSIDERATION

Consideration of an application by the Historic Preservation Committee to provide a recommendation to the Planning Commission regarding the requested demolition of the White Heron House located at 6019 Clam Bayou Lane (Tax Parcel No.11-46-21-T3-0050B.0020). The application is submitted by Annabel Betz, the owner. **Application CA-2023-122.**

PURPOSE

This memorandum has been prepared by the Planning Department to provide background information on the White Heron House and guidance on the process for the Historic Preservation Committee (HPC) to consider the demolition of the house as allowed by Sec. 98-112 of the City's land development code. The recommendation of the HPC will be forwarded to the Planning Commission and the Planning Commission has up to 6 months to consider alternatives to preserve the building.

BACKGROUND

The White Heron House located at 6019 Clam Bayou Lane was placed on the City's Register of Historic Landmarks in 1993. The current owner purchased the property in 2015 and remodeled the interior of the historic house and newer annex in 2016 and 2017. The historic house was significantly damaged by Hurricane Ian on September 28, 2022, with enough structural damage to be classified as 'unsafe' by US Army Corps of Engineers Rapid Assessment Team. The applicant provided before and after hurricane photographs (Attachment 1). City staff conducted a site visit on January 20, 2023, to observe and photograph the damage to the historic house (Attachment 2). From a distance the front view of the house appears to be structurally sound with limited damage. However, the view into the house from the rear reveals major damage to floorboards, stress fractures on walls, destroyed kitchen, hole in the wall from where the air conditioning was attached, and broken windows.

CRITERIA FOR ISSUANCE OF A CERTIFICATE OF APPROPRIATENESS

Land Development Code Section 98-191 lists the following factors as guidance for the issuance of certificates of appropriateness for demolitions. Mrs. Betz submitted comments on how each of these criteria apply to her request and are included in *italicized font* after each factor listed below.

Sanibel is and shall remain a barrier island sanctuary

(1) The historic or architectural significance of the building, structure, or object.

White Heron House originally belonged to Mason Dwight and/or Thomas Holloway, early Sanibel homesteaders on Wulfert Point. Following the hurricane of 1926, the home was purchased by John Oster (inventor of the Osterizer) and moved to its current location on Clam Bayou Lane, where it became the central building in the White Heron Resort before the resort fell into disrepair during the 1940s and 1950s. It was eventually purchased by a relative of Wild Bill Hickock and changed hands several times before receiving historic designation in 1993. Prior to the home's historic designation, extensive renovations had already been made to the original homestead house - new siding, roof, introduction of modern plumbing and appliances, and the addition of front and back porches, as well as an attached car port. The addition of a separate side annex and pool had also been completed before the historic designation, enhancing the value of the property as a whole. The current owner (Annabel Betz with her late husband Russell Julius) purchased the home in 2015 and made significant updates to the interiors of the historic home and the annex in 2016 and 2017.

(2) The importance of the building, structure, or object to the ambience of a district.

White Heron House is an anomaly to its surroundings. All of the homes in the original location on Wulfert Point were destroyed in the 1926 hurricane and much of the original district is now part of the Sanctuary Golf Club. In its "newer" location on Clam Bayou Lane, all of the adjacent lots associated with White Heron Resort were eventually sold off and the neighborhood now consists of homes that are largely elevated and have greater structural hurricane protection.

(3) The difficulty or the impossibility of reproducing such a building, structure or object because of its design, texture, material, detail, or unique location.

6019 Clam Bayou Lane is a private home whose owners over the years have all cherished its historic character and served as stewards of a special property on a special island. Ultimately, however, private ownership financial considerations have to be taken into account for any reproduction/restoration.

Hurricane Ian caused severe damage to the property. The annex collapsed, the gazebo and dock were destroyed, and the pool area sustained considerable damage. In the main (historic) home, the downstairs floorboards were ruptured by storm surge and the exterior doors to the back porch all blew out, resulting in the complete destruction of the downstairs and loss of all furniture and appliances. Exterior walls and windows were ripped out in the living and dining rooms and front porch of the house.

