

**CITY OF SAINT PAUL
HERITAGE PRESERVATION COMMISSION STAFF REPORT**

FILE NAME: North side of Sixth Street between Sibley and Wacouta: 400 Sibley Street (215-225 Sixth Street East), 227-231 Sixth Street East, and 235-237 Sixth Street East
DATE OF APPLICATION: January 3 and final January 8, 2013
APPLICANT: Saint Paul Public Works Department
OWNER: City of Saint Paul – Public Works Right-of-Way
DATE OF PUBLIC HEARING: January 24, 2013
HPC SITE/DISTRICT: Historic Lowertown Heritage Preservation District, local and National Register districts
CATEGORY: New Construction
CLASSIFICATION: Public Right-of-Way permit
STAFF INVESTIGATION AND REPORT: Amy Spong
DATE: January 18, 2013

A. SITE DESCRIPTION:

The Noyes Brothers and Cutler Wholesale Druggists Building (Park Square Court) at 400 Sibley Street (215-225 Sixth Street East), the Konantz Saddlery Company Building at 227-231 Sixth Street East, and the Koehler and Hinrichs Company Building (Margoles Leather Company) at 235-237 Sixth Street East were all designed by prominent architect J. Walter Stevens. No where else is there a complete block face of J. Walter Stevens work that date from 1886 through 1908. This collection of buildings make for an imposing backdrop to the open Mears Park (Smith Park) to the south. All three buildings are in the Romanesque style and the latest 1908 addition blends well with the original building. This entire block face is classified as pivotal to both the local and National Register Lowertown Historic District.

The National Register nomination form for the district states: *Lowertown is not only architecturally significant, but significant in the history of landscape architecture and city planning due to dramatic street pattern and grade changes which were made in the 1870s, and due to the fact that a park encompassing an entire city block has been preserved since the 1880s in the midst of a large warehouse and industrial area with tightly clustered buildings.*

Lowertown has a dense concentration of commercial buildings located on streets which form a grid-iron pattern centered around Mears Park. Although most of Lowertown was platted in 1849, the streets in the area were not graded or improved until the 1870s and most were not paved until the 1880s.

The most dramatic changes in the street patterns in Lowertown were made in 1876-78. During that brief period, Sibley, Wacouta, Fifth and Sixth Streets were cut through Baptist Hill. When these streets were graded, the block which is now Mears Park consisted of a hill with houses and some commercial buildings standing about fifty feet above street level.

Between 1883 and 1888 the block bounded by Sibley, Wacouta, Fifth and Sixth Streets which had been designated "public square" in the original plat of 1849 was finally graded and landscaped as a park.

The Period of Significance for the Historic Lowertown Heritage Preservation District spans from 1867-1929. The grid iron street plans and consistency in the public streets and sidewalks help define and support the district. During the period of significance, most of the streets were brick, especially those that had streetcars, and many alleys were either granite or sandstone cobbles or dirt. Based on research of historic maps and photos, it appears that the vast majority of the sidewalks were platted at 10' wide. The 10' wide sidewalk on Sixth Street is consistent with historic photos and public works index cards that address maintenance and alterations over

time. There is draft 1911 diagram of proposed Saint Paul street widths that show 14' for a typical business street and not sidewalks for a freight yard; it's not clear if this plan was ever adopted and current conditions would indicate it was not carried out in any comprehensive way in Lowertown.

The streetscape was also planned out of utility and allowed for shipping of goods by carriage and later by truck. Building facades with elevated first floors often had internal (integrated) loading docks and trucks would back up to them while other areas had external loading docks (often blocking or integrated into the sidewalk) for loading. This particular building face along Sixth Street had office and store uses on the first level which allows for pedestrian access through various points along the elevations at grade or mostly grade-level.

The National Register nomination also describes the area around the Mears Park as having a dense concentration of commercial buildings located on streets which form a grid-iron pattern. There is little deviation from the grid pattern even today. The Allen Building on Sixth Street and Broadway is setback from this grid as it originally had a loading dock at the south elevation. The building facades opposite the Union Depot were removed and setback to allow for the formal lawn space in front of the Union Depot. Mears Park Apartments at 401 Sibley Street (kiddie-corner from Mears Park) was constructed in 1977 and have a greater setback that is not consistent with historic setbacks.

