

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

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FILE NAME: 737 Plum Street

DATE OF APPLICATION: September 17, 2015

APPLICANT: Saint Paul Housing and Redevelopment Authority (HRA)

OWNER: HRA

DATE OF PUBLIC HEARING: October 08, 2015

HPC SITE/DISTRICT: Dayton's Bluff Heritage Preservation District

CATEGORY: Contributing

CLASSIFICATION: Demolition Permit

STAFF INVESTIGATION AND REPORT: Christine Boulware

DATE: October 7, 2015

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**A. SITE DESCRIPTION:** The Gotthielf Christoff House, at 737 Plum Street, is a one-and-one half story cottage with an L-shaped plan and Italianate proportions constructed in 1882. The home sits on a coursed limestone foundation and features a front-side porch built into the L of the house. Fenestration is currently single-light, one-over-one double hung on all sides, but a 1989 slide shows taller windows on the front elevation with two-over-two sash. The west side elevation features a projecting bay window. The roof is comprised of two intersecting gables, and the exterior walls are cement shingle over clapboard. A large rear addition was constructed sometime after 1950 has low gables and deep, overhanging eaves. A non-contributing garage is sited at the northwest corner of the lot. The property is categorized as contributing.

**B. PROPERTY HISTORY AND CONTEXT:** The construction of the Gotthielf Christoff House pre-dates building permits. The 1989 Historic Property Inventory identifies the construction date of 1882 as recorded in a December 31, 1882 article in the *Saint Paul Daily Globe*. The original owner of the home, Gotthielf Christoff, died at the home on May 2, 1888. A "pioneer resident of St. Paul and Minnesota" that had lived in Saint Paul for some forty years, Mrs. Henrietta A. Meehl was 73 years old when she passed away in the home at 7:35 p.m. on January 29, 1902.

No other records are available for the property until 1889 with a \$100 alteration, then in 1929, when a building permit for work totaling \$1,500 was taken out on July 24 by the owner, Mrs. Blasing and contracted by a Mr. Walter Hauson. The next permit identified the owner of the property as Mr. Herb Schoenenker who reroofed the house in September of 1936. The last historical alteration recorded at the home was an electrical permit for work totaling \$55 in July of 1947.

The 1903-1925 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map show the footprint of the property prior to the post-1950s rear addition. The map also shows a 1 1/2-story "stable" with two, one-story wings (razed) directly behind the residence.

**C. PROPOSED CHANGES:** The applicant proposes to raze the residence; there are no current plans for new construction. The lot would be graded and seeded.

**D. TIMELINE:**

- July 23, 1992 - the Dayton's Bluff Heritage Preservation District was designated by the City Council for Heritage Preservation and established under Ordinance No. 17942 (Council File #92-900)
- April 12, 2010 - the property became a Category 2 vacant building
- February 16, 2010 - the HRA purchased the property for \$29,500 with NSP funds

- April 12, 2010 - the property became a Category 2 Vacant Building
- March 13, 2012 - Certificate of Code Compliance is issued.
- July 19, 2012 – HPC staff met with a developer on-site to discuss rehabilitation of the property.
- July-October 2012 – preliminary plans and scope-of-work were prepared, but ultimately did not move forward. The proposal had total development cost of \$470,500, with a projected sale of the renovated house at \$165,500. The subsidy request was for \$305,000 and \$0 for the land.
- Inspiring Communities RFPs were released on October 15, 2013 and November 3, 2014 and no proposals were received.
- September 15, 2015 – The HRA applied to the HPC for demolition of the property.

#### **E. 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 businesses' 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 non-significant 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.*

**F. FINDINGS:**

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 demolition within designated heritage preservation sites **§73.04.(4)**.
2. **The category of the building.** The Gotthielf Christoff House, at 737 Plum Street, is categorized as contributing to the Dayton's Bluff Heritage Preservation District.
3. **Leg. Code § 74.90.(j)** - The Preservation Program for the Dayton's Bluff Heritage Preservation District states that consideration of demolitions will be determined by the category of building (pivotal, contributing and non-contributing), its importance to the district, the structural condition of the building and the economic viability of the structure.
4. **The importance of the building to the district.** The building's integrity has been compromised; however, it is categorized as contributing to the district's architectural and historical character. The building is important to the district and in a rehabilitated state would enhance the character of the district.

The Gotthielf Christoff House was constructed in 1882 with additional building permits issued in 1889, 1929, and 1936, both during and just after the Period of Significance for the Dayton's Bluff Heritage Preservation District (1857-1930).

The Dayton's Bluff Historic District Handbook states the following:

*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 residential context of this structure is good, as it is on the block of Plum Street which retains many of its buildings constructed during the Period of Significance. Comparing the Sanborn Map to current aerial images, four residences were constructed or moved to the block after 1925 and the commercial building at 200-202 Bates (at Plum) was demolished.

Staff did not find any historical associations, other than Gotthielf Christoff and Henrietta A. Meehl, that have contributed in some way to Saint Paul's history and development or an architect or association with an important event, with this property. The 1989 Dayton's Bluff inventory form did not identify other individuals.

