

CITY OF SAINT PAUL
HERITAGE PRESERVATION COMMISSION STAFF REPORT

FILE NAME: 716 Wilson Avenue, Schornstein House
DATE OF APPLICATION: September 17, 2015
APPLICANT: Saint Paul Housing and Redevelopment Authority (HRA)
OWNER: HRA
DATE OF PUBLIC HEARING: October 22, 2015
HPC SITE/DISTRICT: Dayton's Bluff Heritage Preservation District
CATEGORY: Non-Contributing
CLASSIFICATION: Demolition Permit
STAFF INVESTIGATION AND REPORT: Christine Boulware
DATE: October 2, 2015

A. SITE DESCRIPTION: The Schornstein House, at 716 Wilson Avenue, is a one-and-one half-story frame house with a front gabled, asphalt shingle roof with wide, flared eaves and cornice returns. A single brick chimney rises from the roof ridge. A gabled dormer on the left (east) side of the house and a gabled wall dormer on the right side of the house further embellish the roof. A hipped, bay window projects beneath the wall dormer. The rectangular windows are currently one-over-one double hung, except for a leaded glass transom on the bay. The foundation is contour block. The hipped, full width front porch has been in-filled with double-hung windows, obscuring the front entry and fenestration. Other alterations include the addition of vinyl siding, the addition of decorative shutters to the upstairs front windows, and the addition of Permastone to the porch foundation and front knee wall.

B. PROPERTY HISTORY AND CONTEXT: The Schornstein Grocery and Saloon at 707 Wilson (223 Bates) was constructed in 1884. It is architecturally and historically significant as one of the most unusual and ornate small Victorian era commercial buildings still standing in Saint Paul. The building was designed by Saint Paul architect, Augustus F. Gauger and has served as a focal point for the Wilson/Bates neighborhood since the late nineteenth century.

William Schornstein and his wife, Wilhelmina, were born in Germany and immigrated directly to St. Paul in 1873. William worked as a bartender for several years before moving to the predominantly German Wilson/Bates neighborhood in 1880. In that year he opened his first grocery store and saloon in rented quarters at the corner of Bates and Plum. In 1882, Schornstein purchased a lot a few blocks away at the NW corner of Wilson and Bates (site of the present building) and built a \$6000, two-story brick store. This building was destroyed by fire two years later. In the summer of 1884, he commissioned St. Paul architect Augustus F. Gauger to design the present building, which was completed in the fall of 1884 at an estimated cost of \$5000. Gauger was a prolific German-born architect with a carpentry background who came to Saint Paul in 1875 and first worked in the office of architect Edward P. Bassford. Gauger designed a large number of houses, schools, commercial buildings, and at least one church in Saint Paul. He eventually gained a national reputation.

The Schornstein Grocery and Saloon was listed in the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) in 1984 and was locally designated as part of the Dayton's Bluff Heritage Preservation District in 1992.

The Schornstein Garage at 216-218 Bates was constructed in two phases: the two-story portion (216) in 1886 and the one-story portion (218) in 1912. When the one-story portion was

constructed for Schornstein in 1912, he purchased the two-story portion.

The William Schornstein residence at 716 Wilson (Hudson Ave.) was constructed in 1912 (the same year as 218 Bates). The original building permit number is #59131.

On the 1903-1925 Sanborn Map, the house and garage are shown occupying the same lot. Historically, Bates Avenue between Wilson and Hudson had been a commercial block.

C. PROPOSED CHANGES: The applicant proposes to raze the residence; there are no current plans for new construction. The lot would be graded and seeded.

