

CITY OF SAINT PAUL
HERITAGE PRESERVATION COMMISSION STAFF REPORT

FILE NAME: 79 Western Ave N

DATE OF APPLICATION: April 8, 2014

APPLICANT: Steve Stulz, Agent for AT&T

OWNER: Gettleman Properties

DATE OF HEARING: April 24, 2014

HPC SITE/DISTRICT: Hill Historic Heritage Preservation District

CATEGORY: Pivotal

CLASSIFICATION: Building permit

STAFF INVESTIGATION AND REPORT: Bill Dermody

DATE: April 17, 2014

A. SITE DESCRIPTION:

The Commodore Hotel was constructed in 1924 and designed by architect A.F. Gauger. The seven-story U-shaped building has a brick and stone exterior with a flat roof and parapet. The hotel experienced a roof fire in 1952 and a gas explosion in 1978. The hotel was converted to residential condominiums in 1980.

B. PROPOSED CHANGES:

The applicant proposes to mount nine (9) cellular antennas upon the roof top elevator penthouse in the building's northwest portion and install an 18' x 19' metal platform to hold a 12' x 16' equipment shelter on the roof in the building's southwest portion. The antennas are in three separated groups of three, each mounted upon the elevator penthouse walls. The proposed platform and equipment shelter are not physically connected to the penthouse and represent a new massing. Also, there is wiring proposed between the various antennas and equipment shelter, partially within a cable tray.

C. BACKGROUND:

In 2010, HPC staff conditionally approved three sets of wireless antennas mounted to the elevator penthouse in the building's northwest portion, a small equipment cabinet (also mounted to the penthouse); a fourth set of antennas within a new stealth ballast pod in the building's southeast corner, and associated wiring, all upon the roof. The 2010 approval was for a different service provider than the subject application.

D. GUIDELINE CITATIONS:

Hill Historic District Design Review Guidelines

Sec. 74.64. - Restoration and Rehabilitation

(a) General Principles:

1. *Every reasonable effort shall be made to provide a compatible use for a property which requires minimal alteration of the building, structure, or site and its environment, or to use a property for its originally intended purpose.*

2. *The distinguishing original qualities or character of a building, structure, or site and its environment shall not be destroyed. The removal or alteration of any historic material or distinctive architectural features should be avoided when possible.*
3. *All buildings, structures, and sites shall be recognized as products of their own time. Alterations that have no historical basis and which seek to create an earlier appearance shall be discouraged.*
4. *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.*
5. *Distinctive stylistic features or examples of skilled craftsmanship which characterize a building, structure, or site shall be treated with sensitivity.*
6. *Deteriorated architectural features shall be repaired rather than replaced, whenever possible. In the event replacement is necessary, the new material should match the material being replaced in composition, design, color, texture, and other visual qualities. Repair or replacement of missing architectural features should be based on accurate duplications of features, substantiated by historic, physical, or pictorial evidence rather than on conjectural designs or the availability of different architectural elements from other buildings or structures.*
7. *The surface cleaning of structures shall be undertaken with the gentlest means possible. Sandblasting and other cleaning methods that will damage the historic building materials shall not be undertaken.*
8. *Every reasonable effort shall be made to protect and preserve archaeological resources affected by, or adjacent to any project.*
9. *Contemporary design for alterations and additions to existing properties shall not be discouraged when such alterations and additions do not destroy significant historical, architectural or cultural material, and such design is compatible with the size, scale, color, material, and character of the property, neighborhood, or environment.*
10. *Wherever possible, new additions or alterations to structures shall be done in such a manner that if such alterations were to be removed in the future, the essential form and integrity of the structure would be unimpaired.*

Sec. 74.65. - New construction.

(a) *General Principles:* The basic principle for new construction in the Historic Hill District is to maintain the district's scale and quality of design. The Historic Hill District is architecturally diverse within an overall pattern of harmony and continuity. These guidelines for new construction focus on general rather than specific design elements in order to encourage architectural innovation and quality design while maintaining the harmony and continuity of the district. New construction should be compatible with the size, scale, massing, height, rhythm, setback, color, material, building elements, site design, and character of surrounding structures and the area.

(b) *Massing and Height:* New construction should conform to the massing, volume, height and scale of existing adjacent structures. Typical residential structures in the Historic Hill District are twenty-five (25) to forty (40) feet high. The height of new construction should be no lower than the average height of all buildings on both block faces; measurements should be made from street level to the highest point of the roofs. (This guideline does not supersede the city's zoning code height limitations.)

(c) *Rhythm and Directional Emphasis:* The existence of uniform narrow lots in the Historic Hill District naturally sets up a strong rhythm of buildings to open space. Historically any structure built on more than one (1) lot used vertical facade elements to maintain and vary the overall rhythm of the street rather than interrupting the rhythm with a long monotonous facade. The directional expression of new construction should relate to that of existing adjacent structures.

(d) *Material and Details:*

(1) Variety in the use of architectural materials and details adds to the intimacy and visual delight of the district. But there is also an overall thread of continuity provided by the range of materials commonly used by turn-of-the-century builders and by the way these materials were used. This thread of continuity is threatened by the introduction of new industrial materials and the aggressive exposure of earlier materials such as concrete block, metal framing and glass. The purpose of this section is to encourage the proper use of appropriate materials and details.