The 1903-25 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map for this site indicates the footprint of the building, has been altered since 1925 with the rear portion of the residence being consumed by a later addition. Removal of this building would be the second principle structure removed on the block since 1925 (200-202 Bates Avenue). The map shows that the building was used as a single-family dwelling through 1925. There were four other buildings constructed or moved on this block around or after the Period of Significance. There is no alley and the grade rises steeply to the north and east is retained by limestone, concrete block and timber retaining walls along the east and north property lines.

HPC staff considers the architectural integrity to be fair; the cement shingles and wrap would need to be removed for staff to accurately assess the presence and condition of historic fabric and detailing.

5. **Structural condition of the building.** The current structural condition of the building is considered poor but the recent report did not note any imminent structural danger. The building has been classified as vacant since April of 2010 and the lack of maintenance and mothballing/stabilization is evident.

A Code Compliance Report was issued to the HRA on March 13, 2012. Some of the items noted in the report include: repair/replacement of deteriorated window sash and broken glass, complete storms and screens at all door and window openings, prepare and paint interior and exterior as necessary, repair siding, soffit, fascia, and trim as necessary, install gutters and downspouts, repair the garage and fences.

HPC staff conducted a site visit on October 1, 2015. Most of the original/early architectural or decorative features of the interior have been removed with the exception of the living room window, door and baseboards. The interior of the rear addition does not retain any visible historic details. Some original and early, double-hung windows are intact, along with the living interior casings and mouldings. The exterior features of the house have been covered with cement shingles and aluminum wrap. Staff observed general deferred maintenance. Staff cannot assess the condition of the original exterior materials given that they are not visible.

On September 14, 2015, structural engineering firm, Mattson Macdonald Young, submitted a report to the HRA that summarized the observed conditions of the property. The report notes the front porch post is easily moved and may no longer support the load of the porch roof; the chimney may need repair; water damage was observed in the second floor ceiling; some floors are slightly uneven, and there are rotted joist in the basement; the foundation appears functional and relatively free of cracks, the exterior roof and walls appear to be in good condition, The report summarized that 700 Fourth Street East is in generally poor condition based on visually observed conditions. The report summarized that repairs are possible, but would likely be relatively costly.

6. **The economic viability of the structure.** One preliminary proposal for rehabilitation was received in 2012. The proposal did not progress to beyond preliminary plans and scope-of-work. PED staff indicated that the developer requested the land cost written down to \$0 and a subsidy of \$305,000 with the total development cost at \$470,500 and a projected sale price of \$165,500.

The HRA estimates the demolition costs to be \$16,000. Staff did not receive a cost estimate to rehabilitate the residence. The HRA purchased the property on February 16, 2010 for \$29,500 with NSP funds. In 2014, Ramsey County estimated the 2015 land value at \$15,900 and the building value at \$18,400. In 2015, Ramsey County estimated the 2016 land value at \$10,800 and the building value at \$59,900. The 2154 square foot property is sited on the north side of Plum Street between Bates and Maple and the parcel size is 50 ft. wide by 150 ft. deep (.17 acres).

The property is currently zoned RTI. The previous use was a duplex, but the property has been vacant for over one year and would need to be rehabilitated as a single family home.

7. The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation recommend against removing buildings that are important in defining the overall historic character of the district or the neighborhood. Given the contributing categorization, even with fair-to-poor architectural integrity, and good context, HPC staff finds that the building reinforces the District's architectural and historic character. The Standards also recommend against destroying historic relationships between buildings and open space. The demolition of the building would have a significant impact on the relationship of residential buildings along Plum Street.
8. The Dayton's Bluff Heritage Preservation District Design Guidelines, General Principle (1) states 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..." The proposal to demolish this property does not comply with the guidelines as loss of the property would result in the loss of historic character.
9. This property is in the anticipated Area of Potential Effect for the Gold Line BRT and will be evaluated for National Register Eligibility. Proceeding evaluation, determined effects will be evaluated for impacts with potential mitigation.
10. HPC staff finds that the proposed demolition of the Gotthielf Christoff House at 737 Plum Street may adversely affect the Program for the Preservation and architectural control of the Dayton's Bluff Heritage Preservation District (Leg. Code §73.06 (e)) for reasons outlined in the findings which include: contributing classification, fair condition, fair integrity, and the need to carefully review and understand cost estimates that would comply with the Dayton's Bluff Design Review Guidelines (Leg. Code § 74.87-74.90) and close the financial gap. A vacant lot would have a negative impact on the Dayton's Bluff Heritage Preservation District and the loss of historic fabric is irreversible.

**G. STAFF RECOMMENDATIONS:** Based on the findings, staff recommends denial of the demolition permit application.

**H. ATTACHMENTS**

1. HPC Design Review Application
2. Applicant Submittals:
  - a. Structural Report and Photographs
  - b. Exterior Photographs
3. March 13, 2012 Code Compliance Report
4. 2012 Rehabilitation proposal from Marpe Construction
5. 2015 Photographs
6. Aerial Photographs
7. 1903-25 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map