

City of Excelsior  
Hennepin County, Minnesota

MINUTES  
HERITAGE PRESERVATION COMMISSION MEETING

February 23, 2016

7:00 p.m.

1. CALL TO ORDER

Chair Schmidt called the meeting to order at 7:01 p.m.

2. ROLL CALL

Commissioners Present: Brabec, Finch, Macpherson, Nelson, Salita, Schmidt

Commissioners Absent: Anderson

Also Present: City Planner Smith, Advisor Caron, City Attorney Staunton

Schmidt expressed a concern with Item 6(b) that the direction of the City Council was not being followed. He stated that he had reviewed the minutes and the Council had only remanded the matter for additional findings. Commissioner Finch moved, Commissioner Macpherson seconded, that consideration of any change to the Downtown Historic District's period of significance should precede any decision to amend the district boundaries. Motion carried 6/0.

3. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

a) Heritage Preservation Commission Meeting of January 26, 2016

Smith stated that the minutes should be amended to reflect that any change in the skirt under the canopy would require a Site Alteration Permit. Commissioner Macpherson moved, Commissioner Salita seconded, to approve the Minutes as amended. Motion carried 6/0.

Commissioner Finch moved, Commissioner Brabec seconded, to table the remaining items to follow discussion of item 6(a). Motion carried 6/0.

6(a) Site Alteration Permit – 321 Third Street (HPC No. 15-18)

Schmidt asked about the procedure that the Commission should follow in considering this matter. Salita stated that the Commission is required to follow its procedures, which is why this matter is back for further review. This has been a difficult process for all concerned.

The Commission reviewed the ordinance. Salita stated that the Commission didn't have the proposed partial demolition in front of it when it last considered the application. Schmidt asked whether there have been any modifications to the proposal since it was last considered. Project architect Ben Awes stated that he had submitted a revised application. He has made some further design modifications. He is no longer proposing to make changes to the existing windows on the main floor on the front and side elevations. He has lightened the tone of the charcoal color on the new siding. He is now proposing horizontal lap siding rather than vertical siding, **which will also be used for the upper level façade facing west where the vinyl siding currently exists.** This elevation doesn't appear to have brick behind the siding, but if

it does, they will leave the brick exposed and not cover it with new siding. The front elevation deck railing has been changed from a horizontal cedar to a more transparent wire railing, and he has also added more detail to the porch. The screen porch visible from the front will also have the option of using a knee wall. Finch clarified with Awes that all vertical metal has been changed to Hardie plank horizontal lap siding.

Regarding the rear addition, Awes stated that portions of the rear porch area were renovated in the 1980s. Some exploration was done at the basement level to look at the main floor structure, and on the main level inside the porch area, the exterior wall structure was exposed around the window. He found two different construction types, with the windows made smaller with two sets of 2x4s. The nominal dimension of the studs used indicates that the porch addition was built sometime after 1969. The new wood infill appears to date from after 1978. The size of the 2x4s was only used since the 1960s. No other wood was found from an earlier date. The siding is vinyl, the windows are aluminum clad, and it is unclear how old the foundation may be. He stated that the addition has no architectural or historic merit since it post-dates the rest of the building. The proposed changes are a significant improvement to the property and do not play a dominant role on the rear elevation. He believes that the effect on surrounding buildings is an improvement, and will make less impact than the existing vinyl siding. The dark color of the new siding lessens the effect of the building more than the existing white siding. The feasibility element should be assessed by the fact that this will be a more useful property and involves a major investment. The primary view of the alterations will be on the rear of the building and it is unduly constricting for the owner not to be able to occupy the porches as living space, which requires rebuilding with an extension of three feet and adding a mud space. The existing porch area has a step down on the third level, so it is necessary to raise the elevation to have a continuous floor for the living space on that level. All of the porches slope to the rear like old porches, and are being leveled for use as enclosed living spaces rather than porches.

