

**PARTIAL UNAPPROVED MINUTES OF THE HERITAGE PRESERVATION COMMISSION  
FOR APPEAL PURPOSES**

CITY OF SAINT PAUL, MINNESOTA  
Lower Level - Room 41, City Hall/Court House, 15 West Kellogg Boulevard

**June 25, 2015**

---

**Present:** Richard Dana, Matt Hill, Barbara Bezat, Robert Ferguson, Michael Justin, Amy Meller, Steve Trimble, Diane Trout-Oertel,

**Absent:** Renee Hutter Barnes (excused), Bill Lightner (excused), Matt Mazanec (excused), David Riehle (excused), David Wagner (excused)

**Staff Present:** Amy Spong, Bill Dermody, Allison Suhan, Fred Counts

---

**Public Hearing/Design Review**

**I. Call to Order-** 5:02pm

**II. Approval of the Agenda**

*Chair Dana noted that Items V.A and V.C have been withdrawn. Commissioner Ferguson moved to approve the agenda as amended. Commissioner Justin seconded the motion. **Motion passed 7-0.***

**III. Conflicts of Interest-** None stated.

**IV. Approval of Summary Minutes**

**V. Public Hearing/Permit Review**

**D. 2390-2400 University Avenue West & 735 Raymond Avenue, University-Raymond Commercial Heritage Preservation District**, by Thomas Nelson, Exeter Group LLC, for permits to partially demolish the roof and internal structure and construct five stories of housing on top of the L-shaped General Motors Truck Company building. **File #15-036** (Spong, 266-6714)

Ms. Spong presented the staff report with photos.

Commissioner Hill questioned how the reclassification mechanism gets triggered based off of what they do or don't do tonight.

Staff Spong- SHPO (State Historic Preservation Office) said they would want to reconsider it. If there was a request in the future for this building for tax credits or if staff or HPC got a proposal to do something on the building, like do something on the storefront, they may apply guidelines like it was a contributing storefront but if there is a change proposed for the addition it's about what guidelines are they going to apply. It has more to do with what historic tax credit availability is in the future.

Commissioner Ferguson questioned if this building were to be reclassified what effect would that have on the integrity of the District?

Staff Spong- Barbara Howard (SHPO) unofficially mentioned the concern for precedent. Ms. Spong added that the Lyric is the only detached new construction that the HPC has approved. It is a fairly young District. There have been some small additions approved on the Carelton Lofts building so this is kind of the first to be reviewing a rooftop addition. It is a question of how many buildings that maybe get considered that were contributing that are noncontributing. You need a critical mass to maintain a historic District to maintain the (tax credit) certification. She doubts that this project would do it, but how many more can the District handle before there is a concern that it's not eligible anymore for the National Register? She did not get anything in writing from SHPO as they didn't have time but there was some conversation. She added she was staff when the District was established and there was a Committee that toured it with Susan Roth, a National Register Historian, at the time, and it was a little bit of a hard sell because of all the space and vacant lots that are present. The District wasn't historically built up. The Committee was able to convince Susan and the consultant that wrote the designation study was able to convince her as well and the Park Service agreed, but there is a whole block that has noncontributing buildings on it (within the Historic District).

Commissioner Trout-Oertel questioned if the Metropolitan Council grant is tied to the design?

Ms. Spong said she doesn't believe so, it's the concept that it's connected to a residential component, but they will need to verify with the applicant.

The applicant, Tom Nelson, Exeter Group, supplied supplemental information in response to the staff report. He explained that this is their second project in the District. They did the award winning C&E Lofts using historic rehabilitation tax credits so they are familiar with those and how they work. They love doing their projects in urban infill Districts and love historic buildings like C&E. They are also doing the Custom House project in Lowertown. In spite of the staff report they do have experience with historic buildings and know how to work on them. In this case they teamed up with BKV Group, a preeminent preservation architect firm after having worked on the Schmidt Brewery and Custom House among others. They have come up with a great plan and a great property that is compatible yet differentiated in the District and that allows for the rehabilitation and restoration of this currently contributing building in the District, while also making progress and moving forward. The District has already been changed by the City of Saint Paul when it was rezoned it to a Transit Oriented District and by the reintroduction of rail along University.

