

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

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FILE NAME: 900 Summit Avenue  
DATE OF APPLICATION: July 1, 2014  
APPLICANT: Jamie Borell, Innovative Power Systems, Inc.  
OWNER: St. Paul United Church of Christ  
DATE OF HEARING: July 24, 2014  
HPC SITE/DISTRICT: Hill Historic Heritage Preservation District  
CATEGORY: Non-contributing  
CLASSIFICATION: Building permit  
STAFF INVESTIGATION AND REPORT: Bill Dermody  
DATE: July 17, 2014

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**A. SITE DESCRIPTION:**

The affected portion of the site is a 2-story, flat roof, auxiliary building used for classrooms that connects to the main church building via a 1-story, flat roof element. The main church has a linear plan with its long side facing north onto Summit Avenue. It has a long, side-gabled asphalt shingle roof with tight eaves hidden by gutters. Parishioners enter the building in a front-facing gabled wing at the left end, and a 2-story, side-gabled bell tower topped with a hexagonal spire sits at the junction. The nave at the right end is an extension of the gable roof and narrows twice. The vestibule at the left end is also gabled, but the roof is lower than the main roof. Several extensions to the main form are scattered around the footprint. There are 1-story extensions on the rear of the nave and the rear of the vestibule which connect to the auxiliary 2-story building affected by this application. There is a prominent 1-story extension on the front of the bell tower. All the extensions are flat-roofed.

**B. PROPOSED CHANGES:**

The applicant proposes to install 96 solar electric modules (solar panels) upon the flat roof of the site's 2-story building, with the panels facing south (away from Summit Avenue) in 12 rows of 8. The panels sit 29 inches above the roof at their highest point.

**BACKGROUND:**

In June 2014, HPC staff conditionally approved a roof replacement for four flat roof sections of the building, not including the 2-story portion affected by the subject application. The subject building's roof was approved for replacement in 1996. Several minor repair and fencing applications have also been approved in the past three decades.

**C. 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 non-contributing, as it was constructed in the 1960s after the period of significance for the district.
2. On April 2, 1991, the most recent expansion of 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 portion is a two-story building with a flat roof at the eastern side of the site. The applicant proposes to install 96 solar modules in 12 rows of 8 on the roof, oriented toward the south, of a total height of 29 inches above the roof.
4. Photographs submitted by the applicant demonstrate that the solar modules are placed at the rear of the roof, in a location where they will not be visible above the primary elevation parapet from on-site or from Summit Avenue.
5. **General Principles: Sec. 74.65(a)** Because they are placed upon an existing building, the solar modules do not affect *the rhythm, setback, color, or site design* of the site. The modules do not affect *size and scale* of the existing building. The materials of the solar modules do not relate to the materials of the building or the surround historic district, but they will not be visible and will not be affixed to the building.
6. **Massing and Height: Sec. 74.65(b)** The solar modules do not adversely affect the *visible height, massing of the building, or the character of the surrounding structures and the area*, given that they are not visible from on-site or nearby on Summit Avenue. Therefore, the installation complies with the guideline.
7. **Roofs: Sec. 74.65(e)(1)** The solar modules are placed upon ballasts that rest upon the flat roof, are easily reversible, and do not affect the design of the roof.. The modules are appropriately placed away from the building's front, and comply with the guidelines.
8. **Public Infrastructure: Sec. 74.65(g)(3)** The proposed solar modules are setback from the primary elevation and exterior walls, which generally conforms with the intent of the guideline.
9. The proposed installation of solar modules on the roof 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. All final materials and details, including any external attachments to the building, shall be submitted to HPC staff for review and approval.
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 Study