D. TIMELINE:

- July 23, 1992 - the Dayton's Bluff Heritage Preservation District was designate by the City Council for Heritage Preservation and established under Ordinance No. 17942 (Council File #92-900)
- October 27, 2005 - the property became a Category 2 vacant building
- May 19, 2006 - Code Compliance Report generated
- August 2006 - building permits for Vacant Category 2 Repairs were reviewed and approved administratively
- January 10, 2007 - Certificate of Code Compliance is issued.
- December 7, 2007 - the HRA purchased the property for \$150,000 with CDBG funds
- June 7, 2011 – HPC/HRA/HSP/Ward7/DBNHS staff conducted a site visit
- April 2012 - Karen Gjerstad, architect, is hired by Dayton's Bluff Neighborhood Housing Services (DBNHS) to evaluate the property in partnership with Load Bearing, Inc (construction management)
- August 2, 2012 - Karen Gjerstad and DBNHS applied for HPC review to rehabilitate the property into one, four-bedroom, rental unit. Staff determined that this would be an administrative review.
- November 15, 2012 - the project went out to bid as a package with 216-218 and 208-210 Bates Avenue
- December 2012 - bids received
- February 2013 - proposal from DBNHS to PED for subsidy: Hardcosts = \$263,360 with 1807 finished sq.ft.
- April - September 2013 - PED Housing staff discussed options to reduce the cost of the project with DBNHS
- October 2013 - PED Housing staff begin discussing rehabilitation vs. demolition scenarios with HPC staff
- February 6, 2014 - The HRA applied to the HPC for demolition of 716 Wilson along with 208-210 Bates and 216-218 Bates
- February 27, 2014 - The HPC denied the application to demolish the property. The HPC decision was not appealed.
- September 25, 2014 - The fire department was called to a report of a dwelling fire. On arrival, crews found and extinguished a front porch fire. There was some extension to the interior. The fire appears to have started on the left side of the front porch. Cigarette lighters were found at the scene. The first materials ignited were ordinary combustibles. The ignition source was an open flamed device. The classification of the fire cause is incendiary.

(Source: Fire Incident Disposition)

- September 15, 2015 - The HRA applied to the HPC for demolition of the property.

E. GUIDELINE CITATIONS:

Dayton's Bluff Historic District Guidelines

Leg. Code § 74.87. 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 or alteration of distinctive architectural features should be avoided as should alterations that have no historical basis and which seek to create an earlier appearance. The restoration of altered original features, if documentable, is encouraged.*

(2) *Changes which may have taken place in the course of time are evidence of the history and development of a building, structure, or site and its environment. These changes may have acquired significance in their own right, and this significance shall be recognized and respected.*

(3) *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 (including consideration of proportion, texture and detail), color and overall appearance.*

(4) *New additions or alterations to structures should be constructed in such a manner that if such additions or alterations were to be removed in the future, the form and integrity of the original structure would be unimpaired.*

(5) *The impact of alterations or additions on individual buildings as well as on the surrounding streetscape will be considered; major alterations to buildings which occupy a corner lot or are otherwise prominently sited should be avoided.*

(6) *New construction should be compatible with the historic and architectural character of the district.*

§ 74.90. – New construction and additions.

- (j) *Demolition. Demolition permits will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis and will be determined by the category of building (pivotal, contributing and noncontributing) and its importance to the district, the structural condition of the building and the economic viability of the structure.*

§ 73.06(i)(2): Demolition

When reviewing proposals for demolition of structures within the district, the Heritage Preservation Commission refers to § 73.06 (i)(2) of the Saint Paul Legislative Code which states the following:

In the case of the proposed demolition of a building, prior to approval of said demolition, the commission shall make written findings on the following: the architectural and historical merit of the building, the effect of the demolition on surrounding buildings, the effect of any proposed new construction on the remainder of the building (in case of partial demolition) and on surrounding buildings, and the economic value or usefulness of the building as it now exists or if altered or modified in comparison with the value or usefulness of any proposed structures designated to replace the present building or buildings.

SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR'S STANDARDS FOR REHABILITATION

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.

-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.

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.

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

-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

-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.

F. FINDINGS:

1. On July 23, 1992, the Dayton's Bluff Heritage Preservation District was established under Ordinance No. 17942 (Council File #92-900). 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 demolition within designated heritage preservation sites **§73.04.(4)**.
2. **Leg. Code § 74.90.(j)** - The Preservation Program for the Dayton's Bluff Heritage Preservation District states that consideration of demolitions will be determined by the category of building (pivotal, contributing and non-contributing), its importance to the district, the structural condition of the building and the economic viability of the structure.
3. **The category of the building.** The Schornstein House is classified as non-contributing to the Dayton's Bluff Heritage Preservation District. Aluminum siding wraps and conceals the original siding and trim, the porch has been enclosed and Permastone has been applied to the exterior of the front porch. Staff considered the building's historic context to be good, as it is associated with the adjacent Schornstein Garage (216-218 Bates Avenue – approved for demolition 2/27/2014 File#14-015) and Schornstein Grocery (223 Bates and 707 Wilson avenues – NRHP 1984). The architectural integrity of the Schornstein House was considered good, as the aluminum siding and Permastone are seen as a reversible condition and if they were to be removed, the property would be re-categorized as contributing. Unfortunately, a fire at the building on September 25, 2014 adversely impacted the architectural integrity of the Schornstein House was, especially at the front porch and northeast corner of the residence.
4. **The importance of the building to the district.** The Schornstein House was constructed in 1912 during the Period of Significance for the Dayton's Bluff Heritage Preservation District (1857-1930). The inventory form classified the building as non-contributing because the house was wrapped in aluminum siding and the front porch was enclosed with a synthetic stone material.

