

MINUTES OF THE HERITAGE PRESERVATION COMMISSION
CITY OF SAINT PAUL, MINNESOTA
Lower Level – Room 41, City Hall/Court House, 15 West Kellogg Boulevard
November 4, 2010

Present: Robert Ferguson, Jennifer Haskamp, Pat Igo, Rich Laffin, John Manning, Matt Mazanec, Lee Meyer, David Riehle, Mark Thomas, Steve Trimble

Absent: Diane Trout-Oertel (excused)

Staff Present: Amy Spong, Christine Boulware,

BUSINESS MEETING

CALL TO ORDER: 5:04 PM by John Manning (Chair)

I. APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA - The agenda was approved as presented

II. CONFLICTS OF INTEREST - None stated

III. APPROVAL OF THE MEETING MINUTES - The minutes for August and September meetings were approved as presented.

A. August 26, 2010 Public Hearing (laid over from October 7th meeting)

B. September 9, 2010 Business Meeting/Public Hearing (laid over from October 7th meeting)

C. September 23, 2010 Public Hearing (laid over from October 7th meeting)

~~**D.** October 7, 2010 Business Meeting/Public Hearing~~

~~**E.** October 21, 2010 Public Hearing~~

IV. CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS – None stated.

V. STAFF ANNOUNCEMENTS

A. October Design Review Statistics (see attached)

B. Staff informed that 300 Maple Street filed an appeal of the HPC decision to City Council.

C. Staff stated that the C & E Building, several buildings at 3M and the Schmidt Brewery are currently under purchase agreement.

VI. PUBLIC HEARING

A. Victoria Theater Designation, 825 University Avenue, Public Hearing to consider the property a Saint Paul Heritage Preservation Site and make a recommendation to the City Council. (Spong, 266-6714).

The Chair explained the public hearing process. Staff read the resolution and proposed preservation program for the building.

Bee Vue, owner, was present to testify. He stated that the building has been vacant for a while and that the designation process didn't start until the building was for sale. He stated that designation will limit his ability to sell the property to a developer. He added that he would prefer to have a developer for the building before designation. He noted that the City didn't find the property important enough to designate earlier and that it is only a particular group that wants to designate the building. Bee Vue stated that there are more significant properties on University Avenue than his and that designation will limit what the property can be and what can be built on the site. He also noted that someone outside of the city initiated the process and the HPC should take another look at the significance of the property.

Testimony in support of designation:

Tait Danielson-Castillo, District 7 Planning Council, gave a history of the designation process stated that two-and-one-half years ago an interested person applied for a Star Grant for work at

the property and that Model Cities wanted to buy the property in order to turn it into a parking lot. He stated that designation needs to move forward as the site is significant to Frogtown and is in the Victoria Station area. He added that the community needs an entertainment venue/destination. He also noted that he is excited about the upcoming survey of the area and has learned a lot about the theatre and culture.

Kurt Gegenhuber stated he became interested in the building four-and-one-half years ago but wished that he had found the building earlier when he first heard Moonshiner's Dance on the Anthology of American Folk Music. He stated that the anthology has been very influential on modern musicians like Bob Dylan, Jerry Garcia and Elvis Costello. He added that the Smithsonian liner notes list the Victoria Café Orchestra, members unknown. He showed a map of the geographic distribution of the recordings on the anthology noting that the Victoria Theater is the only site in the Upper Midwest. He added that the HPC was established to preserve properties of cultural importance and this occasion is why the HPC exists.

Denise Harris, a twenty-year resident of Frogtown, stated the community is in need of entertainment venues and the designation would assist the opportunity to get the building purchased and turned into an entertainment and meeting place in Frogtown. She stated she was present to represent 100s of people in Frogtown. She added that she respects the owner and his right to sell the property and noted that LRT is coming.

Laurie Nevers, a thirteen-year resident of Frogtown, stated it would be nice to have central focus for arts and entertainment in the community and designation of the building is the first step in recognizing the unique heritage. She added that history makes Saint Paul what it is and the anthology is a "really big deal" and well known nationally. She concluded that the Victoria Theater is a significant piece of folk history.

Testimony in opposition:

Keith Johnson, of Minneapolis, state that he is ambivalent about the designation, as he has been corresponding with the building owner for two years, has been allowed access and has brought contractors, architects and investors in. He wants to see the building saved and architects have told him that the building is structurally sound. A mural expert has told him that the mural on the second level can be restored. He added that he would like to see the building used as an entertainment venue. Mr. Johnson informed that he was the founder of the "New Victoria Theater Project" and hopes that the owner will allow him to continue to look for investors for the project as it location with LRT and the Victoria Station are key. Reuse and rehabilitation would take this vacant building off of the list and discussion should shift to saving the building.

Written Testimony:

Staff read the written testimony into record noting that all was in support of the designation, none against.

Bee Vue, owner, returned to ask and answer questions. He reiterated that the HPC should look at the significance of the building and make a decision, as only a few people in an interest group are in favor. He stated that the property isn't significant enough to designate and as a property owner, he doesn't want to be restricted. He added that the history of the property has not been acknowledged by the community and the recording at the building is the only significant event. He continued that the building should be significant to the community as a whole, not just this group and he hopes the HPC makes an informed decision.

Igo stated he wanted to understand the owner's position and noted that the history has been verified. He asked about the fair market value of the property. Vue stated designation will limit what can be done with the site and buyer will back off. Manning stated there are benefits to designation.

Laffin asked Vue when he purchased the building. Vue replied either 2005 or 2006. Laffin asked if he has other options for the property. Vue replied he wants to sell the property or work

with Mr. Johnson and that he supports the idea of saving and renovating the building for the community. He added that if there isn't a developer, the limitations will keep him from marketing the property. Laffin stated the building will be worth more in a few years. Vue stated he could not wait that long.

Thomas motioned to lay the recommendation over to the November 18, 2010 HPC meeting. Igo seconded the motion. The motion passed 10-0.

VII. NEW BUSINESS

VIII. COMMITTEE REPORTS

A. Education Committee (Ferguson, Thomas, Trout-Oertel) – Ferguson reported they plan to coordinate meeting with City Council and Mayor's staff as well as with Janelle Tummel, PED, PIO.

B. Greater Lowertown Master Plan Task Force (Ferguson) – Ferguson reported that he did not receive any feed back from commissioners on the survey.

C. Saint Paul Historic Survey Partnership Project (?) – Trimble volunteered to attend the steering committee meetings.

D. Public Safety Building mitigation (Manning, Igo) – Manning stated there were no updates. Staff reported they had received a letter from SHPO revising the list of buildings to receive local designation studies as part of the mitigation for the loss of the Public Safety Building.

E. 3M Advisory Committee/Workgroups update (Trimble, Mazanec) – Trimble reported that there was a Star Tribune article about Ironton entering into a purchase agreement with the Port Authority for four acres of 3M. He will continue to follow the mitigation process.

IX. ADJOURN : 6:17

Submitted by: C. Boulware