The majority of sidewalks in Lowertown were simple with concrete and in some places Bomanite. Granite or concrete curbs were used and stone slab sidewalks were employed around Mears Park. The current sidewalks around Mears Park are 14' wide (10' in public ROW and 4' maintained by Parks). A key word to describe the character of the sidewalks in Lowertown is *consistency*. While there are a variety of building styles represented and a variety of natural brick and stone materials, there is a cohesiveness in the built environment and a *consistency* in the public streets and sidewalks; further enforcing the significance of the warehouse district as the sum of its parts and not just individual buildings.

B. PROPOSED CHANGES:

The Department of Public Works is proposing to reconstruct and widen the sidewalk on the north side of East Sixth Street between Sibley and Wacouta Streets. The current sidewalk is 10 feet wide and Public Works states that it is in poor condition. Public Works proposes to reconstruct the sidewalk to be 18 feet wide, introduce a new, 5 foot, continuous paver band at the edge of the sidewalk, abandon the areaways under the sidewalk as needed, relocate storm sewer and other utilities, install four trees (currently there are two), relocate existing globe style streetlights, complete traffic signal revisions, revise striping and signage to transition and shift traffic lanes and remove twenty-two parking meters. Additionally, there is a bus stop with a shelter located near the middle of this block. According to Public Works staff, the building owners wish to relocate this bus stop and shelter, but this matter has not been resolved with the Metropolitan Council/MetroTransit. It would appear that the main purpose of the sidewalk widening is to accommodate a desire by the building owners abutting the proposed improvement for additional space to install sidewalk patio/cafe seating for the restaurants on the block. as is shown in the "Proposed Typical Cross Section" on page 5 of the drawings submitted by Public Works for HPC review.

C. BACKGROUND:

The proposal to widen the Sixth Street sidewalk was first brought before the HPC for consideration at a Pre-Application review on June 24, 2010. The applicant at that time was the Department of Public Works and the widening of the Sixth Street sidewalk was proposed to accommodate patio seating for the adjacent restaurants. Color renderings that were provided for review in 2010 were helpful in understanding the proposed changes in the context of the historic buildings, historic street grid and relationship of the proposal to the context of the whole district. [See the June 24, 2010 meeting minutes in the meeting packet]

In 2010, the CapitolRiver Council (CRC) set up a taskforce and received community input on the proposal. The CRC adopted the following resolution:

“CapitolRiver Council approves the plans for a permanent sidewalk extension and café on 6th Street between Sibley and Wacouta, and urges building owners to further consider a seasonal decking option by meeting with John Mannillo.”

The project did not move forward and the HPC never conducted a public hearing on the proposal.

Two years later, during the summer of 2012, the proposal resurfaced when Public Works staff began discussions with HPC staff. During these discussions, the sidewalk width changed from an 18’6” wide to 18’ wide sidewalk and the design, materials and placement of lights, trees and other features has also changed from the 2010 proposal. Engineering drawings were submitted for review. New colored renderings were not provided. The colored renderings that were provided for review in 2010 are no longer applicable for this review, and the HPC will not review these renderings.

On January 17, 2013, The CapitolRiver Council Board requested that the City Council deny the application for the Sixth Street right-of-way changes until a full public review of the process could be completed, guided by the output from the HPC’s updated design guidelines, the CRC’s Parking Task Force, and consistency with the 6th/5th Street plan.

The Greater Lowertown Master Plan Summary was adopted by the City Council in 2012 and amended to the City Comprehensive Plan. The complete Plan was adopted by the Capital River Council. The following goals and strategies should be taken under consideration and relate to this current proposal of altering a city sidewalk and public right-of-way within an historic warehouse district:

Historic Preservation

Goal 9.2 Continue to preserve the historic character of the Historic District.