It is unclear whether the remaining portion of the property is structurally stable. Even if it were, the current owner estimates that over 70% of the property would have to be rebuilt to restore the site to its original state and property value. While she has not solicited a formal quote, informal discussions with her previous contractor suggest that a full restoration would easily exceed \$1m, far more than the home's assessment of \$696,378 by the Lee County Property Appraiser. The current owner – having lost her husband in 2018 and now the home they bought for retirement – has neither the financial nor the emotional wherewithal for such an undertaking.

A significant challenge in restoring the home for any future buyer – assuming this is a possibility from a structural standpoint - is the insurability of the property as a private residential home. The current owner was informed that her home insurance carrier was ceasing coverage in 2023 and has received limited support post-Ian. Any future home buyer of a historic structure would have to take the insurability of the home into consideration, particularly given the low elevation of the property and the post-Ian emphasis on bringing Sanibel homes up to FEMA code.

(4) Whether the building, structure, or object is one of the last remaining examples of its kind in the neighborhood, the county, or the region.

The current owner does not have expertise to determine the distinctiveness of the property but would note that the property is not a designated national or state landmark. Also, as mentioned above, considerable changes were made to the original 1905 structure (not to mention the relocation of the entire home) before White Heron House received its historic designation in 1993. With one portion of the property consisting of a former homestead house, 6019 Clam Bayou Lane may be unique to Sanibel, but the addition of a carport, aluminum siding, new roof, pool, separate annex and entirely new interiors before the historic designation took place may have changed the property from its original structure from the perspective of a historic preservationist. The Sanibel Historic Village has multiple examples of early Florida homesteads in original condition along with many volunteers and fundraisers and a board to assure its preservation. The original Bailey Homestead is also open as part of the SCCF property.

(5) Whether there are definite plans for reuse of the property if the proposed demolition is carried out, and what effect of those plans on the character of the surrounding area would be.

The current owner contacted the Historic Village to see if there would be interest in relocating and repurposing the original building (assuming it is moveable) but was told that the structure could not be accommodated within the environs of the Village. As such, she plans to sell the underlying land once demolition has taken place (assuming the City of Sanibel has not provided another option). Any future owner would be guided by the Sanibel codes.

(6) Whether reasonable measures can be taken to save the building, structure, or object from collapse.

6019 Clam Bayou Lane has been labelled as “destroyed” by FEMA so there has been no need to remediate.

(7) Whether the building, structure, or object is capable of earning reasonable economic return on its value.

There are restrictions on commercial use of the property for the neighborhood and it is a private residence.

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATION

The interior of the historic house was remodeled and modernized by the current owners. The historic house was significantly damaged by Hurricane Ian with enough structural damage to be classified as 'unsafe' by the US Army Corps of Engineers Rapid Assessment Team. There is not available area at the Sanibel Historic Village and Museum to relocate the structure. Planning staff contacted Sanibel Captiva Conservation Foundation (SCCF) to find out if they are interested in having the house relocated to the Bailey Tract to potentially be renovated for intern housing or offices. SCCF CEO James Evans stated he would discuss with his staff to determine if it is a viable option. As of January 25, 2023, Planning staff have not received information on whether SCCF is interested in pursuing relocation of this historic building for their use.

The Historic Preservation Committee should provide a recommendation to allow the relocation of the house to the Bailey Tract if found to be structurally and financially feasible, and if relocation is not feasible then allow demolition of the house for the Planning Commission consideration in the form of a Certificate of Appropriateness.

Attachments:

1. Before and after Hurricane Ian photographs submitted by the owner.
2. Post Hurricane Ian photographs taken by City staff on January 20, 2023.

