

and recommendation as to any other planning consideration which may be relevant to the proposed designation, together with its recommendation of approval, rejection or modification of the proposed designation. Said recommendation shall become part of the official record concerning the proposed designation and shall be submitted by the heritage preservation commission along with its recommendation concerning the proposed designation to the city council. The heritage preservation commission may make such modifications, changes and alterations concerning the proposed designations as it deems necessary in consideration of the recommendations of the city planning commission.

3. Section 73.05 states for *Communication with state historical society*. A copy of the heritage preservation commission's proposed designation of a heritage preservation site, including boundaries, and a program for the preservation of a heritage preservation site, shall be sent to the state historical society in accordance with Minnesota Statutes, Section 471.193, Subdivision 6.
4. Section 73.05 states for *Hearings*. Prior to the heritage preservation commission recommending to the city council any building, district or object for designation as a heritage preservation site the commission shall hold a public hearing and seek the recommendation of all concerned citizens.
5. Section 73.05 states for *Finding and recommendations*. The heritage preservation commission shall determine if the proposed heritage preservation site is eligible for designation as determined by the criteria specified in paragraph (a), and if the heritage preservation commission recommends to the city council that the site be designated as a heritage preservation site, the commission shall transmit to the city council with its recommendation its proposed program for the preservation of the site.

C. BACKGROUND:

1. **1983.** The first comprehensive Historic Sites Survey in Saint Paul was completed. The Saint Paul Gas Light Company building was identified as a *Site of Major Significance* and listed in the Final Report. The building was also noted as significant under the category "Public Utility Buildings."
2. **1984.** Gary Phelps prepared a draft National Register of Historic Places Nomination for the "Saint Paul Gas Light Company's Island Station." This nomination, which included historic context development for the Saint Paul Gas Light Company, was prepared on behalf of the property owner, John L. Kerwin. The nomination recommended that the property was eligible for the NRHP but did not evaluate it under specific criteria. In 1984, a State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) memorandum reviewed the Phelps nomination and evaluated it under NRHP criterion A, B, and C. The SHPO found that the property did not meet the NRHP criteria for eligibility.
3. **2003-2006.** In 2003 the City of Saint Paul prepared an Environmental Assessment Worksheet (EAW) for the SpringPointe Development boat access and private marina. This project was within a mixed residential/commercial project that proposed 200 condominiums and 20,000 square feet of commercial space. The EAW noted that the Island Station was determined not eligible for listing in the NRHP but made no reference to the property meeting local criteria for designation.

The proposed replacement of the coal-fired High Bridge Power Plant (1924) at 501 Shepard Road with a natural gas-fired 2-on-1 combined cycle system required preparation of a *Phase I Architectural History Evaluation and Area of Potential Effect Scoping Study* as part of the Site Permit application. This study, which included historic context development for electric power generation in Saint Paul and the metropolitan area, recommended that the NSP plant was not eligible for listing in the NRHP due to lack of significance. The *High Bridge Plant Effects Study* was completed in 2006. This and the previous study noted that the Island Station had been recommended earlier by the SHPO as not eligible for listing in the NRHP.

4. **2010-current.** The creation of the Great River Passage Plan was a major multi-year effort and involved many community meetings and input. Public comment periods and reviews from various boards and commissions took place in 2012, including review by the HPC. During that time the City received an inquiry about demolishing the Island Station while draft language in the Great River Passage Plan envisioned reuse of the building and activating the site with private and public amenities. The City Council adopted an interim ordinance in August of 2012 prohibiting the issuance of city permits until the Great River Passage Plan was adopted and until an historic evaluation was completed for the site.

Landscape Research was hired and completed an *Historic Significance Evaluation Study for the Saint Paul Gas Light Company Island Station* on March 15, 2013. The Study was presented to the Heritage Preservation Commission which accepted and forwarded the Study to the State Historic Preservation Office for review and comment.

4. On March 28, 2013, the HPC voted to initiate the designation process for the potential historic district.

D. FINDINGS:

1. Constructed in 1923-1924, the St. Paul Gas Light Company Island Station is a multi-story, industrial building made of structural steel and brick accented with stone. Crowning the building is a 289-foot-high steel smokestack.