Goal 9.5 Welcome and celebrate changes and investments in Lowertown by managing them within the strong historic fabric.

Strategy 9.1 Apply the Secretary of Interior’s Standards for Treatment of Historic Properties and the local Design Review Guidelines to all repair, alteration, new construction and demolition in the Historic District.

Strategy 9.7 Conduct a study on historic streetscape and infrastructure to inform future open space and streetscape proposals.

Land Use & Urban Design

Goal 3.4 Welcome new investments that enhance and augment the unique qualities of Lowertown.

Transportation

Goal 5.1 Provide safe access and mobility for vehicles.

Goal 5.2 Prioritize safe, convenient and inviting pedestrian, bicycle and transit accessibility.

Objective 5.3 Incrementally and selectively modify streets to be more pedestrian-friendly.

Strategy 5.1 Construct a complete and connected on-street bike network and preserve sufficient right-of-way for transit on 4th, 5th and 6th streets.

Parks & Open Space

Strategy 6.7 *Incrementally improve sidewalks to become part of the neighborhood's valued open space system.*

D. GUIDELINE CITATIONS:

ARTICLE VI. - HISTORIC LOWERTOWN HERITAGE PRESERVATION DISTRICT

Lowertown Historic District Design Review Guidelines

Sec. 74-112.II Restoration and Rehabilitation, General Principles:

1. *All work should be of a character and quality that maintains the distinguishing features of the building and the environment. The removal of architectural features is not permitted.*

2. *Deteriorated architectural features should be repaired rather than replaced whenever possible. In the event of replacement, new materials should match the original in composition, design, color, texture and appearance. Duplication of original design based on physical or pictorial evidence is preferable to using conjectural or period designs or using part of other buildings.*

3. *Distinctive stylistic features or examples of skilled craftsmanship characteristic of structures of a period should be treated sensitively. Furthermore, if changes in use of a building are contemplated, they should be accomplished with minimum alteration to the structure and fabric.*

4. *In general, it is expected that buildings will be restored to their original appearance. However, alterations to buildings are sometimes significant because they reflect the history of the building and the district. This significance should be respected, and restoration to an 'original' appearance may not always be desirable. All buildings should be recognized as products of their own time and not be altered to resemble buildings from another era.*

New Construction

Setback - Siting

There should be no more than a 5% variation in setback from existing adjacent buildings. The proportion of built edge to open space should preserve the plane of the street wall, particularly along the streets facing Mears Park and the Farmer's Market.

Landscaping and Street Furniture

When lots are used for green space or parking, a visual hole in the street "wall" may result. Landscape treatment can eliminate this potential problem by providing a wall of enclosure for the street. Traditional street elements of the area, such as granite curbs, should be preserved. New street furniture should complement the scale and character of the area.

The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation (1990)

****EXCERPT****

District/Neighborhood

Recommended:

-Identifying, retaining, and preserving buildings, and streetscape, and landscape features which are important in defining the overall historic character of the district or neighborhood. Such features can include streets, alleys, paving, walkways, street lights, signs, benches, parks and gardens, and trees.

-Retaining the historic relationship between buildings, and streetscape and landscape features such as a town square comprised of row houses and stores surrounding a communal park or open space.

-Protecting and maintaining the historic masonry, wood, and architectural metals which comprise building and streetscape features, through appropriate surface treatments such as cleaning, rust removal, limited paint removal, and reapplication of protective coating systems; and protecting and maintaining landscape features, including plant material.

-Protecting buildings, paving, iron fencing, etc. against arson and vandalism before rehabilitation work begins by erecting protective fencing and installing alarm systems that are keyed into local protection agencies.

-Evaluating the overall condition of building, streetscape and landscape materials to determine whether more than protection and maintenance are required, that is, if repairs to features will be necessary.

-Repairing features of the building, streetscape, or landscape by reinforcing the historic materials. Repair will also generally include the replacement in kind - or with a compatible substitute material - of those extensively deteriorated or missing parts of features when there are surviving prototypes such as porch balustrades, paving materials, or streetlight standards.