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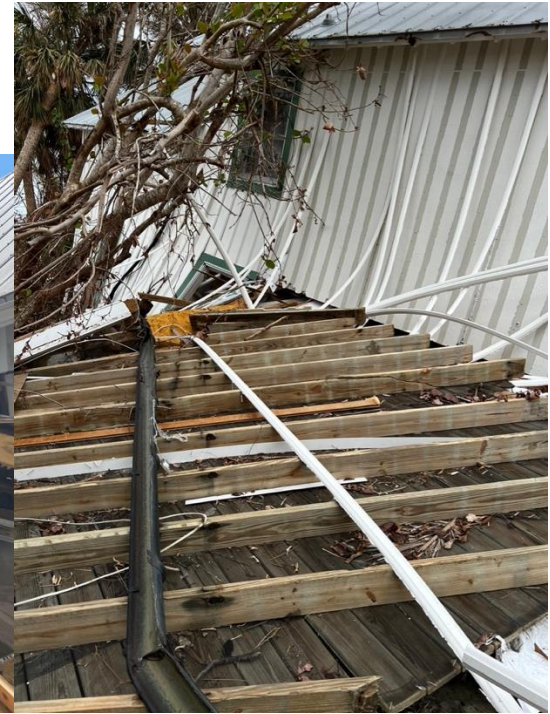
ATTACHMENT 1 – Before and after Hurricane Ian photographs provided by owner.

Annex – External Damage (Before and After)



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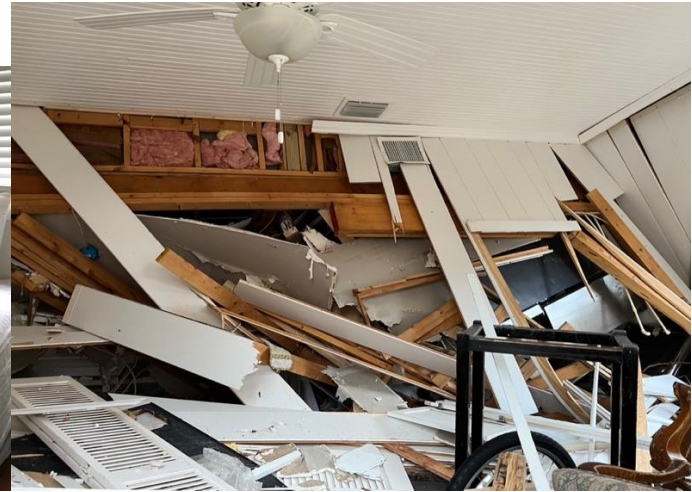
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Annex – Bedroom (Before and After)



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ATTACHMENT 1 – Before and after Hurricane Ian photographs provided by owner.

Annex – Upstairs (Before and After)



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ATTACHMENT 1 – Before and after Hurricane Ian photographs provided by owner.

Annex – Living Room and Kitchen (no after pictures because the first floor disappeared)



