

CITY OF SAINT PAUL

HERITAGE PRESERVATION COMMISSION RESOLUTION

FILE NUMBER: 15-1659/1669 Grand Avenue – Historic Resource Review

DATE: December 3, 2015

WHEREAS, the City of Saint Paul has declared as a matter of public policy, in Chapter 73 of the Saint Paul Legislative Code, "that the preservation, protection, perpetuation and use of areas, places, building, structures and other objects having special historical, community or aesthetic interest or value is a public necessity and is required in the interest of the health, prosperity, safety and welfare of the people;" and

WHEREAS, Chapter 73 also establishes the purposes of heritage preservation to be to: "safeguard the heritage of the City of Saint Paul by preserving sites and structures which reflect elements of the city's cultural, social, economic, political or architectural history; protect and enhance the City of Saint Paul's attraction to residents, tourists and visitors, and serve as a support and stimulus to business and industry; enhance the visual and aesthetic character, diversity and interest of the City of Saint Paul; foster civic pride in the beauty and notable accomplishments of the past; and promote the use and preservation of historic sites and structures for the education and general welfare of the people of the City of Saint Paul;" and

WHEREAS, Chapter 73 establishes the Saint Paul Heritage Preservation Commission (HPC) and states that it "shall serve as an advisory body to the mayor and city council on municipal heritage preservation matters" including surveying properties that the HPC have reason to believe are eligible for designation as heritage preservation sites and to recommend to the mayor and city council those sites be designated in order to preserve them; and

WHEREAS, there are a variety of threats facing historic resources in Saint Paul, including demolition by neglect and purposeful destruction; development pressures; owners who do not properly maintain their buildings; challenges to finding new uses; and even natural disasters; and

WHEREAS, the Saint Paul Comprehensive Plan has a chapter devoted to preserving and protecting historic resources and recommends specific strategies to protect undesignated historic resources. Strategy HP4.3 recommends to "Protect any undesignated property that is eligible for local designation or listing on the National Register of Historic Places from destruction or a substantial loss of historic character until the HPC has an opportunity to consider alternatives to adverse effects, or pursue historic designation of the property, and/or find parties interested in acquiring and preserving it;" and

WHEREAS, a historic resource is defined as "A property that is believed to have historical, cultural, architectural, archaeological or engineering significance and to meet at least one of the criteria for designation as a heritage preservation site or district as provided in Legislative Code Chapter 73.05; and

WHEREAS, the S.B. Walsh Block at 1661-1665 Grand Avenue was constructed in 1891 and designed by Saint Paul architect Charles A. Wallingford and built by Ira White. The two-story, loadbearing brick structure has a flat roof, a corbelled brick cornice and three storefront bays. The first floor storefronts have been infilled with smaller windows and shingles and do not convey the early design, which likely had large windows, transoms and bulkheads. The brick façade has also been painted; and

WHEREAS, the Walsh Block has three storefront bays with dwelling units above and behind and the original owner may be Silas B. Walsh of the Cochrane and Walsh real estate firm. There were many residential tenants and the building housed a grocery store and dry cleaners at one point. The grocery store of George M. Ray was there from at least 1897 to 1901, the Stoltz Dry Cleaners was there from 1917 to at least 1946, and they are still in business today at 1580 Grand Avenue. More recently, there were residences, restaurants and a bookstore. The 1665 portion was home to the first Hungry Mind bookstore, which is considered a cultural St. Paul icon too many. The building was fully vacated in April 2015 with an Order to Vacate and categorized as a Category III Vacant Building pursuant to Legislative Code Chapter

WHEREAS, architect Charles A. Wallingford resided in Saint Paul for 11 years and designed several important buildings and private residences including his own house at 1259 Como Avenue (extant) which is determined eligible for listing as a Saint Paul Heritage Preservation Site (1983 Historic Sites Survey) as well as Geneva Flats at 110 N. St. Albans St. (1892, RA-SPC-3444) and Stickler Row at 733-39 Lincoln Avenue (NRHP, 1890, RA-SPC-4278). He also designed the ice palace in St. Paul in 1887 and a year later he worked with Reed and Stem as the firm was known as "Reed, Stem and Wallingford" from 1888 to 1889. The Walsh Block is one of the few known commercial buildings designed by Charles A. Wallingford; and

