

**[PARTIAL AND NOT APPROVED by HPC]**

**SUMMARY MINUTES OF THE HERITAGE PRESERVATION COMMISSION**

CITY OF SAINT PAUL, MINNESOTA

Lower Level – Room 41, City Hall/Court House, 15 West Kellogg Boulevard

**May 23, 2013**

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**Present:** Richard Dana, Robert Ferguson, Matt Hill, Michael Justin, Rich Laffin, Matt Mazanec, David Riehle, Diane Trout-Oertel, David Wagner, Renee Hutter Barnes

**Absent:** Steve Trimble (excused)

**Staff Present:** Amy Spong, Christine Boulware, Renee Cohn

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**PUBLIC HEARING**

- I. **Call to Order:** 5:04 p.m.
- II. **Approval of the Agenda:** Commissioner Riehle moved to approve the agenda; Commissioner Dana seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.
- III. **Chair's Announcements:** None were stated at this time.
- IV. **Staff Announcements:** None were stated at this time.
- V. **Public Hearing/ Permit Review:**
  - A. **1516 Summit Avenue, Summit Avenue West Historic District**, by John Wiik, Sussel Builders, for a building permit to demolish the contributing two-stall garage and construct a three-plus stall garage. **File #13-025** (Boulware, 266-6715)
  - B. **336 Robert Street North – Pioneer and Endicott Buildings**, by Eric Anderson, Serigraphics Sign Systems, Inc., for a sign permit to install a 120 sf. banner on the south elevation of the building. **File #13-026** (Boulware, 266-6715)
- VI. **Public Hearing/Designation:**
  - A. **Saint Paul Gas Light Company Island Station**, generally bounded by Randolph Avenue, Shepard Road and the Mississippi River, Public Hearing to consider the site and accompanying Preservation Program a Saint Paul Heritage Preservation Site and make a recommendation to the City Council. (Spong, 266-6714)

Staff presented a summary of the report recommending that the Commission recommend the Saint Paul Gas Light Company Island Station be designated as a Saint Paul Heritage Preservation Site and a Preservation Program be adopted. Ms. Spong summarized the process necessary to complete the designation and the history of the evaluation processes for this property.

Staff presented a PowerPoint of historic and recent photos of the property and the site.

Commissioner Riehle inquired as to the reasons for the property not meeting the eligibility requirements for the National Register of Historic Places. Ms. Spong spoke to the lack of integrity relating to how coal moved through the building and significance at a national scale as determined by previous reviewers.

Commissioner Dana inquired as to the visibility of the water tower in a recent photo presented, and if the water tower still stands. Chair Laffin noted that the structural report states that it is.

Commissioner Wagner inquired if any of the developers had come forward to the HPC with previous plans. Ms. Spong responded they have not and would not have needed to because it's not designated. Chair Laffin spoke to the potential impact this building could have on the future of the site and the surrounding area.

Carol Lansing, an attorney representing the owner, was present and spoke in support of demolition and against designation. Ms. Lansing summarized a letter written March 8, 2013 stating the lack of significance of the building determined by previous studies and the rise of dangerous activities occurring on the property and within the building.

Paul Breckner, the building owner, was present and spoke against the designation of the building and property. Mr. Breckner presented the history of the ownership of the property. Mr. Breckner described multiple attempts to market the building for redevelopment. Mr. Breckner noted several problematic aspects of rehabilitating the building for development including structural inefficiencies and prohibitive costs.

Mr. Breckner presented a slideshow of images showing the deterioration of the building. Mr. Breckner expressed concern for the safety of those currently involved with the building and frequent trespassers. Mr. Breckner detailed partnerships with various organizations to develop options for the building. Mr. Breckner emphasized the problem of saving the building and then having no options for redevelopment.

Commissioner Wagner requested confirmation on the proportion of land that the building occupies on the property. Mr. Breckner stated that a portion of the property is within the 100 year flood zone, but the footprint of the building is outside of the 100 year flood zone. Commissioner Wagner restated his request to inquire as to how much of the property that Mr. Breckner deemed sufficient for redevelopment with the building remaining; Mr. Breckner replied that he believed it to be less than half. Mr. Breckner noted that the Army Corps of Engineers would like the basement of the building be shut down, and the closure of which may allow for some fill.

Commissioner Wagner noted the development of the Mill City Ruins as a possible option for redevelopment of Island Station. Mr. Breckner noted that there have been some proposals for saving some elements of the building. Commissioner Wagner noted that there is value in retention of the building for the history and character of the neighborhood. Mr. Breckner noted that there have been some proposals to memorialize certain aspects of the building. Commissioner Wagner inquired as to the timeline for demolition if the building is not designated; Mr. Breckner stated that the goal for demolition would be this summer.

Commissioner Wagner noted that if the building is not designated that there would be no requirement to save any part of the building if demolished and inquired as to if Mr. Breckner would be personally committed to retaining aspects of the building. Mr. Breckner replied that he would and that several ideas have been explored to memorialize the building. Commissioner Wagner noted that there is a distinction between stabilization of the building and complete redevelopment. Mr. Breckner expressed concern for the cost and feasibility of stabilization.

Commissioner Hill requested confirmation from Mr. Breckner that he has explored every option for redevelopment. Tim Prinsen was present and spoke to multiple attempts made to redevelop the building. He noted several organizations and groups that he consulted, but deemed a successful proposal unfeasible. Commissioner Hill stated that there are more pressing issues for the Commission to address and that further efforts to designate the building are not warranted.