The Schornstein House was constructed in 1912, the same year as the 218 Bates Avenue portion of the Schornstein Garage and is closely tied to the German-American context in Dayton's Bluff. The Dayton's Bluff Handbook states the following:

In the 1880s, and particularly during the peak years 1882-1884, Dayton's Bluff became a densely-built urban neighborhood. The construction of a series of bridges and the extension of streetcar service brought a new and diverse population to the bluff. Factory and railroad workers purchased small lots and erected a great variety of single and multiple-family houses. The newly-arrived settlers included recent immigrants from Sweden, Ireland, and Germany, but German-Americans were the predominant group. They joined a large contingent of well-established German-American business owners...

The residential context of this house is strong as there is a row of several houses on this block face that were all built during the period of significance. They relate in form, massing, style and setback. The 716 Wilson house is the last in a row before the character transitions to the commercial corner and commercial block (south on Bates Avenue). There are a few buildings across the street and down the block that were constructed outside the period of significance, these include: 224 Bates Avenue (1962), 740 Wilson Avenue (2005) and 215 Maple Street (1957) and the demolition of a house at 721 Wilson Avenue (2012).

Staff did not find any historical associations other than Schornstein that have contributed in some way to Saint Paul's history and development or an architect or association with an important event, with this property. The 1989 Dayton's Bluff inventory form did not identify other individuals.

The Sanborn Insurance map for this site indicates the footprint of the building has not changed since 1925. There is no alley on this block and the grade rises steeply to the east and the south.

- 5. *Structural condition of the building.*** A Code Compliance Report was generated on May 19, 2006. In August of 2006, permits were reviewed and approved for work at the property. The permits were finalized and a Certificate of Code Compliance was issued on January 10, 2007. Essentially, the property was approved for occupancy and met the requirements listed in the Code Compliance Report in early 2007. There was no mention of foundation or structural issues during the time permits were issued and finalized to repair the structure. The Code Compliance Report called for repointing the interior/exterior foundation as necessary. The HRA acquired the property in late 2007 along with the adjacent 216-218 Bates.

During a June 7, 2011 site inspection, HPC staff did not observe any conditions on the interior to raise concern. Much of the original or early architectural or decorative features the interior were intact and in good condition. The exterior features of the house have either been covered with aluminum siding and trim as well as PermaStone at the enclosed front porch. The changes are considered to be reversible. HPC staff considered the architectural and historical integrity of the Schornstein House to be good. (See attached photos from 2011)

The January 24, 2014 letter from Jeffrey Garetz, Load Bearing, Inc (project construction manager) states, "This single-family dwelling has a full basement which has deteriorated over time due to water infiltration. The structure was built into a hillside, and water movement within this topography has caused the masonry foundation to disintegrate.... repair is not an option, and that even if repairs to the foundation were possible, the water infiltration would continue to be an issue at this particular site, given its topography." The letter from the construction manager indicated that the structural integrity of the foundation is poor. A structural engineer was consulted for the proposed, four-bedroom design; there was no structural report submitted that addressed stabilizing or rehabilitating the property as a two-bedroom residence, nor were repair options submitted for the foundation that did not include the garage, shared driveway, shifting the house five feet, exposing much of the basement walls and adding two bedrooms in the basement.