WHEREAS, the Department of Safety and Inspections issued an *Order to Abate Nuisance Building* on September 15, 2015 and the Legislative Hearing Officer heard the case on November 24, 2015 with a City Council public hearing being planned for December 16, 2015; and

WHEREAS, the City of Saint Paul submitted a *Historic Review Form* for 1659-1669 Grand Avenue to the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) pursuant to the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 and implementing federal regulations at 36 CFR 800 and the SHPO responded in a letter dated October 16, 2015 that in their opinion the building may have significance for listing on the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP). The SHPO also states that in accordance with 36 CFR 800.4(B), the property should be fully evaluated in order to determine the building's eligibility for listing on the NRHP and cites qualifications for how the evaluation should be carried out; and

WHEREAS, the HPC reviewed the available materials and allowed for public comment at their meeting held on December 3, 2015. However, this meeting was not noticed as a public hearing but the Chair allowed anyone present on the item to speak. Tom Welna, from Macalester College High Winds Fund was present and provided much background to the HPC regarding the organizations interest in the property over several years. Mr. Welna also stated that if the organization did acquire the property they would not rehabilitate the property given its deteriorated state. The owner's representative, Fred Kueppers, sent an email indicating the owner, Grand Heritage Properties LLC, are not interested in pursuing designation at this time. Staff also presented information to the HPC presented during the Legislative Hearing on November 24th where Fred Kueppers, owner's representative spoke; Carol Carey of Historic St. Paul spoke about the lack of tools for historic resources that have been neglected; and both Macalester College and the Macalester Groveland Community Council spoke in favor of razing the buildings; and

WHEREAS, the Saint Paul Heritage Preservation Commission, based upon information gathered by staff and presented at their December 3, 2015 meeting, made and adopted the following findings:

1. The property was surveyed during the 1983 Historic Sites Survey of Ramsey County (RA-SPC-1371) but no further recommendations were made at the time and there has not been an updated evaluation completed to determine current eligibility. Initial research resulted in early maps and photos of the building in context of the neighborhood and Macalester College. They also show the context shortly after construction and that it was the first commercial building in this area during the late Victorian era.
2. Strategy HP3.1 in the *City's Historic Preservation Chapter of the Comprehensive Plan* recommends, "Implementing an ongoing survey program to identify and evaluate all types of historic resources in Saint Paul, including buildings..." Given the initial research conducted by staff, the 1983 inventory form and the opinion of the SHPO, the Walsh Block meets the definition of *historic resource* and a proper evaluation must be completed prior to a City Council final

decision regarding the Remove or Repair Order. A more intensive level survey would be required to determine if the building is eligible for local designation or eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places but initial research indicates the property has the potential to possess significance and meet at least one of the criteria for local and/or National Register designation. The loss of a property that is significant and contributes to St. Paul's sense of place and a neighborhood's historic character would have a negative impact on the integrity of the neighborhood and Grand Avenue.