*Commissioner Hill left the public hearing.*

Chair Laffin inquired as to what Mr. Breckner would have done nine years ago if he knew then what he knows now about the process; Mr. Breckner responded that he would have done nothing. Mr. Breckner noted the timeline of the process in relation to the economic environment. Chair Laffin inquired as to whether Mr. Breckner was aware of the history of the loss of the interior features of the building. Mr. Breckner stated that most likely the majority of the features and equipment was sold for scrap metal. Mr. Breckner noted that some interior building features were removed for asbestos removal and other abatement.

Chair Laffin requested clarification on the position of the consultants in regards to the cause of the damage in the building. Mr. Breckner suggested that water infiltration and natural settling have contributed to the damage.

Commissioner Wagner inquired as to the condition of the roof at the time of purchase of the property. Mr. Breckner responded that the roof has deteriorated since their purchase. Commissioner Wagner inquired as the possibility of replacement of the roof; Mr. Breckner suggested that the cost is prohibitive. Mr. Breckner noted that there were no roof repairs made but other minor repairs were made to improve the safety of the building.

John Yust, a member of the community, was present to speak in support of designation of the building. Mr. Yust discussed the history of the property before the current owners were involved and suggested that there has been neglect since then. Mr. Yust presented a graphic of the site that suggested the building be part of larger development plans. Mr. Yust stated community support for the rehabilitation of the building.

Mr. Yust discussed his involvement with the *Great River Passage Plan* and the potential possibilities for the building in regards to this Plan. Mr. Yust noted other recent development within the surrounding neighborhoods including the rehabilitation and redevelopment of the Schmidt Brewery. Mr. Yust encouraged the Commission to designate the building and work with community organizations to develop redevelopment strategies.

Commissioner Trout-Oertel inquired as to the potential of redevelopment on the site in regards to it's location on a flood plane. Mr. Yust stated that the location on the flood plane is a significant issue of the site. Mr. Yust discussed his long-term involvement with the West Seventh Fort Road Federation and the designation of the Irvine Park Historic District. Mr. Yust emphasized the importance of preserving the building.

Ms. Spong stated the role of the Commission at this stage is to make a recommendation to the City Council based on the significance and integrity of the building for designation purposes. Ms. Spong expressed appreciation for the presentation made by Mr. Breckner. Ms. Spong responded to the questions stated by Commissioner Trout-Oertel and clarified that it is possible to build on the site after demolition given compliance with

the City Flood Plain and Critical Area Overlay Districts and cited articles 68.4 and 72.4. Ms. Spong read aloud a sentence addressing the development concerns previously discussed during the Planning Commission's considerations that was added, and then stricken, from the resolution in regards to the designation of the building. Ms. Spong emphasized the role of the Commission to focus on the significance and the integrity of the building at this time.

Mr. Yust stated that he believes the building may still be eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places.

Richard Miller, a community member and member of the West Seventh Fort Road Federation, was present and spoke in support of designation of the building.

**No other written testimony was presented, and Chair Laffin closed the public hearing.**

**Commissioner Wagner motioned to lay over the decision to allow for further discussion and possibly visiting the building. Commissioner Riehle seconded the motion.**

Commissioner Dana inquired as to the feasibility of the layover in the timeline of the designation. Ms. Spong expressed concern for the process timeline and recommended that the Commission not lay over the decision.

Commissioner Wagner inquired as to a possible issue of viewing the building exterior from a prescribed distance; Ms. Spong responded that she does not believe so unless given owner consent.

Commissioner Trout-Oertel discussed the discrepancies with the state of the building and the remaining architectural features, and stated that a visit to the site would delay the designation process without providing definitive conclusions.

Commissioner Barnes stated agreement with Commissioner Trout-Oertel and expressed disagreement with the current motion.

Commissioner Justin requested confirmation on the implications for the owner if the building is designated and demolition is pursued. Ms. Spong clarified that the application for demolition would be processed through the HPC, and that decision could be appealed to the City Council. Ms. Spong also noted that the location on the flood plain may require review by the Planning Commission for site plan review.

Commissioner Ferguson requested confirmation that if the demolition application were to come in front of the Commission that there would be the possibility to impose conditions. Ms. Spong clarified that if the Commission were to approve an application for demolition there would be possibilities for imposing conditions, for example for documentation.

Commissioner Riehle requested clarification on the role of the Commission in an application for demolition; Ms. Spong clarified that the Commission will only have a role if the City Council designates the property.

**The vote was 2-5 with one abstention from Commissioner Justin. The motion failed.**

**Commissioner Dana moved to support staff recommendation to recommend designation of the building to the City Council. Commissioner Barnes seconded the motion.**

Commissioner Barnes expressed the concern for the difficulties in redeveloping the building, and stated that designation would allow for the Commissioner to play a more significant role in the process.

Commissioner Dana requested clarification that the official designation is completed by the City Council; Ms. Spong responded that it is and the current vote is a recommendation.

**The motion passed 8-0.**

**VII. Notice of Appeal:**

**A. 255 E. 6<sup>th</sup> Street, Lowertown Historic District**, by Dave Brooks, 9 & 19 Properties, LLC, appealing an HPC decision denying the location of a 4-ft x19-ft illuminated sign on the upper east elevation of the building. **File #13-024** (Dermoddy, 266-6617)

**VIII. Committee Reports:** There were none given.

**IX. Motion to Adjourn:** 7:46 p.m.

| Submitted by: R. Cohn