



CITY OF SAINT PAUL
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DATE: December 5, 2013
TO: Heritage Preservation Commission
FROM: Amy Spong, Historic Preservation Specialist
SUBJECT: *Lowertown Ballpark Discussion*

PROPOSAL (from EAW)

The proposed project will convert a vacant and polluted industrial site (former Diamond Products Building) in Saint Paul's Lowertown neighborhood to a new ~7,000 seat ballpark. The ballpark will be publicly-owned and privately supported. It is anticipated to host over 160 events and entertain approximately 400,000 visitors annually. The new ballpark will include a street level (Broadway & Fifth Street) concourse, a lower level clubhouse and a baseball field that will be surrounded on the north and west sides by an open air street level concourse with a lower level clubhouse. The area on the east side of the site behind left field is currently planned to be used for staging and/or parking; long-term planning includes the possibility of an additional 2,000 seats and a building that could be used for baseball training. The proposed ballpark will be constructed through the design-build process, and site preparation will involve vacation of 5th Street east of Broadway and John Street adjacent to the Diamond Products Building, removal of parking lots north of the Diamond Products building, and on-site soil corrections. Site activities will also require demolition of the northern portion of the Diamond Products building.

LOWERTOWN HISTORIC DISTRICT

The Lowertown Historic District was listed on the National Register of Historic Places on June 21, 1983 under Criteria A and C, and locally designated by the City Council as a St. Paul Heritage Preservation Site on March 22, 1984 under ordinance #17120 §2. The Period of Significance for the Lowertown Historic District is 1867 to 1929 which is used when reviewing proposals for rehabilitation, new construction and demolition. It is also the context considered when defining character-defining features and elements worthy of preservation.

The National Register nomination form for the district states: *Lowertown is not only architecturally significant, but significant in the history of landscape architecture and city planning due to dramatic street pattern and grade changes which were made in the 1870s, and due to the fact that a park encompassing an entire city block has been preserved since the 1880s in the midst of a large warehouse and industrial area with tightly clustered buildings.*

Lowertown has a dense concentration of commercial buildings located on streets which form a grid-iron pattern centered around Mears Park. Although most of Lowertown was platted in 1849, the streets in the area were not graded or improved until the 1870s and most were not paved until the 1880s.

The most dramatic changes in the street patterns in Lowertown were made in 1876-78. During that brief period, Sibley, Wacouta, Fifth and Sixth Streets were cut through Baptist Hill. When these streets were graded, the block which is now Mears Park consisted of a hill with houses and some commercial buildings standing about fifty feet above street level.

During the period of significance, most of the streets were brick, especially those that had streetcars, and many alleys were granite, sandstone cobbles or dirt. Based on research of historic maps and photos, it appears that the vast majority of the sidewalks were platted at 10' wide.

The National Register nomination also describes the area around the Mears Park as having a dense concentration of commercial buildings located on streets which form a grid-iron pattern. There is little deviation from the grid pattern even today. The Allen Building (contributing) on Sixth Street and Broadway is setback from this grid as it originally had a loading dock at the south elevation. The building facades opposite the Union Depot (contributing) were removed and setback to allow for the formal lawn space in front of the Union Depot. Mears Park Apartments (noncontributing) at 401 Sibley Street (kiddie-corner from Mears Park) was constructed in 1977 and have a greater setback that is not consistent with historic setbacks.

HPC REVIEW

The Saint Paul Comprehensive Plan adopted in 2011 by the City Council states in **HP Strategy 1.10** that equal consideration be given to historic preservation factors when City action, involvement, or funding is requested or required. **HP Strategy 2.2** states that the City should consider impacts to historic resources in all public and private planning and development projects that require City involvement, action, or funding. Alternatives should be considered to avoid, minimize, or mitigate potential adverse impacts to historic resources. Additionally, **HP Strategy 5.3b** states the full economic potential of key historic resources should be realized by integrating historic properties into new development to strengthen sense of place and provide a link between old and new.

The Comprehensive Plan also acknowledges certain State and Federal environmental review regulations that require the impacts of historic resources to be considered for many publicly and privately funded projects. Potential impacts should be avoided or mitigated and preference is to be given to preserving historic resources in a manner that complies with HPC design guidelines or the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties (**HP 2.2**).

THE ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT WORKSHEET AND STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICE REVIEW

Question 22 of the EAW requires consideration of impacts to cultural resources (archeological, historical and architectural) as part of other environmental considerations. Summit Envirosolutions conducted a historic resources review and assessment of the site for the Saint Paul Port Authority in 2011. The report is summarized within question 22 and is included as Appendix 4.0 in the EAW. The report identifies both direct and indirect effects as relating to the project site and the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP)-listed Lowertown Historic District. An area of potential effects (APE) for indirect effects for Lowertown is also suggested, a detailed context and history of the project site and Lowertown Historic District along with several maps is also provided. The report states:

Although review is not required, consultation with the Saint Paul Heritage Preservation Commission regarding stadium design and construction materials may help to improve viewshed impacts on the Lowertown Historic District relative to existing conditions. The National Register nomination for the District speaks to the importance of the street grid and the Lowertown design guidelines address the need for a "street wall" around both

Mears Park and the Farmer's Market sites. It's important to note that the street grid shifted historically east of Broadway where the new ballpark will be built.