3. This remove or repair order comes at a time when preservation consultants have just completed an intensive level survey of the Macalester Park neighborhood and have submitted a draft report with recommendations to Historic St. Paul and Heritage Preservation Commission staff. While the commercial corridor on Grand Avenue was not included as part of the survey, the report includes contexts for Macalester College, Macalester Park (which was platted up to Summit Avenue), and the Grand Avenue streetcar. The significance of the Walsh Block within the development of the Grand Avenue context has also not been established. All of these contexts have the potential to establish significance for the Walsh Block and the HPC has not had an opportunity to review the draft Macalester Park report.
4. Strategy HP4.3 recommends to "Protect any undesignated property that is eligible for local designation or listing on the National Register of Historic Places from destruction or a substantial loss of historic character until the HPC has an opportunity to consider alternatives to adverse effects, or pursue historic designation of the property, and/or find parties interested in acquiring and preserving it." A decision by the City Council to remove the property prior to proper evaluation of its historic significance and integrity and prior to allowing the HPC time to pursue designation or consideration of alternatives to demolition would not comply with the City's Comprehensive Plan. An order to remove the property by the City prior to an evaluation also would not comply with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966.
5. Strategies HP4.5 and HP5.3 recommend: "Acquiring key threatened historic properties until a suitable owner can be found and realizing the full economic potential of key historic resources." The rehabilitation of the Walsh Block would further enhance an already vibrant and active commercial area if rehabilitated.
6. The proposed *Macalester Groveland Community Plan* includes several strategies that reinforce the City's Comprehensive Plan but also includes strategies to prioritize historic preservation over demolition when matters come before the MGCC or its committees (HP2.2), preserving and protecting historic resources (HP3) through identification and designation (HP1) as well as education (HP4) and finally, to encourage reinvestment in rehabilitation of existing buildings (LU3.3).
7. It is always better to retain historic fabric type buildings that are associated with a period of significance and development for a neighborhood than it is to demolish. The Walsh Block on the north side of Grand Avenue contributes to a visually strong urban street corridor in context with the historic commercial buildings on the south side of Grand Avenue. This framing of the urban corridor between historic structures that sit across the street from one another is critical in defining this vibrant streetscape. The context is similar to other Grand Avenue commercial zones, notably those in the vicinity of Victoria Crossing, where the historic commercial buildings reinforce the urban street corridor. The loss the Walsh Block would have an adverse impact on the visual integrity of this important historic streetscape.
8. The integrity, or authenticity as evidenced by a site's location, design, setting, workmanship or association is good to fair because the alterations that have occurred, such as the infill of the

storefronts and painting of brick, can often be reversible. The site's location and setting would be considered to have good integrity. The property was built during a period of significance for the neighborhood and is representative of the early development of Grand Avenue as a commercial corridor.

9. The HPC recognizes the long-term neglect the property has suffered and the concerns by the community over safety given the proximity to two universities and a school. The HPC requests the owner and/or City take any necessary precaution to secure and provide necessary system disconnects to minimize safety hazards during this process, if not already completed.
10. Available Ramsey County property information for PIN 04.28.23.41.0015 states the building from 1659 through 1665 Grand Avenue is 12,886 square feet with a parcel size of .1500 acres. The 1922 year built appears incorrect given maps, photos and permit data. The following is the taxable market value for the building and the land: 2011=\$811,000, 2012=\$472,000, 2013=448,400, 2014 and 2015=\$461,800, and estimated for 2016=\$719,400. The condemnation process began in April of 2015. According to Mr. Welna's comments, the owners more recent asking price was approximately \$3 million; now

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that after reviewing the materials available, the findings and recommendation of staff and discussing the Order to Abate by the City Council, the Heritage Preservation Commission finds that an order to remove the building by the City Council is premature and an appropriate period of time to formally evaluate the historic resource for eligibility for listing as a Saint Paul Heritage Preservation Site and for the National Register of Historic Places has not been completed. The City must also comply with Section 106 of the National Preservation Act of 1966 prior to considering the adoption of a resolution ordering the building removed with no option for repair and this is outlined in the SHPO letter dated October 16th; and

FINALLY, BE IT RESOLVED, the HPC urges the City Council to delay an order to demolish the property and to fully consider options for rehabilitation. A timely and complete evaluation of the condition of the property, inside and outside, is also necessary to fully determine the feasibility of rehabilitation and realize the historic resource's full economic potential (Saint Paul's Comprehensive Plan, HP 5.3).

MOVED BY **B. Bezat**
SECONDED BY **R. Ferguson**

IN FAVOR **Unanimous**
AGAINST
ABSTAIN