-Replacing in kind an entire feature of the building, streetscape, or landscape that is too deteriorated to repair - when the overall form and detailing are still evident - using the physical evidence to guide the new work. This could include a storefront, a walkway, or a garden. If using the same kind of material is not technically or economically feasible, then a compatible substitute material may be considered.

Design for Missing Historic Features

-Designing and constructing a new feature of the building streetscape, or landscape when the historic feature is completely missing, such as row house steps, a porch, streetlight, or terrace. It may be a restoration based on historical, pictorial, and physical documentation; or be a new design that is compatible with the historic character of the district or neighborhood.

Alterations/Additions for the New Use

-Designing required new parking so that it is as unobtrusive as possible, i.e., on side streets or at the rear of buildings. Shared parking should also be planned so that several businesses' can utilize one parking area as opposed to introducing random, multiple lots.

-Designing and constructing new additions to historic buildings when required by the new use. New work should be compatible with the historic character of the district or neighborhood in terms of size, scale, design, material, color, and texture.

-Removing non-significant buildings, additions, or streetscape and landscape features which detract from the historic character of the district or the neighborhood.

Not Recommended:

-Removing or radically changing those features of the district or neighborhood which are important in defining the overall historic character so that, as a result, the character is diminished.

-Destroying streetscape and landscape features by widening existing streets, changing paving material, or introducing inappropriately located new streets or parking lots.

-Removing or relocating historic buildings, or features of the streetscape and landscape, thus destroying the historic relationship between buildings, features and open space.

-Failing to provide adequate protection of materials on a cyclical basis so that deterioration of

building, streetscape, and landscape feature results.

-Stripping features from buildings or the streetscape such as wood siding, iron fencing, or terra cotta balusters; or removing or destroying landscape features, including plant material.

-Failing to undertake adequate measures to assure the preservation of building, streetscape, and landscape features.

-Replacing an entire feature of the building, streetscape, or landscape such as a porch, walkway, or streetlight, when repair of materials and limited replacement of deteriorated or missing parts are appropriate.

-Using a substitute material for the replacement part that does not convey the visual appearance of the surviving parts of the building, streetscape, or landscape feature or that is physically or chemically incompatible.

-Removing a feature of the building, streetscape, or landscape that is unrepairable and not replacing it; or replacing it with a new feature that does not convey the same visual appearance.

Design for Missing Historic Features

-Creating a false historical appearance because the replaced feature is based on insufficient historical, pictorial and physical documentation.

-Introducing a new building, streetscape or landscape feature that is out of scale or otherwise inappropriate to the setting's historic character, e.g., replacing picket fencing with chain link fencing.

Alterations/Additions for the New Use

-Placing parking facilities directly adjacent to historic buildings which cause the removal of historic plantings, relocation of paths and walkways, or blocking of alleys.

-Introducing new construction into historic districts that is visually incompatible or that destroys historic relationships within the district or neighborhood.

-Removing a historic building, building feature, or landscape or streetscape feature that is important in defining the overall historic character of the district or the neighborhood.

E. FINDINGS:

1. On March 22, 1984, the Historic Lowertown Heritage Preservation District was established under Ordinance No. 17120, § 2. The Heritage Preservation Commission shall protect the architectural character of heritage preservation sites through review and approval or denial of applications for city permits for exterior work within designated heritage preservation sites §73.04.(4).
2. **Classification of the streetscape and effected buildings.** All of the buildings along Sixth Street between Sibley and Wacouta Streets are pivotal to the character of the Historic Lowertown Heritage Preservation District. They are all designed by J. Walter Stevens in similar styles with pressed red brick and sandstone. An entire block face of J. Walter Stevens designs can be found no where else. The sidewalks and street grid contribute to and support the historic architecture and character of the Historic Lowertown Heritage Preservation District.
3. **Proposed Demolition.** Public works is proposing to remove the originally platted 10' wide sidewalks. Public works staff determined that historic materials and features such as:

granite curbing, glass prism sidewalks (they are around the corner at Sibley next to Bin Wine Bar) and brick gutters (visible) are not located in the affected area and will not be removed as part of this project. The areaways beneath the sidewalk will also be filled-in; they are a feature that is unique to the commercial and warehouse districts. Many areaways have been filled-in/removed in recent years. Typically, the removal of areaways is not reviewed by the HPC. Digital photos have been taken of these areaways for HPC files. Public works also proposes to remove a traffic and parking lane which will altering the historic street grid.