The State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) provided comment on the proposed Ballpark project pursuant to the responsibilities given the Minnesota Historical Society by the Minnesota Historic Sites Act and the Minnesota Field Archaeology Act. SHPO's letter dated February 27, 2013 states there are several potential indirect effects on the Lowertown Historic District that should be addressed and comments that the design of the ballpark and supporting site development will need to meet the Secretary of the Interior Guidelines for new construction within or adjacent to an historic district. The letter also notes that other effects, including traffic, noise and lighting need to be examined. SHPO's general practice is to review the design work at 30, 60 and 90 percent complete phase. The first submittal was sent to SHPO and they provided comments in a letter dated November 1, 2013. Their comments address concerns around massing that is overly differentiated, window and door openings and materials.

PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS

Downtown Central Station Area Plan

The *Downtown Station Area Plan* was adopted by the City in February 2010. The Plan recognizes the significance of having an intact collection of historic buildings in Lowertown which creates a distinct urban form in terms of street widths, block length, and historic warehouse architecture. Strategies in **Section 2.3** call for preserving the unique character of Lowertown by placing great emphasis on this character and the quality of development that has promoted the area's continued success. **Strategy 2.3.3** states the existing block and building pattern should be strengthened and is one of the defining characteristics of downtown. Specifically "As opportunities for infill development emerge and larger redevelopment sites come forward, new development should reinforce and re-establish the existing pattern through extensions of the street grid and placement of new buildings that define the streets."

Section 3.2 on Reinforcing Lowertown groups strategies into three sub-areas: Historic Lowertown, Lowertown Extension and Lowertown Transition. Strategies for the Lowertown Historic District call for strengthening Lowertown's character and to require new development to be sympathetic to the scale, materials, massing and height of adjacent buildings (**3.2.3**) and to maintain and enhance the street grid to maintain Lowertown's sense of place and scale, but also to accommodate some increase in vehicular traffic that will come with a major entertainment facility (**3.2.7**).

Strategies for the Lowertown Extension calls for the design of the Diamond Products site to be a complementary neighbor and that the northern half of the site designated for the ballpark should include an active street-level frontage as an important interface with Broadway Street and the surrounding community (**3.2.8**).

Greater Lowertown Master Plan

The Greater Lowertown Master Plan Summary was adopted in April of 2012 as recommended in the Downtown Station Area Plan, specifically to address outstanding Lowertown issues that were outside the scope of the station area plan. Three **core values** informed the neighborhood's vision and strategies: **the arts, sustainability and historic preservation**. One of the seven initiatives of the Master Plan is to *Preserve the District* specifically by ensuring that every new increment of development enhances the character and value of Lowertown as an historic district (**2.6**).

SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR'S STANDARDS

Of the ten Standards, nine and ten are the most applicable to new construction in this case. They state:

9. *New additions, exterior alterations, or related new construction shall not destroy historic materials that characterize the property. The new work shall be differentiated from the old and shall be compatible with the massing, size, scale, and architectural features to protect the historic integrity of the property and its environment.*

10. *New additions and adjacent or related new construction shall be undertaken in such a manner that if removed in the future, the essential form and integrity of the historic property and its environment would be unimpaired.*

Key words in **Standard nine** states that related new construction should be both differentiated and compatible. There has often been confusion among national, state and local bodies that grapple with reviewing architects' designs, gathering public reaction and applying appropriate standards. Author and professor, Steven Semes offers four possible strategies or attitudes toward contemplating new construction in a historic setting: 1) literal replication, 2) invention with a style, 3) abstract reference, and 4) intentional opposition. Mr. Semes describes each of the different strategies or approaches as prioritizing either compatibility or differentiation over the other or seeking balance of the two concepts. During his presentation in St. Paul during the National Preservation Conference in 2007, Mr. Semes emphasized that new buildings in an historic setting should focus more on the "sense of place" than the "sense of time." From this point of view, *any style would be acceptable in an historic district provided it draws on the influences of the place and harmonizes with, rather than ruptures, the continuity of the architectural character.* He would also add, however, the inherent objective of the Modern movement was to create rupture with styles of the past. The lack of ornamentation, use of glass and steel and other characteristics were intended to create this break with the past.

LOWERTOWN GUIDELINES FOR DESIGN REVIEW

The Lowertown Guidelines are provided for consideration and specifically they state "*There should be no major variation in setback from the building line. Minor variations for bays and entrances are permissible. The proportion of built edge to open space should preserve the plane of the street wall, particularly along the streets facing Mears Park and the Farmer's Market.*" Additional guidelines are provided for building elements, rhythm and directional emphasis (which can be found both horizontally and vertically in individual buildings and in the relationship between buildings), and massing and scale, landscaping and windows and doors.

ATTACHMENTS:

1. Specific citations from the EAW (emailed separately)
2. SHPO letters dated February 27, 2013 and November 1, 2013
3. Preservation Brief #14: New Exterior Additional to Historic Buildings: Preservation Concerns
4. Lowertown Guidelines for Design Review