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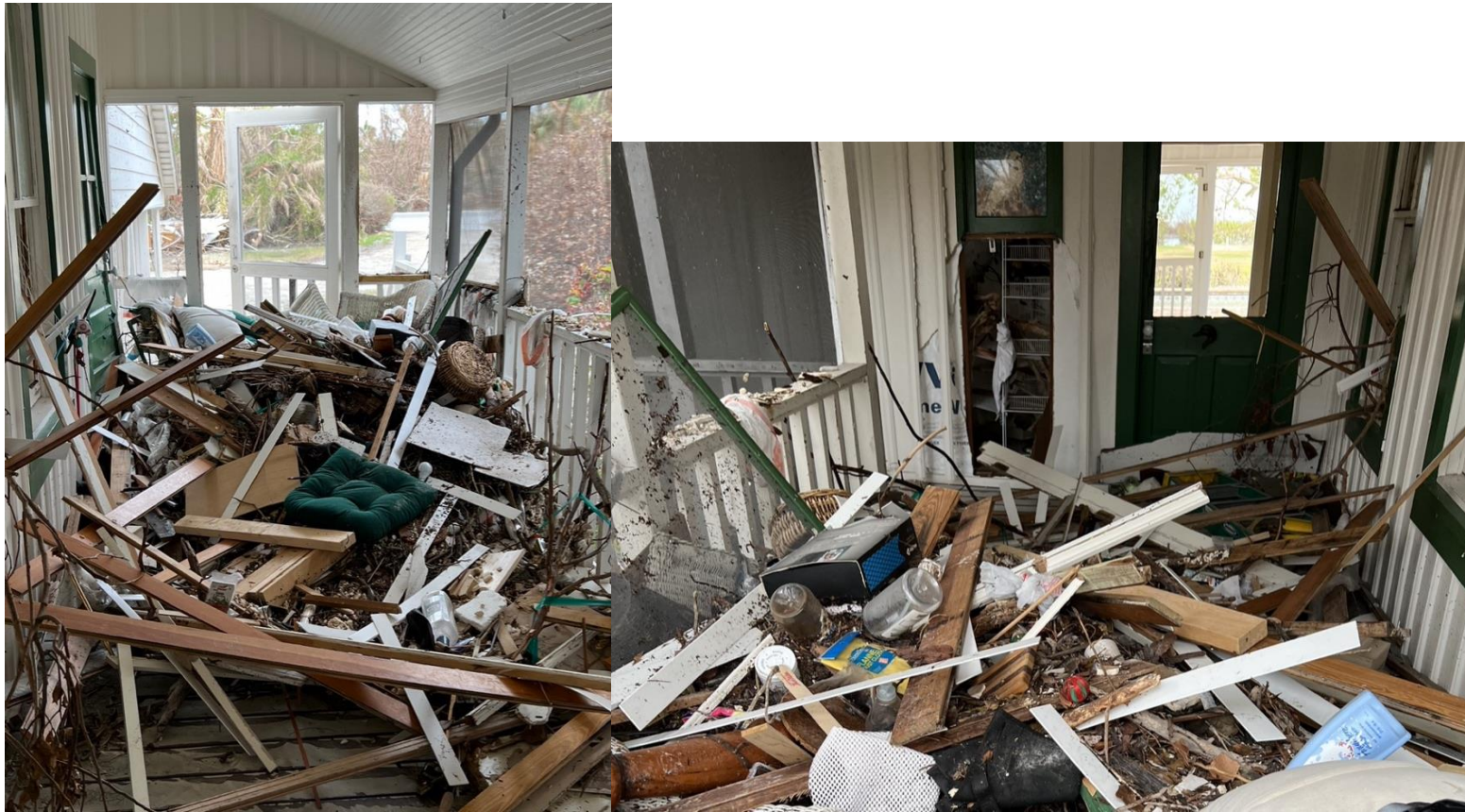
ATTACHMENT 1 – Before and after Hurricane Ian photographs provided by owner.

Front and Back porch of main house (before and after)