4. **Character of the historic streetscape.** In order to determine whether a new streetscape proposal is consistent with the historical and architectural character of the Historic Lowertown Heritage Preservation District, an understanding of the streetscape over the District's Period of Significance is necessary. The Period of Significance for the Historic Lowertown Heritage Preservation District is 1867-1929.

The Site Description in Section A addresses how the streets were platted and established in Lowertown as well as the importance of the landscape in preserving and maintaining the District's character and authenticity. It is during that broad timeframe that streetscape elements are considered significant. A key word to describe the character of the sidewalks in Lowertown is *consistency*. While there are numerous building styles represented and a variety of natural brick and stone materials, there is a cohesiveness in the built environment and a *consistency* in the public streets and sidewalks; further enforcing the significance of the warehouse district as the sum of its parts and not just individual buildings.

Historically, this block face along Sixth Street did not have trees, parking meters, transit structures or even light posts. Today, as with much of Lowertown, there are street trees, light poles and traffic signage. Altering the width and materials of the sidewalk and altering the historic grid pattern of the streets would have an adverse impact on the character of the historic streetscape.

5. **Alteration of the sidewalk** The Historic Lowertown Heritage Preservation District Design Review Guidelines state "*Traditional street elements of the area...should be preserved.*" (§74-112.I.H.) The proposal to widen the sidewalk to 18' will have a negative impact to the important "grid-iron pattern" that defines the character of Lowertown.

The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation recommend against "*Introducing a new building, streetscape or landscape feature that is out of scale or otherwise inappropriate to the setting's historic character.*" Widening from 10 to 18 feet is out of scale and inappropriate to the historic character. The *consistency* of the streetscape, as the neighboring blocks will not be altered, and the utility of the sidewalk will change and become something more formal. The sidewalks around Mears Park are all 14' and this is an established precedent within close proximity.

6. **Impact on view sheds and street views.** The widening of the sidewalk from 10 feet to 18 feet would have an adverse impact on the view sheds and street views. With the "grid-iron" street pattern in Lowertown, site lines, streetscape and landscaping features align to reinforce the strong linear precedent. Public Works proposal to shift the location of the trees and lights will physically and visually disrupt the consistent line of trees and lights that further emphasize the historic grid and unique topography of the Historic Lowertown Heritage Preservation District.
7. **Proposed materials and details. Globe lights.** The light globes are a replica fixture that has been approved for the Lowertown District. While they may not have been placed on this particular block face they are an appropriate fixture that was present in other areas of Lowertown. When considering the changes to 4th Street in Lowertown, the lights were considered an amenity by the reviewers and HPC, as that was a streetscape element that was restored district wide. Positioning at the edge of the expanded sidewalk is addressed in Finding 6.

Street trees. Trees were originally located in the Park, not along the sidewalks, and they have been added over the last 30 years as the area has become revitalized. In the district, the tree grates are of cast iron which is consistent with the character of Lowertown. Public Works proposal to change the cast iron grates to concrete pavers and keep the band continuous along the curb will have a negative impact on the character of the streetscape and is not consistent with the historic or established streetscape. Street trees should not block important views and facades of historic buildings and should not have a dense canopy. The trees should also be located at breaks between buildings or bays which will not have a negative impact to the historic district. Positioning at the edge of the expanded sidewalk is addressed in Finding 6.

Concrete Paver Band. Public Works proposal to introduce a gray concrete paver band that is not located on any other adjacent block or around Mears Park does not comply with the standard that recommends against *“Introducing a new building, streetscape or landscape feature that is out of scale or otherwise inappropriate to the setting’s historic character.”* The application states that this is not a requirement for traffic purposes. This was a requirement, however, along 4th Street for the LRT but that should not establish a new precedent for the rest of Lowertown.

