

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

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FILE NAME: 1173 Davern Street

DATE OF APPLICATION: March 3, 2014 (with and extension request)

APPLICANT: Allan Czaia, City of Saint Paul Public Works

OWNER: Phillip C. Foussard

DATE OF PUBLIC HEARING: May 22, 2014

HPC SITE/DISTRICT: Individual Site – William & Catherine Davern Farmhouse

CATEGORY: Pivotal

CLASSIFICATION: Right-of-Way Permit

STAFF INVESTIGATION AND REPORT: Amy Spong

DATE: May 15, 2014

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**A. SITE DESCRIPTION:**

Built circa 1862, the William & Catherine Davern Farmhouse is a wood-framed farm house constructed in the Italianate style located on a large lot along the bluffs in the Highland Park neighborhood of St. Paul. Originally three bays, the main facade is now five bays wide, the northern two were added in 1929. The house has a basic box-like form and has an ornate cornice with dentils and large brackets. The windows are tall, narrow, and rectangular with two-over-two and four-over-four sashes. None of the original farm outbuildings survive except for the foundation of the barn and some early retaining walls.

The William & Catherine Davern Farmhouse is historically and architecturally significant as a rare, surviving farm house in an area of post-World War II homes, as the home of one of the first farm families to settle in the area of St. Paul (originally known as the Reserve Township), and as one of the oldest and most intact Italianate style farm houses still standing in Ramsey County.

**B. PROPOSED CHANGES:** The applicant is proposing to construct a new, five-foot wide city sidewalk along the east side of the site at the curb and street edge. Currently, neither side of the street has a sidewalk and Public Works evaluated both sides of the street and determined the best solution was to install the sidewalk on the west side of the street.

**C. GUIDELINE CITATIONS:**

**Preservation Program for the William & Catherine Davern Farmhouse**

**(Ordinance No.17283, § 2)**

*The exterior appearance of the house should be preserved in a manner consistent with the original design intent. Any additions or alterations that would obscure or detract from the architectural integrity or historic character of the building or its site should be avoided.*

**The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation**

**Standards for Rehabilitation**

*1. A property will be used as it was historically, or be given a new use that requires minimal change to its distinctive materials, features, spaces, and spatial relationships.*

- 2. The historic character of a property will be retained and preserved. The removal of distinctive materials or alteration of features, spaces, and spatial relationships that characterize a property will be avoided.*
- 3. Each property will be recognized as a physical record of its time, place, and use. Changes that create a false sense of historical development, such as adding conjectural features or elements from other historic properties, will not be undertaken.*
- 4. Changes to a property that have acquired historic significance in their own right will be retained and preserved.*
- 5. Distinctive materials, features, finishes, and construction techniques or examples of craftsmanship that characterize a property will be preserved.*
- 6. Deteriorated historic features will be repaired rather than replaced. Where the severity of deterioration requires replacement of a distinctive feature, the new feature will match the old in design, color, texture, and, where possible, materials. Replacement of missing features will be substantiated by documentary and physical evidence.*
- 7. Chemical or physical treatments, if appropriate, will be undertaken using the gentlest means possible. Treatments that cause damage to historic materials will not be used.*
- 8. Archeological resources will be protected and preserved in place. If such resources must be disturbed, mitigation measures will be undertaken.*
- 9. New additions, exterior alterations, or related new construction will not destroy historic materials, features, and spatial relationships that characterize the property. The new work shall be differentiated from the old and will be compatible with the historic materials, features, size, scale and proportion, and massing to protect the integrity of the property and its environment.*
- 10. New additions and adjacent or related new construction will be undertaken in such a manner that, if removed in the future, the essential form and integrity of the historic property and its environment would be unimpaired.*

#### **D. FINDINGS:**

1. The William & Catherine Davern Farmhouse was designated a Saint Paul Heritage Preservation Site by the City Council in 1985 and was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1983. A Period of Significance (POS) was not defined in the National Register nomination. For the purposes of this review, staff has determined the POS is from 1862 when construction commenced to 1929 when two bays were added onto the house which is still the configuration and size present today.
2. In order to determine whether the public sidewalk will have a negative impact to the architectural and historical significance of the site and building, an understanding of the changes that took place over the POS that have acquired significance in their own right is warranted, as well as any changes outside the POS that have or have not had a negative impact. The original farm site of 160 acres (Snelling, Montreal, Fairview, St. Paul Avenues) had grown to 290 acres by 1880. A late 19<sup>th</sup> Century image shows the farmhouse in the background and a large open field for farming. Early accounts say there were few trees, making the river valley visible from Davern Hill. There was a dirt road that extended south to West Seventh Street. In 1887, the road was extended north of the farmhouse and became a city street named Davern Street. The street wasn't paved until the early 1950's.  
  
In 1917, the house was sold to Harvey B. Fuller, Jr. he had the front porch removed, dozens of apple trees to the south of the house removed, but the remains of the old barn were still extant. In 1928, Clifton C. Dailey of Drake Marble Company bought the house and they expanded the house with two bays in 1929. Other interior improvements were made and a clay tennis court

was installed west of the house where the Davern's pig pen had been. After 1938, new owners, the Headley's, hooked up to city water, cleared the south of tangled raspberry patches and removed the clay tennis court.

There is not a lot of documentation about the site conditions at the front lawn along Davern Street, except that the location and alignment of the road had remained the same since the Davern's farmed the land. The improvement made as a city street provided paving, curbs, lights and storm water management. A new city sidewalk would allow for a safe pedestrian route separated from the street.

3. Ordinance No.17283, § 2 (Preservation Program) states "*Any additions or alterations that would obscure or detract from the architectural integrity or historic character of the building or its site should be avoided.*" With minimal tree removal and grade changes, the proposal to construct a 5' wide sidewalk will not detract from the architectural integrity or historic character of the building or its site. The distance of the sidewalk from the main façade of the house still allows for several feet of green space and tree growth and preserves the wide area of green space and most of landscaping that surrounds much of the house.
4. A significant and character-defining feature of the properties' site is its topography (sited on the hill) and the fact that a large and open piece of land was preserved around the house that also included the foundation of the barn and early retaining walls. While much of the farm land was sold and developed, mainly beginning in the 1940's, it is fortunate that this large lot was not further divided for redevelopment. That would have likely negatively impacted the site's integrity of *setting* as defined by the National Park Service. A new city sidewalk, while replacing some green space, is at grade and will not minimally impact the site's integrity of setting.
5. The proposal to construct a public sidewalk at the eastern perimeter but within the boundaries of the William and Catherine Davern Farmhouse Site will not adversely affect the Program for the Preservation and architectural control (Leg. Code §73.06 (e)) as long as the proposed conditions are met.

#### **E. STAFF RECOMMENDATIONS:**

Based on the findings staff recommends approval of the building permit application provided the following condition(s) are met:

1. Every effort shall be made to avoid the need for a retaining wall within the boundaries of the historic site. If a retaining wall cannot be avoided HPC staff and Public Works staff shall consult on appropriate materials and detailing.
2. Every effort shall be made to lessen curves and angles (often to avoid trees or existing infrastructure) in the alignment of the sidewalk.
3. Final construction level drawings shall be submitted to HPC staff to verify consistency with the HPC reviewed and conditionally approved plans.
4. Any revisions to the approved plans shall be submitted to HPC staff for review.
5. A copy of the stamped HPC approved plans shall be on site for the duration of the construction project and provided to the selected contractor.

*Note: Much of the historical information in this staff report was taken from an article written for the Ramsey County History publication written by previous Farmhouse owner, Robert J. Couser in the Fall, 1991.*