On September 14, 2015, structural engineering firm, Mattson Macdonald Young, submitted a report to the HRA that summarized the observed conditions of structural frame and elements of the basement level and foundation walls, concrete walkway along the foundation, retaining walls, rear deck, and the front porch and walls. The report notes the structural elements of the building framing and foundation to be in poor condition; the fire damage to the structure is mostly to the porch posts and lintels; the exterior sidewalk on the northeast side of the house slopes toward the foundation; water drainage is an issue at the site; the interior sides of the foundation walls are in poor condition (cracking, spalling, and missing mortar); the concrete and timber retaining walls are out of plumb and failing; and the wood deck at the rear is deteriorated and would need to be removed. The report summarized that 716 Wilson Avenue is in generally poor condition based on visually observed conditions. It added repairs are possible, but would likely be relatively costly.

- 6. *The economic viability of the structure.*** The HRA estimates the demolition costs to be \$10,000 to \$30,000. The cost range to rehabilitate the building into a four bedroom residence, based on the bids received in 2012 were \$255,440 to \$402,031 which included: kitchen and bath remodels, a complete new basement which would provide two additional bedrooms and bath in addition to the two bedrooms on the second floor, new plumbing, heating, air conditioning, and electrical system, hardwood floor finish, all interior painted surfaces and trim refinishing, a new detached garage, and concrete retaining wall along the east property boundary. The HRA purchased the property in 2007 for \$150,000 with CDBG funds. In 2014, Ramsey County estimated the 2015 land value at \$15,900 and the building value at \$54,400. In 2015, Ramsey County estimated the 2016 land value at \$12,500 and the building value at

\$12,000. The property is sited on the south side of Wilson Avenue, east of Bates Avenue and the parcel size is .12 acres. An estimate to rehabilitate the two-bedroom residence in its existing, two-bedroom configuration and location, without a new garage, was not submitted.

The 9/25/2014 Fire Incident Disposition listed the building value at \$94,800 and the damage estimate at \$61,169.

The property is currently zoned RTI with the use as Single Family - Residential.

7. The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation recommend against removing buildings that are important in defining the overall historic character of the district or the neighborhood. Given the architectural and historical integrity and context, HPC staff finds that the building reinforces the District's architectural and historic character, but the structural integrity has been compromised. The Standards also recommend against destroying historic relationships between buildings and open space. The demolition of the building would have a significant impact on the relationship of residential buildings along the south side of Wilson Avenue and the historic context/relationship to the Schornstein family/businesses/buildings at the Bates and Wilson intersection.

The Dayton's Bluff Historic District Design Guidelines, General Principle (1) states *All work should be of a character and quality that maintains the distinguishing features of the building and the environment. The removal or alteration of distinctive architectural features should be avoided...* The proposal to demolish this property does not comply with the guidelines as loss of the property would result in the loss of historic character. However, given the fire at the residence and the further deterioration of the building, the loss of this historic resource may now be inevitable, as rehabilitation costs would be higher than previously reviewed.

8. This property is in the anticipated Area of Potential Effect for the Gold Line BRT and will be evaluated for National Register Eligibility. Preceding evaluation, determined effects will be evaluated for impacts with potential mitigation.
9. HPC staff finds that the proposed demolition of the Schornstein House at 716 Wilson Avenue will adversely affect the Program for the Preservation and architectural control of the Dayton's Bluff Heritage Preservation District (Leg. Code §73.06 (e)), however, the report from the structural engineer outlined foundation, site, and porch (structural) issues at the property which has continued to deteriorate and remain a nuisance property. A vacant lot would have a negative impact on the historic district and the loss of historic fabric is irreversible.

STAFF RECOMMENDATIONS: Based on the findings, staff recommends approval of the demolition permit application provided the following condition(s) are met:

1. Prior to demolition, the applicant shall remove non-original siding and wrap to reveal the historic exterior of the residence and the building shall be documented following the Minnesota Historic Property Record (MHPR) archival photo documentation standards prior to demolition, at the owner's expense. Two copies of the 2012 HPC reviewed plans in 11" x 17" format will be accepted in lieu of as-built drawings. Two copies of the documentation shall be forwarded to the HPC in both printed form and as TIFF files on an archival quality CD (one copy of the documentation to be delivered to the Ramsey County Historically Society.)

G. ATTACHMENTS

1. HPC Design Review Application
2. Applicant Submittals:
 - A. *Structural Report and Photographs*
 - B. *Exterior Photographs*

C. Arson Inspection Report (not included for legal reasons)

D. Arson Photographs

3. 2011, 2012, 2014 Photographs
4. Aerial Photographs
5. 1903-25 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map
6. SHPO Letter – August 9, 2012