Trash bins and Meters. A trash bin was not supplied for review; if the existing bronze-toned bin is proposed, it will meet the intent of the guidelines. Given the removal of parking, there will be no meters. If any meters are proposed to be changed, especially to the new parking system present elsewhere in downtown, review by the HPC and/or staff is required.

Patio Railings/Enclosures and Permanent Street Furniture. The drawings did not indicate where the patios would be placed except against the building facades and no railing designs were submitted. Railing designs and placement will require review by the HPC and/or staff and should be an appropriate material, design and visually open.

8. **General Planning Considerations.** Various planning considerations were outlined in the Background Section C. There has been limited dialogue with key city staff and all identified stakeholders as to what is driving the current proposal and how alternate proposals will better balance compliance with the applicable historic district guidelines and the goals, strategies and objectives outlined in the Greater Lowertown Master Plan Summary.
9. Public Works proposal, as submitted, is likely to adversely affect the program for the preservation and architectural control of the Historic Lowertown Heritage Preservation District (Leg. Code §73.06 (e)). In discussion with Public Works staff, an alternate plan was designed and submitted on January 14, 2013 for a 14 foot wide sidewalk that would have a lesser impact on the Historic Lowertown Heritage Preservation District.

F. STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Based on the alternate plan, staff would recommend approval of the alternate proposal dated January 14, 2013. The alternate proposal better balances the impact to the District’s historic character along with the applicable planning considerations identified in the Background Section C.

The alternate proposal is the result of HPC staffs desire to find a compromise and respond to a question at the City Council public hearing on January 2, 2013 which asked whether other options had been explored. This alternate proposal is depicted in a section drawing labeled “HPC Staff Proposal.” The alternate proposal is based on precedent for a 14 foot wide sidewalk (located around Mears Park), which would be an acceptable width without being too out of scale with the established historic width of 10 feet. Along with the change to 14 feet width, adjusting the organization of the sidewalk in a more efficient way and changing the use of the drive lanes, this proposal would mean the following:

1. The scale and character of the historic district would be maintained. Less impact and change shifting the lights and trees with the adjacent lights and trees and less disruption to prominent street views—4 foot shift opposed to 8 foot shift. A discussion should also be had about keeping the trees and lights in the same plane as the current and how that would affect patio seating, pedestrian circulation, and safety. Removing non-historic concrete pavers and maintaining the established cast iron tree gates while meeting ADA requirements will comply with the guidelines.
2. The parking lane on the north side of Mears Park would be restored. This maintains parking revenues, provides a barrier for the pedestrian and a traffic lane which won't negatively impact the vitality of the Park.
3. There will then be two drive lanes, one of them would also be the bus lane and there remains 4 feet (from the dedicated bus/bike lane proposed) that could be a dedicated bike lane, which would also create a stronger buffer for the pedestrians on the north side to a traffic and bus lane.
4. This would allow for 7 to 8 feet (9 feet is proposed) of patio seating to be on the outer edge of the sidewalk and then a clear minimum space for pedestrian circulation along the building edge of 5 feet (4 feet is proposed).
5. The materials of concrete (no concrete pavers), globe street lights, ADA cast iron tree grates and existing trash bins would be consistent with the historic and established character and comply with the guidelines.
6. A discussion should be had regarding the bus shelter. If the existing bus shelter will be removed and then reinstalled that is acceptable, but if a new bus shelter is proposed then it must be reviewed separately for compliance with the guidelines in terms of design, materials and finishes. Its placement should also not block main entrances to the historic buildings.

G. ATTACHMENTS:

1. Applications with photos and plans
2. Historic streetscape photos
3. Minutes from the June 24, 2010 HPC meeting
4. Example photos of widened sidewalks outside Lowertown but in downtown
5. Written testimony: 0 in support, 8 objections, 0 neutral
6. Section drawing of "HPC Staff Proposal" 14' sidewalk