Mike Krych, BKV Group, provided more detail as a part of what they have already submitted. He described their approach to the project. He explained the context in the existing building. He showed a slide that shows the building is L-shaped. It also shows the configuration in size of the footprint of the addition they are providing to the rooftop of the building. He said what's important is that the front of the building is wedged between the C & E Building and the Twin Cities State Bank building on the corner and L's around to the back. When you are at the site you never perceive these two buildings as a singular building because you don't see all facades at one time and it doesn't inhabit a corner. They maintained the front half of the building which has the finished commercial space. They are not putting their building over the top of that area and a big part of the reason is because of the historic viewshed corridors. The look will not change at all until you get right at the corner. The front half of the building

has one distinctive use and the rear of the building was used for parking automobiles. They will maintain those two uses as part of the historic building. He showed more images demonstrating the viewshed will remain intact and how the building is setback. He showed images that represents the qualities and characteristics of the existing building. Each façade that is visible is different. Each brick is a different color and has different patterning. The building has many different faces. He noted that with the existing building they are seeking and working to maintain the integrity of the existing building and its facades. They want to bring back the openings to what they were historically. The University Avenue side they will look to do that once they have a viable use that they know they have a tenant for and know that they can come in and do the right thing for the façade. They would actually be happy to come back to HPC and review what they would do there as a part of the condition if they can get approved. The Department of the Interior is okay with leaving historic buildings and facades as they are and not making changes to them. They are choosing to leave it intact and not make any alterations until they know they can have the right solution. He would like to note that on the facades they are going to rehab the existing historic light fixtures. On the Raymond Avenue side he showed images demonstrating the evolution of what they are proposing. There are two bricked up openings in between the existing garage door opening. There is a door in the one on the left and they want to open that back up and put replica windows of what historically would have been there. The one to the right of the overhead garage door they will leave the bricked up opening in place. It goes into the garage area where they are parking vehicles and they thought from an energy standpoint they should leave that in place as it is. All of the windows on this façade and the south façade are shown in a darker line weight and those represent the windows that they want to replicate. They would replicate what was there historically. They want the finished space to be energy efficient and to remove contaminants. They will also be inserting a pair of doors and they will have gridded windows that provide the historic pattern and characteristic like the existing windows. He showed photos how the rear façade currently looks and changes that they would like to make. They include energy efficiency and darker line weights on replica windows. They would like to rehab the windows in the garage spaces. They will leave the overhead doors in place. They will maintain the actual operation, the mullion patterns, sizes, width and depths in any new replica windows they provide.

Amy questioned a statement in the application that said they will be removing non historic wainscoting.

[Reply couldn't be heard on the recording]

Upon questions from Commissioners --- They do not know of any historic photos of the side or back elevations. The only photographs they could find were from Ms. Spong.

Mr. Krych --The new project maintains the character of the District. It's historically compatible through the use of setbacks, height, differentiation of materials, color, simplicity, and window styles and details. The materials are appropriate and compatible. They are using earthen tones. The design is appropriate for this particular site. It is a simple form interrupted by a large recess and the metals on the front are a little lighter in color and the darker recess allows that to recede even more and creates a very simple rhythm at a grander scale similar to the GM building on University. The character is defined on this block as well as other buildings in the District. It is important to let historic buildings speak for

themselves. There will be a very regular pattern of windows that will rhythmically march down the façade. They will only be adding grids to the windows to add texture. The orientation of the building is the most efficient. They are trying to create a certain density and configuration to make the project viable and part of that will allow them to do the restoration. They are making considerable moves to make it fit in with the District and yet be differentiated. They will be careful with masonry work and repointing where necessary.

Mr. Nelson (applicant) referenced Item 12 in the letter pertaining to uses – Parking for the residents is proposed on the inside of the structure which is consistent with the original use and screen from public right-of-ways, however, not considered the highest and best use for adaptive reuse in the vision planning outlined in the Raymond Station Area Plan. Related to the uses of their project, they are residential on top and they are maintaining the uses as they were historically. There is commercial at the front and parking within the historic building in the back. These seem to be polarizing statements and they think what they are doing is very appropriate, they are separating the uses and keeping historic program.