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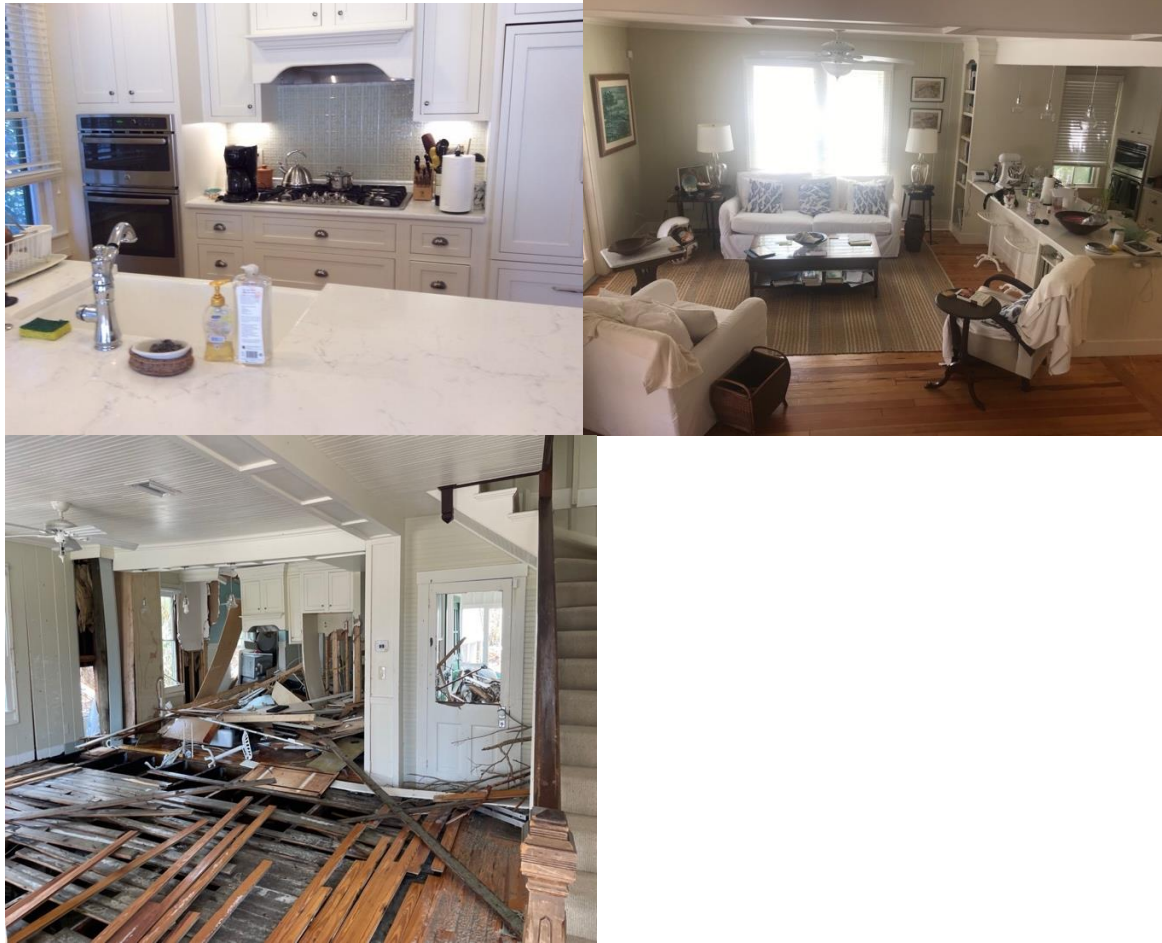
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ATTACHMENT 1 – Before and after Hurricane Ian photographs provided by owner.