Schmidt stated that he is impressed with what Awes shared with him, because in his view, staying within the existing dimension of a 7'8" porch doesn't accommodate a reasonable living area. The existing addition attaches to the rear brick wall, which would otherwise require removal of the brick wall to accommodate the desired living space within the existing dimensions of the porch area. Finch asked whether the four-season porch as it exists could be combined with the primary living space. Awes stated that the porches are designed as secondary living spaces and it would be difficult to combine them with the primary space. Awes clarified that the proposed windows on the addition are fixed windows, and not sliding doors. The double hung windows are operable. The screen porch on the front elevation has a door and the option of adding a knee wall. Two gray colors are used. The screen porch is intended as an expression of the addition for a unified design feeling. The side planking is used for oblique screening of the neighboring property to the west. Finch noted that the property was designated as historic in 1981.

Schmidt proposed a motion to accept the plan with the alterations described with the following findings: 1. The property is an individually designated site and the only one designated for its historical associations and not for its original architectural appearance, and the addition does not contribute architectural value because significant changes have been made to both the front and rear of the building. 2. The effect of the demolition on surrounding buildings is minimal, due to the softening of the colors, removal of metal siding, addition of a more transparent wire railing, and replacement of the lap siding on the west side. 3. The effect of the new construction on the building is acceptable, though he still has an issue with the dark color on the historic trim, but is okay with it. 4. On feasibility, he finds that it is economically infeasible to use the existing porch addition with its current dimension

as a living space. Commissioner Salita seconded. The approval is with reference to the revised plans of 2/23/16, with the addendum to the Beehive project plan presented at the meeting. The conditions are that the replacement of the existing windows on the main level is no longer part of the project, and all brick will remain.

Macpherson stated that he still doesn't feel that the issue of demolition has been addressed. He doesn't believe that the rear addition has historic merit so he has no issue with demolition of the porch addition. He believes that there should be a clearer reference to the specific plan that is being approved. Schmidt stated that he is concerned about the precedential effect of declaring a portion of building to have no historic significance. Motion carried 5/1, with Finch opposed. Finch presented a written statement to the effect that he does not believe the ordinance standard for demolition of a portion of a historic building has been thoroughly discussed or addressed, that the evidence suggests that rear porches have been on this building since 1882, with various changes over time, that demolition of a portion of a historic building is not justified in this case, and that the new addition does not meet the standards for a compatible historic alteration. He requested that the citations and statement be recorded with the meeting minutes.

Awes questioned whether the decision could still be appealed. Staunton explained the right of appeal provided in the ordinance.

Commissioner Finch moved, Commissioner Macpherson seconded, to return the remaining agenda items to the table. Motion carried 6/0.

b) Heritage Preservation Commission Special Meeting of February 4, 2016

Commissioner Salita moved, Commissioner Brabec seconded, to approve the minutes as presented. Motion carried 6/0.

c) Heritage Preservation Commission Special Meeting of February 8, 2016

Commissioner Salita moved, Commissioner Brabec seconded, to approve the minutes as presented. Motion carried 6/0.

d) Heritage Preservation Commission Special Meeting of February 10, 2016

Commissioner Salita moved, Commissioner Brabec seconded, to approve the minutes as presented. Motion carried 6/0.

4. CITIZEN REPORTS OR COMMENTS

None.

5. NEW BUSINESS

a) Site Alteration Permit - 373 George Street (HPC No. 16-03)

Smith stated that an application has been made for signage on this building, which is in the Downtown Historic District. The application is for the former State Farm Insurance space, and consists of an aluminum sign with logo graphics. The application also requests to remove the cloth skirt from around the front canopy.

The staff report states that the proposed wall sign makes minimal change to the historic building, and retains the property's historic character. The cloth skirt is not a historic element or distinctive feature of the property. The proposed sign does not

clutter the appearance of the building or conceal architectural detail. Staff recommends approval to install the proposed wall sign and remove the cloth skirt from the canopy, subject to the findings and conditions in the staff report.

Commissioner Salita moved, Commissioner Nelson seconded, to approve the Site Alteration Permit consistent with the staff report.

The Commission further discussed the signage requirements. Brabec expressed concern that the sign color and material did not seem appropriate for the building. Macpherson questioned whether the wall sign should be oval like the front sign that was recently installed for consistency of wall treatment. Schmidt noted that accommodating the use of a business logo does not mean that any type of sign containing the logo can be used, as it should still relate to the historic building and architecture. Finch concurred that appropriate signage should reflect that it is located in a historic district and on a historic building, and should in some way seek to relate to the building and its features.