In regards to the staff recommendations; they believe residential is appropriate at this location because transit and a lot of other things are nearby, and it will help energize the area. In regards to the comment about little or no rehab work on the University store fronts, they are willing to continue to work with staff on what they will do with that space when the timing is appropriate. He stated they offer specific details of the canopy design on sheet A403. They have provided more information since the pre-application. He addresses the change to the contributing status briefly that is on page 7, item A in the staff report. He said they are taking the current façade and restoring and replicating where it's needed, and they will be bringing it back to its historic nature. They do take issue with the idea that the addition will forever impact the integrity of the existing building and the District. The new addition can be dismantled and carefully removed and ultimately return to the existing building to its historic character and its historic facades and the facades will already be at that position. He also mentioned the discussion that this addition could cause the District to be decertified. He isn't aware of any District, particularly in Minnesota, where that has happened. It is a complete rarity. He believes that District 4 and the Raymond Station Area Plan allow for development and new construction.

They are very excited about the project. It will be a tremendous project that will create a positive impact on the vitality of the neighborhood.

At questions from the Commissioners, Mr. Nelson stated they have had conversations with zoning and have been instructed on what needs to be done to obtain a CUP.

Amy Lucas, Landscape Research, stated that the addition could be removed. She has had many buildings with noncontributing changes in elevation and alterations that were removed and the properties were reclassified as historic properties. They have gone to measures, and she has seen the construction plans, that all elevations will not be damaged at the property. Ms. Lucas thinks the development is consistent with the character of the District. The design is simple and box-like and is set back 77 feet from University Avenue as well as the C&E building and bank building by quite a bit. The

viewsapes along University Avenue, which is the only historic viewscape they have ever found in historic documentation, is maintained. Ms. Lucas explained you can see the building from Raymond, but she doesn't believe that is a historic viewscape. It has never been documented. It is also a slanted angled street. It is an elevation you can see more from the back, and it is setback from Raymond by 8 or 10 feet.

Mr. Nelson added that the building across the street from Raymond Avenue is 3 or 4 stories high making it consistent with that viewshed. He also noted staff report only includes one page from the Raymond Station Area Plan. There are four pages (15, 18, 28, and 30) within the plan showing massing models and all models show building additions somewhere between 3 and 4 stories on top of their building in almost the same location as they are showing it. Also along the same Raymond viewshed shows a 6 story addition on a vacant lot immediately across from this property, similar to the height of the Carylton Artist's Lofts that was allowed in the District.

Amy Lucas stated since Tom brought up precedent she would like to mention that St. Anthony Falls Historic District is the oldest District in the state. It was the first and designated in 1971. It is why preservation commissions across the state were created. It is a milling District so it was designated for the milling industry and the grain elevators were demolished and the Guthrie was built in its place. It was determined a similar massing to what was there. Next to the Washburn Crosby Lofts building, a historic building, the Humboldt Mill was built right next to it and it did change the massing in the District and there had never been a building next to it like that and it was determined not damaging to the historic building. The Landmark is the actual ruin of the Washburn Mill and ironically that one did lose its status when the Minnesota Historical Society put the milling museum in it and did not receive tax credits in the end and was the only one that has lost its status. Massing changed up and down that street and it has not damaged those buildings. She thinks this is a mismatch of industrial buildings along a business core and there is a long history, and one that is changing from businesses and manufacturing to residential. As you can see with the Lyric that massing does change with that, and she thinks there has been a lot of effort to maintain more than 50% of the building as it is. It is a very large building at a one story level.

Amy Spong stated she doesn't recall commenting on decertification of the District as a whole she only addressed the contributing noncontributing status of the individual building. The comment from SHPO that was informal was more about the potential precedent.