(2) The materials and details of new construction should relate to the materials and details of existing nearby buildings.

(3) Preferred roof materials are cedar shingles, slate and tile; asphalt shingles which match the approximate color and texture of the preferred materials are acceptable substitutes. Diagonal and vertical siding are generally unacceptable. Imitative materials such as asphalt siding, wood-textured metal or vinyl siding, artificial stone, and artificial brick veneer should not be used. Smooth four-inch lap vinyl, metal or hardboard siding, when well installed and carefully detailed, may be acceptable in some cases. Materials, including their colors, will be reviewed to determine their appropriate use in relation to the overall design of the structure as well as to surrounding structures.

(4) Color is a significant design element, and paint colors should relate to surrounding structures and the area as well as to the style of the new structure. Building permits are not required for painting and, although the heritage preservation commission may review and comment on paint color, paint color is not subject to commission approval.

(e) *Building Elements:* Individual elements of a building should be integrated into its composition for a balanced and complete design. These elements of new instruction should compliment existing adjacent structures as well.

(1) *Roofs:*

a. There is a great variety of roof treatment in the Historic Hill District, but gable and hip roofs are most common. The skyline or profile of new construction should relate to the predominant roof shape of existing adjacent buildings.

b. Most houses in the Historic Hill District have a roof pitch of between 9:12 and 12:12 (rise-to-run ratio). Highly visible secondary structure roofs should match the roof pitch of the main structure, and generally should have a rise-to-run ratio of at least 9:12. A roof pitch of at least 8:12 should be used if it is somewhat visible from the street, and a 6:12 pitch may be acceptable in some cases for structures which are not visible from the street.

c. Roof hardware such as skylights, vents and metal pipe chimneys should not be placed on the front roof plane.

(2) *Windows and doors:*

c. Although not usually improving the appearance of building, the use of metal windows or doors need not necessarily ruin it. The important thing is that they should look like part of the building and not like raw metal appliances. Appropriately colored or bronze-toned aluminum is acceptable. Mill finish (silver) aluminum should be

avoided.

(g) *Public infrastructure:*

- (3) Electric, telephone and cable TV lines should be placed underground or along alleys, and meters should be placed where inconspicuous.

E. FINDINGS:

1. The property is located in the Historic Hill Heritage Preservation District and is categorized as pivotal.
2. On April 2, 1991, the Historic Hill Heritage Preservation District was established under Ordinance No. 17815, § 3(II). 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 exterior work within designated heritage preservation sites §73.04.(4).
3. The subject building is located at the northwest corner of Holly and Western Avenues and has primary elevations facing both streets.
4. **General Principles: Sec. 74.64(a) and Sec. 74.65(a)** The antennas mounted upon the elevator penthouse are *compatible with the... scale, massing... material, building elements... and character of surrounding structures and the area* if they are colored and finished to blend with the penthouse. The platform and equipment shelter, however, are not *compatible with the... scale, massing... material, building elements... and character of surrounding structures and the area*. The platform/equipment shelter, which are approximately 1'-7" taller than the existing elevator penthouse, represent a new massing that is more visible and uses less appropriate materials (metal), including the platform's stair railings that are higher than the adjacent parapet.

The incompatibility of the shelter is mitigated by its lack of visibility above the primary elevations. According to staff calculations, no portion of the equipment shelter will be visible above the primary elevations from the opposite side sidewalks on either Holly or Western Avenues in front of the subject site. The most problematic views would be from above the western (non primary) elevation: approximately 3'-9" of the shelter will be visible from just southwest of the site, across the street and unimpeded by trees, with potentially greater portions visible farther west along Holly Avenue or Ashland Avenue during the winter.

5. **Roofs: Sec. 74.64(d)** The proposed platform is permanently attached to the roof in six (6) sets of penetrations – these should not obscure, alter or destroy any architectural features or details.
6. **Materials and Details: Sec 74.65(d)(2)** The metal materials proposed for the platform and equipment shelter do not *relate to the materials and details of existing nearby buildings*. However, these items are placed upon the roof and are not plainly visible above the primary elevations. Coloring and finishing the equipment shelter to match the elevator penthouse would help mitigate the nonconformity with this guideline.
7. **Public Infrastructure: Sec. 74.65(g)(3)** The proposed antennas, platform, and equipment shelter are not placed underground or along the alley as called for by the guidelines because there is no alley present. However, they are placed away from the primary elevations, which generally conforms with the intent of the guideline.
8. The proposal to add wireless antennas, a platform, and an equipment shelter will not adversely affect the Program for the Preservation and architectural control of the Historic Hill Heritage Preservation District (Leg. Code §73.06 (e)) so long as the conditions are met.

F. STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Based on the findings above, staff recommends approval of the proposal provided the following conditions are met:

1. The antennas, platform, equipment shelter, and any exterior equipment above the parapet height on the building's roof shall be finished or painted the same color as the elevator penthouse wall so as to blend in.
2. Any revisions to the approved plans must be submitted to the HPC and/or staff for review.
3. The HPC stamped approved plans must be kept on site during the construction project.

G. ATTACHMENTS

1. HPC Application
2. Plans
3. Photo Simulations