

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

FILE NAME: 689 Conway Street
OWNERS: MERS; Commonsense Mortgage Inc.; Deutsch Bank National Trust Co.; Wells Fargo Home Mortgage; and John Dockry, Shapiro & Zielke LLP
AGENCY: Department of Safety and Inspections – Code Enforcement
DATE OF HEARING: November 19, 2015
HPC SITE/DISTRICT: Dayton’s Bluff Heritage Preservation District
CATEGORY: Contributing
CLASSIFICATION: Demolition – VB3, Remove or Repair
STAFF INVESTIGATION AND REPORT: Christine Boulware
DATE: November 13, 2015

A. SITE DESCRIPTION:

The John Kaese House at 689 Conway Street is a two-story, frame, Queen Anne style, residence constructed in 1888 by builder, L. Metz. Cement-asbestos shingles obscure the clapboard exterior. Once a distinctive design; the gable balcony at the attic and Eastlake style brackets are extant. The two-story, front bay is typical of many Queen Anne style house in the district. The original, open, one-bay front porch was replaced by a stoop. The property is categorized as contributing to the character of the Dayton’s Bluff Heritage Preservation District.

B. PROPOSED CHANGES/BACKGROUND:

This property became a Vacant Category 2 building on March 2, 2015, then was reclassified as a Vacant Category 3 on September 8, 2015. Records indicate that the owner is Wells Fargo Home Mortgage and on September 11, 2015, an Order to Abate was issued. On October 8, 2015, a Code Compliance Inspection Fee was paid and on November 4, 2015, the Compliance Report was completed. The property is scheduled for a Public Hearing before the Legislative Hearing Officer on November 24, 2015. The Legislative Hearing Officer will hear evidence and make a recommendation for action to the full City Council on December 16, 2015. Given the building is located within the Dayton’s Bluff Heritage Preservation District, the HPC is required to review and approve or disapprove the issuance of city permits for demolition pursuant to Leg. Code § 73.06(a)(4) generally and Leg. Code § 74.90(j) specifically, with the exception for structures that are subject of a resolution adopted by the City Council requiring the demolition in accordance with Chapter 45 of the Legislative Code or MN Statues Chapter 463.

In 2009, Ramsey County Public Health Department submitted an application for window replacement and received a Certificate of Approval (#09-204963) from HPC staff to replace 23 double-hung windows with wood, A-Craft sash packs.

In 2010, Historic Saint Paul submitted an application to install 28, Allied, flush-mount, aluminum storm windows and received a Certificate of Approval (#10-017937).

C. 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 business' 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 nonsignificant 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.

E. FINDINGS: The following findings are based upon HPC records and research including a site inspection of the exterior of the property on March 6, 2015 by HPC staff.

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 exterior work within designated heritage preservation sites §73.04.(4).
2. The property is categorized as contributing to the character of the Dayton's Bluff Heritage Preservation District. It was constructed in 1888 during the period of significance for the historic district (1857-1930). At the time the building was designated as contributing, had been wrapped in cement-asbestos shingles and the original front porch had been replaced by a small entry stoop.
3. Leg. Code § 74.90.(j) - The Preservation Program for the Dayton's Bluff Historic District states that consideration of demolitions will be determined by the category of building (pivotal, contributing and noncontributing), its importance to the district, the structural condition of the building and the economic viability of the structure.
4. *The category of the building.* The building is classified as contributing to the architectural and historical integrity of the Dayton's Bluff Historic District. The cement-asbestos shingles and wrap, and the removal of the open front porch appear to have been undertaken after the period of significance for the Dayton's Bluff Historic District. This *change has not acquired significance in its own right* [See § 74.87(2)] given how it obscures and has altered the original features of the property. The building reads as a residence constructed in the 1880s. Staff considers the building exterior's historic and architectural integrity as fair.
5. *The importance of the building to the district.* The house was constructed during the period of significance of 1857-1930. The Dayton's Bluff Handbook states the following about early twentieth-century vernacular properties;

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 number of houses still extant in the Dayton's Bluff Historic District during this time period is unknown.

The Sanborn Insurance map for this site indicates the footprint of the house has changed very little since 1925, with only the replacement of open front porch evident. Parking in the rear yard is accessed by the alley.

The southern and northern block faces on Conway Street are contiguous, mostly with contributing structures. There is consistency in scale, rhythm, massing, and setbacks on both faces of the block. An early row-house at the eastern end of the block is the only building that doesn't conform to the massing.

Staff has not researched other historical associations with the subject building such as

persons that have contributed in some way to Saint Paul's history and development or an architect or an association with an important event.

6. *Structural condition of the building.* On November 4, 2015, a Code Compliance Report was issued by the Department of Safety and Inspections. HPC staff has not conducted a site inspection. The original exterior features were obscured by cement-asbestos siding and wrap but decorative details of the front bay and brackets are evident. HPC staff considers the overall exterior condition of 689 Conway Street as fair.
7. *The economic viability of the structure.* DSI has not provided a rehabilitation cost estimate, but did state that demolition costs are estimated to start at \$12,000. For 2015, Ramsey County estimates the land value at \$10,500 and the house value at \$78,600. The property is sited on a 40 ft. wide by 125 ft. deep foot lot (0.11 acres).
8. In general, the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation recommend against removing buildings that are important in defining the overall historic character and destroying historic relationships between buildings and open space. Given the alterations to the building and its current condition, HPC staff finds that the building reinforces the District's architectural and historic character and with the removal of non-original materials and restoration of siding, trim, the front porch, the property would continue to be contributing to the historic district.
9. HPC staff finds that the proposed demolition of the building at 689 Conway Street will have a negative impact on the Dayton's Bluff Heritage Preservation District. A vacant lot can have a negative impact on the historic district and the loss of historic fabric is irreversible. If demolished, any future work at the site shall comply with the new construction guidelines for the Dayton's Bluff Historic District, specifically Leg. Code § 74.90.

F. STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Based on the findings, the HPC encourages the City Council to delay an order to demolish the property and to fully consider options for rehabilitation prior to ordering removal with no option for repair.