Amy Lucas explained that SHPO will not make an official declassification unless they are asked by the applicant. HPC cannot declassify it. The applicant or owner could ask for tax credits and then they would go through that review. It probably would not get tax credits because it has a new addition and most buildings with larger additions don't receive tax credits. The applicant is not seeking tax credits. You would need to do a lot of work on a building to meet the basis to even receive tax credits.

Mr. Nelson stated there would be 119 units in the building and there are 104 in the C & E Building.

Amy Spong stated there was written testimony. Sandy Jacobs wrote a letter in support (attached). William Miller, owner of the Twin City Bank Building, wrote a letter in stating the project could be

beneficial with some adjustments to scale and architectural details (attached). She noted an email was received on June 2 from Brad Engelmann, District 12 Land Use Committee (see attached). She has not received an official statement from District 12.

**The public hearing was closed.**

Commissioner Bezat moved approval of the staff recommendation of denial of the application. Commissioner Meller seconded the motion.

Commissioner Hill stated that 50 million dollars of new construction was started right down the street from this location. He disagrees with the staff report seeing that the historic exterior is preserved and would find compatibility on the proposal through the Standards and Station Area Plan with the right conditions applied.

Commissioner Meller stated she does appreciate the attention that was put towards restoring and preserving the existing General Motor Building including the setbacks on University Avenue and the attention to the windows. She also understands making sure this is a viable construction project. The total number of units is really what is driving the height and orientation. She is concerned about setting a precedent. University Avenue is the primary viewshed through this District, but Raymond is another strong viewshed, and that corner is marked by buildings that are three stories or less. There is a very strong height and massing at that corner. She is also concerned with the precedent they are setting between new infill and additions. Even though this is an addition it's almost being treated like new infill because it is a one story building with five stories being added on top of it, so it is several new buildings in height that is being added on top of it, and by adding all of this on top of it and maintaining the historic nature on Raymond and University that is facadism. The massing at that corner and adding five stories on top of a one story building isn't maintaining what's going on in the District. If it was new construction infill on an empty lot it might change how they address the heights, but given that it is being added to a building she has concerns.

Commissioner Trout-Oertel stated because this is an addition to a historic building and the desire is to be low key and subservient the materials and detailing but the addition itself isn't really a "background building" and therefore not the great addition to this important intersection. She doesn't feel convinced that a good effort was made to market this building for what it could be adapted to successfully without destroying its integrity. She thinks that with all the new housing going up on University there is an opportunity for a lot of amenities that will be needed in this area. There is a lot of potential for storefront possibilities in this building both on the Raymond and rear side. There is also parking in the rear that could help. A lot of people in this livable community are going to be walking and these are spaces that could serve that purpose.

Commissioner Trimble said he thinks the addition overwhelms the original building. It's not a separate building behind; it is plopped down on, and dwarfs the front of the existing building.

Commissioner Justin said he agrees with Commissioner Trimble on that aspect. He is conflicted over this because he thinks a lot of attention has been paid to try and preserve the look of the original building

from the facades. He doesn't have a problem with the new part either other than the fact that it is plopped on top of a historic building, and it doesn't seem appropriate.

Commissioner Ferguson said he is also conflicted. He very much takes the point that the different facades on the historic building are very different in character. That one would not perceive that as being one building from the University side to the Raymond side and he would be prepared to consider different relationships between the addition and the historic building which is what we are seeing. It tries very hard and the project does so many good things that they hope to see done in this kind of development. He finds himself struggling to believe that it isn't an overpowering object plopped on top of an existing building and then the character is fundamentally altered. He wishes he could find somewhere in the guidelines for a justification for this development, but he cannot support it.

The motion for denial is based on the findings and the information within the staff report and attachments and no one is disagreeing with what staff has recommended.

**Commissioner Bezat moved to approve staff recommendations. Commissioner Meller seconded the motion. Motion passed 5-1 (Hill)-1 (Justin abstaining).**

(This section submitted by Samantha Langer, PED)

**VI. Chair Announcements**

**A.** Statewide conference in Little Falls, MN has been announced for Sept. 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup>. Scholarships are available and due July 31<sup>st</sup>. You must attend both days to receive a scholarship.

**VII. Staff Announcements—None**

**VIII. Adjourn 7:18 pm**