The motion was withdrawn by Commissioner Salita.

Commissioner Finch moved, Commissioner Brabec seconded, to disapprove the Site Alteration Permit for signage, due to issues with the color of the proposed sign, its style and materials, and specifically that the sign copy should be less dominant, the overall scale of the sign should relate to the door opening below, the sign should be centered and not crowd the cornice at the top, and the signage should better relate to the shapes and colors on the historic building. Finch suggests that the applicant look to the newly developed design manual signage requirements for useful guidelines. Motion carried 6/0.

Commissioner Macpherson moved, Commissioner Brabec seconded, to allow removal of the cloth skirt. Motion carried 6/0.

b) Site Alteration Permit - 444 Second Street (HPC No. 16-04)

Smith stated that the applicant would like to reinstall an awning over the rear door area and add signage. The staff report finds that the proposed alterations retain the historic character of the building. The proposed sign does not clutter the building's appearance, and is generally consistent with the design of the building. Smith recommended approval. The individual sign letters are attached through the mortar and not through the brick face of the thin brick veneer. Commissioners commented that the awning should extend the entire length of the storefront because of the change in materials between the first and second levels and to avoid a truncated appearance.

Commissioner Finch moved, Commissioner Brabec seconded, to approve only the awning with the condition that it extend the entire length of the building. Motion carried 5/1, with Salita opposed because he had no issue with the awning covering only the window area.

The Commission discussed the proposed sign and the manner of mounting the letters and the reveal or depth of the sign letters. The depth of the letters is too thin to be consistent with prior approvals and the sign position should be centered between the roof cap and the windows without crowding other building features.

Commissioner Finch moved, Commissioner Macpherson seconded, to disapprove the Site Alteration Permit for signage due to an inadequate depth/reveal on the lettering, which is not compatible with the historic character of the building, and the proposed

positioning on the rear facade, which results in a cluttered appearance on the building. Motion carried 6/0.

6. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

- a) Extending the Period of Significance for the Downtown Historic District and Amending the District to Include 426 Lake Street
- b) Staff Reports

Smith stated that he is proposing a new format for staff reports with a table comparing the ordinance requirements with staff's analysis of the application. Salita stated that he thinks a verbatim recitation of the standards and a set of bullets as to why the plan fits or doesn't fit the standards would be most helpful. Finch stated that he also prefers the tabular approach. The Commission believes that it needs more details and should add the program for preservation elements whenever relevant. Schmidt stated that the HPC should determine whether an ordinance provision applies or not, and staff should err on the side of over-inclusiveness in its reports.

- c) 2015 Preservation Awards

Smith stated that he had compiled before and after photos of various improvements over the past year that could be recognized by the Commission should it wish to do so. He stated that the Commission might also consider recognizing new or renovated houses that are compatible with historic neighborhoods. Finch commented that he would like to define the criteria for receiving recognition, and determine whether these would be HPC reviewed projects or other projects. Schmidt moved to continue the discussion to the next meeting for further consideration, Commissioner Finch seconded. Motion carried 6/0.

7. COMMUNICATIONS AND REPORTS

- a) Site Alteration Permits Approved Administratively
- b) Next Planning Commission Meeting – March 14, 2016
- d) Next City Council Meeting – March 7, 2016
- e) Next HPC Meeting – Tuesday, March 22, 2016

8. MISCELLANEOUS / COMMISSIONER'S COMMENTS

- a) Recent City Council Actions

Smith stated that the Council had denied the PUD concept plan for the Burdick building at Third and Water due to the applicant's request for a parking waiver. The Council is considering installing new parking meters in the City. Extensions on three municipal docks are also being considered. The plans for a proposed new scoreboard

for the Commons baseball field are undergoing revisions to achieve a more historic appearance. Commissioners noted that any such alteration to the Commons as a designated site should come to the HPC for Site Alteration Permit review.

9. ADJOURNMENT

Commissioner Salita moved, Commissioner Brabec seconded, to adjourn at 9:35 p.m.  
Motion carried 6/0.

Respectfully submitted,

Tim Caron  
Recording Secretary