Main House – Kitchen/Living Room/Dining Room



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ATTACHMENT 1 – Before and after Hurricane Ian photographs provided by owner.



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White Heron House – Post Hurricane Ian

Photographs taken 20 January 2023 by Kim Ruiz, Planner



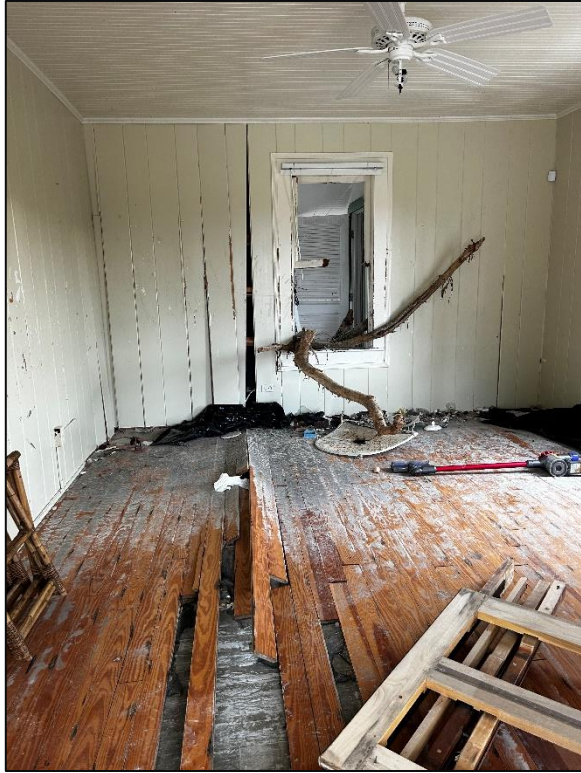
Front view of house



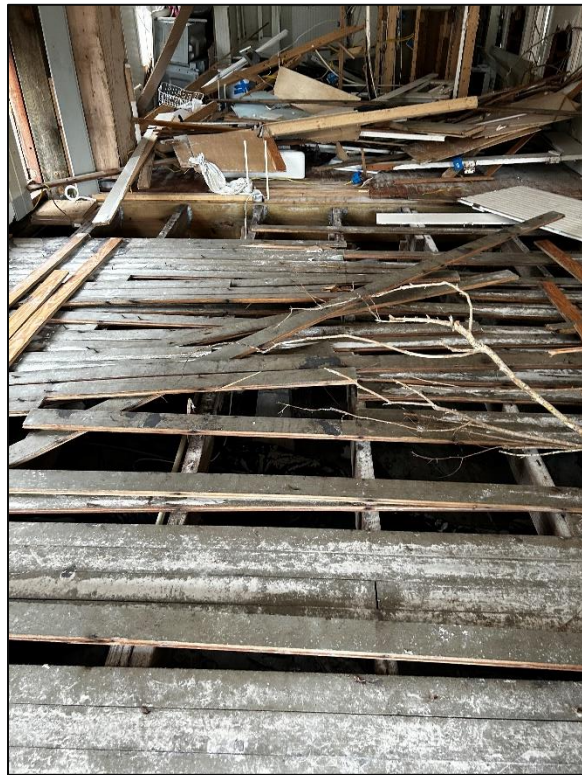
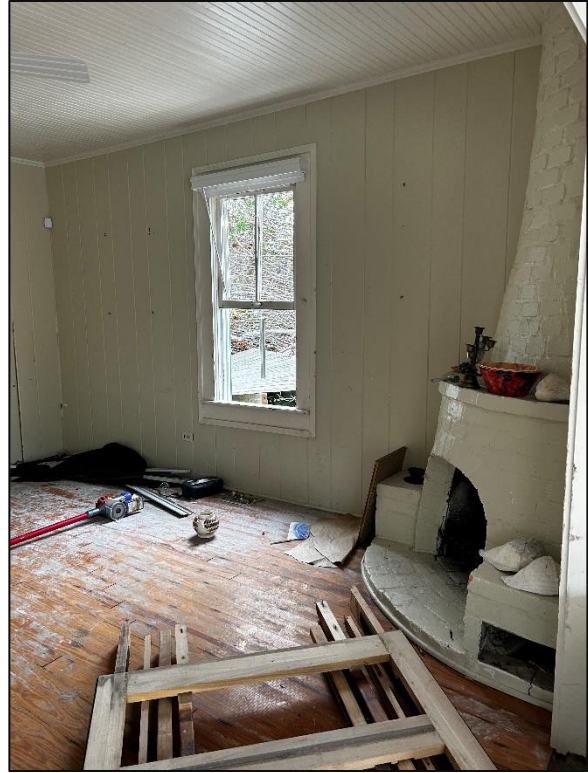
Rear view of house



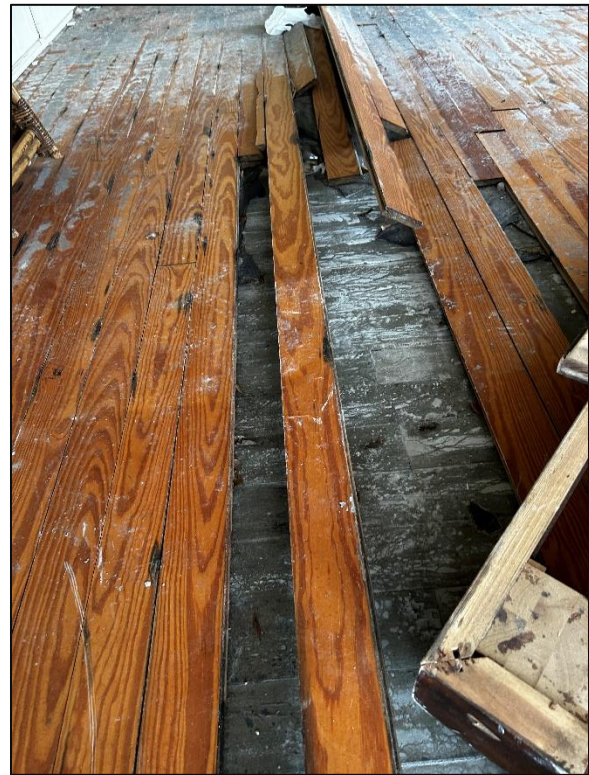
First floor main living area



First floor secondary living area



First floor main living area floor damage



First floor secondary living area floor damage
reveals original floor boards