Island Station was the first power plant in the Twin Cities area that utilized pulverized coal technology. It was designed by the prominent architectural and engineering firm of Toltz, King and Day (now TKDA). The plant is associated with St. Paul's growth and economic development during the early 1920s, particularly the response to increased demand for various electrical devices for household use. In 1925, one year after opening, Island Station was acquired by Northern States Power, which operated the facility on a standby basis until 1973, when it was decommissioned.

2. The Planning Commission (under resolution number 13-25) finds the designation of the St. Paul Gas Light Company Island Station as a St. Paul Heritage Preservation Site generally consistent with the goals and objectives of the Comprehensive Plan, that designation will have a positive effect on the surrounding neighborhood and act as an anchor for redevelopment. The Great River Passage Plan includes several references to Island Station and envisions reusing the building. One such goal states, "The historic, iconic and vacant power plant will be repurposed to bring the arts, environmental and recreation communities together, supported by commercial and residential uses developed by public and private partners."

3. Pursuant to Minnesota Statutes §471.193, subd. 6, and Section 73.05 (c) of Saint Paul's Legislative Code, staff submitted the proposed nomination form and draft preservation program to the State Historic Preservation Office on April 9, 2013. The response from SHPO dated May 16, 2013 concludes that Island Station is eligible for local designation under Criteria 1 and 7 in Section 73.05(a) of the Legislative Code.
3. Island Station has been mostly vacant since 1973. The building appears to be in very poor condition. It retains fair exterior historic integrity, with extensive areas of missing glass or sash, sections of missing masonry, and graffiti. The surrounding site also retains fair historic integrity, despite removal of railroad trestles and other site circulation. The original screen house and car puller buildings are still extant and considered contributing while a metal garage structure of unknown construction date is considered noncontributing.
5. The period of significance for the Island Station is from **1924 to 1973** and spans the initial construction of the site to when Northern States Power decommissioned the plant.
6. The St. Paul Gas Light Company Island Station is eligible for local designation as a Heritage Preservation Site under criteria (1) and (7) of Section 73.05 (a) of the Legislative Code.

(1) Its character, interest or value as part of the development, heritage or cultural characteristics of the City of St. Paul, the State of Minnesota, or the United States.

Island Station represented the St. Paul Gas Light Company's attempt to compete with NSP at a time when acquisition and consolidation of such companies was standard practice. St. Paul Gas Light Company became the city's chief gas supplier, but was never its leader in electric power production. The investment in this plant and its new coal pulverization technology, and in a Service Center at Rice and Atwater Streets (1925), demonstrates that the company intended to expand production to meet increasing demand. Investment in this plant did not actually result in a significant contribution to power generation in St. Paul, because after acquisition by NSP it was only used in a standby capacity.

The planning and construction of this plant, however, is associated with the city's early 1920s neighborhood growth. This was based on reinvigorated railroad, warehousing, retail, and manufacturing interests and corresponding demand for housing supplied with many types of electrical equipment. This included widely advertised, labor-saving household devices. As detailed in St. Paul's Historic Context, "Residential Real Estate Development: 1880-1950" (Zellie and Peterson 2001) and in "The St. Paul Gas Light Company and the Growth of Early Twentieth-Century St. Paul Neighborhoods" the early 1920s were an exceptional period for new housing and neighborhood infrastructure, particularly in the western half of the city including the Highland Park area.

(7) Its unique location or singular physical characteristic representing an established familiar visual feature of a neighborhood, community, or City of St. Paul.

Island Station and its 289-foot smokestack are prominent landmarks against the downtown St. Paul skyline and upriver landscape of bluffs and bottomland forest. The vacant building, which declines in condition each passing year, is a well-known local landmark. Since decommissioning in 1973 the building and its setting have inspired

artists, designers, explorers, students, neighbors, developers, and all those who imagine the possibilities of the place. Criterion 7 offers a way to address the importance of the building in the public's imagination.

7. Written testimony received for the May 23, 2013 Public Hearing is from the current property owner who objects to the proposed designation.

F. STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Based on the above findings, staff recommends that the St. Paul Gas Light Company Island Station be designated as a Heritage Preservation Site along with the Preservation Program (design guidelines) and that recommendation be forwarded to the City Council along with the Planning Commission's resolution and the State Historic Preservation Office's response.

- Attachments:
1. Island Station Nomination Form
 - Part 1: Site Description
 - Part 2: Site Significance
 2. Part 3: Draft Preservation Program
 3. Planning Commission Resolution 13-25
 4. Written testimony