

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

FILE NAME: 797 Summit Avenue
DATE OF APPLICATION: April 22, 2011
APPLICANT: House of Hope Presbyterian Church, Mary Senkbeil
DATE OF STAFF APPROVAL: May 5, 2011
DATE OF FENCE PERMIT ISSUANCE: May 6, 2011
DATE OF CITY COUNCIL APPEAL: July 20, 2011
HPC SITE/DISTRICT: Hill Historic District
CATEGORY: pivotal
CLASSIFICATION: fence/retaining wall
STAFF REPORT AUTHOR: Amy Spong
DATE: July 18, 2011

A. SITE DESCRIPTION:

In 1872 the City hired renowned landscape architect H.W.S. Cleveland of Chicago who outlined and advocated a parkway system and took particular note of the opportunity for a parkway on Summit Avenue. Cleveland conceived of parkways with their wide boulevards as in many ways superior to isolated and discreet neighborhood parks. He compared future St. Paul "driveways" favorably to those in Paris which provided continuous connecting belts of green plants, trees, and flowers. The boulevard and roadway, however, were poorly maintained and the west end of Summit remained mostly unbuilt until the 1900s.

The National Register nomination for the Summit Avenue West Historic District states the most visually distinguishing feature of the avenue is its width and median boulevard. Summit is 200-220 feet wide including the median parkway, which is planted in mature trees, shrubs and lawn. Overall, the feeling is one of stateliness which is the result of large lots, large houses, compatible architectural styles, generous set-backs, the boulevard, and mature plantings.

House of Hope Presbyterian Church is located on the part of Summit that does not have a center median. The massive stone complex of a church, rectory, chapel, assembly room, library, cloister and educational wing is representative of the academic phase of the Late Gothic Revival style which developed at the turn of the century. According to the National Register Hill Historic District nomination form, the sources for design motifs throughout the complex are derived from medieval and Jacobean England adapted to twentieth century building technology. The complex was constructed in 1913 and designed by Ralph Adams Cram of Cram, Goodhue and Ferguson, America's noted academic gothicists.

B. PROPOSED CHANGES:

The applicant proposed to construct a new fence to enclose a fruit and vegetable garden in the front yard of the preschool building. The fence is rectangular, approximately 78 feet by 34 feet and made of galvanized steel welded panels in four inch gauge with graduated openings. The top is finished with a cedar rail and cedar posts spaced every eight feet.

Two panels on the north side are 54 inches tall for trellising taller crops. The remainder of the fence is 36 inches tall.

C. GUIDELINE CITATIONS:

Hill Historic District Design Review Guidelines (excerpt)

Restoration and Rehabilitation

General Principles:

The Historic Hill District design guidelines for restoration and rehabilitation are based on the ten standards for rehabilitation developed by the National Park Service, United States Department of the Interior. The ten standards are as follows:

- 1. Every reasonable effort shall be made to provide a compatible use for a property which requires minimal alteration of the building, structure, or site and its environment, or to use a property for its originally intended purpose.*
- 2. The distinguishing original qualities or character of a building, structure, or site and its environment shall not be destroyed. The removal or alteration of any historic material or distinctive architectural features should be avoided when possible.*
- 5. Distinctive stylistic features or examples of skilled craftsmanship which characterize a building, structure, or site shall be treated with sensitivity.*
- 9. Contemporary design for alterations and additions to existing properties shall not be discouraged when such alterations and additions do not destroy significant historical, architectural or cultural material, and such design is compatible with the size, scale, color, material, and character of the property, neighborhood, or environment.*

Site:

Landscaping. Typically, open space in the Historic Hill District is divided into public, semipublic, semiprivate and private space. The public space of the street and sidewalk is often distinguished from the semipublic space of the front yard by a change in grade, a low hedge or a visually open fence.

The buildings, landscaping elements in front yards, and boulevard trees together provide a "wall of enclosure" for the street "room". Generally, landscaping which respects the street as a public room is encouraged. Enclosures which allow visual penetration of semipublic spaces, such as wrought-iron fences, painted picket fences, low hedges or limestone retaining walls, are characteristic of most of the Historic Hill area. This approach to landscaping and fences is encouraged in contrast to complete enclosure of semipublic space by an opaque fence, a tall "weathered wood" fence or tall hedge rows. Cyclone fence should not be used in front yards or in the front half of side yards. Landscape timber should not be used for retaining walls in front yards.

For the intimate space of a shallow setback, ground covers and low shrubs will provide more visual interest and require less maintenance than grass. Boulevard trees mark a separation between the automobile corridor and the rest of the streetscape, and should be maintained.

District/Neighborhood (Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation)

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.

-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.

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.

-Destroying streetscape and landscape features by widening existing streets, changing paving material, or introducing inappropriately located new streets or parking lots.

Design for Missing Historic Features

-Creating a false historical appearance because the replaced feature is based on insufficient historical, pictorial and physical documentation.

-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

-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 staff and HPC design review process:

1. The entire complex is categorized as Pivotal to the historic and architectural integrity of the Hill Historic District. This classification is used by the staff and HPC when reviewing all applications. It is a variable that is weighed along with all applicable guidelines, the integrity of the property, the nature of the proposal and the history and context of the historic district.

2. The HPC does not review or regulate plantings, but the Hill Historic District Design Review Guidelines make recommendations regarding plantings in front yards on pages 34 and 35. Both the text and the illustrations indicate that low and/or visually open plantings are appropriate while tall hedges are not (Legislative Code §74.65 (f)(2)).

3. The HPC reviews and regulates fencing within all the historic districts and this type of request is usually considered minor and typically reviewed and approved by staff. There are certain cases brought before the full HPC for a more formal review. Pages 34 and 35 of the Hill guidelines also provide text and illustrations as to what is appropriate in front yards and what is not. The guidelines address both location and appearance (design) of appropriate fencing. Appropriate location is depicted as outlining the front yard as a semi-public space. And appropriate appearances are low wrought iron fences and painted picket fences. Inappropriate fences are metal cyclone fencing and "weathered wood" opaque fences. (Legislative Code §74.65 (f)(2))

4. The Certificate of Approval for Minor Work states the following findings or reasons for the approval as:

1. The low hedge and visually open fence comply with the guideline.
2. The enclosure and landscaping allow for visual penetration of the semi-public space and comply with the guideline.
3. The steel and cedar fence are of a more modern design and interpretation of a traditional rabbit fence. A raw metal finish would not comply with the guideline, thus the metal should have a dark finish or be painted black.

The staff approval was conditioned on the finish of the steel panels being either a dark gray or black. This condition does not appear to be met.

5. The fence permit that was issued noted that the Zoning Code allows for a maximum fence height in front yards of four feet. This does not appear to be met on the taller trellis sections of the fence.

6. The Certificate of Approval took into consideration height, visual openness and materials but did not take into consideration location and overall design of the fence given the style and two materials being combined together.

7. In retrospect, staff erred in conditionally approving the fence because (1) the location or placement of the fence did not distinguish the "...semipublic space of the front yard by a change in grade, a low hedge or a visually open fence," (2) the appearance of the fence is not "characteristic of most of the Historic Hill area" and (3) a condition was made to address the metal finish of the panels but not the unpainted wood of the posts and rail.

F. ATTACHMENTS:

Written testimony letters

Pages 34 and 35 of the Hill Historic District guidelines

Photos