

CITY OF SAINT PAUL HERITAGE PRESERVATION COMMISSION RESOLUTION

FILE NAME St. Paul Gas Light Company Island Station Heritage
Preservation Site nomination

DATE May 23, 2013

WHEREAS, Chapter 73 of the Saint Paul Legislative Code directs that the Heritage Preservation Commission (HPC) shall recommend to the Mayor and City Council areas and buildings which the Commission has reason to believe are eligible for designation as heritage preservation sites; and

WHEREAS, Chapter 73 requires that the Heritage Preservation Commission shall secure comments from the Planning Commission and the Minnesota Historical Society prior to forwarding the proposed designation to the City Council for its consideration; and

WHEREAS, the HPC accepted the nomination form regarding the proposed designation of the St. Paul Gas Light Company Island Station (Island Station) as a Saint Paul Heritage Preservation Site; and

WHEREAS, the Planning Commission reviewed the proposed designation on May 17, 2013 and found the proposed Island Station Site to be consistent with the comprehensive plan of the City of Saint Paul and that such designation would have a positive effect on the surrounding neighborhood and recommended approval of the proposed designation to the City Council and Heritage Preservation Commission; and

WHEREAS, the Minnesota Historical Society, pursuant to Minnesota Statutes Section 471.193, Subdivision 5 and Chapter 73 of the Saint Paul Legislative Code, has reviewed and commented on the proposed designation of the Island Station and found the site to be a good candidate for local designation for the following reasons:

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 & Day. 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. We concur that Island Station is eligible for designation as a local landmark under Criteria 1 and 7; and

WHEREAS, the HPC held a public hearing regarding the proposed designation on May 23,

2013 and made the following 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.
4. 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; and

NOW, FINALLY, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Heritage Preservation Commission of the City of Saint Paul determines that the Island Station Site is eligible for designation as a Saint Paul Heritage Preservation Site and forwards consideration of the designation and preservation program to the Saint Paul City Council;

MOVED BY **Commissioner Dana**
SECONDED BY **Commissioner Barnes**

IN FAVOR **8**
AGAINST **0**
ABSTAIN