

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

FILE NAME: 344 Summit Avenue
DATE OF INITIAL APPLICATION: October 30, 2014
APPLICANT: John R. Rupp, Commonwealth Properties, Inc.
OWNER: 344 S. A., LLC
APPLICATION SUBMITTED: October 30, 2014
DATE OF INITIAL HEARING: November 20, 2014
WITHDRAWN: January 21, 2015 HPC Hearing
NEW HEARING DATE: April 23, 2015
HPC SITE/DISTRICT: Hill Heritage Preservation District
CATEGORY: Pivotal
CLASSIFICATION: Building Permit
STAFF INVESTIGATION AND REPORT: Amy Spong
DATE: April 14, 2015

A. SITE DESCRIPTION:

The Watson P. Davidson House at 344 Summit Avenue is a Jacobethan style residence designed by Thomas Holyoke and constructed between 1915 and 1921. The limestone house with a gabled slate roof is representative of the academic phase of the medieval revivals popularized at the turn of the century and the National Register nomination for the Hill Historic District states “The design features the characteristic window with small transoms arranged in groupings of three, a dominant central bay with monumental entry featuring recessed Tudor-type arch and ironwork, and a finished stone block facing.” The building is categorized as Pivotal to the historic and architectural character of the Hill Historic District (NRHP, State and local).

B. PROPOSED CHANGES:

The applicant is proposing the following in order to use the property as a hotel:

1. Widen the front sidewalk that connects the driveway with the central entry sidewalk (this is to allow for a car to turn around and to face forward when leaving the driveway—this condition is required as part of the CUP approval. See C. BACKGROUND). This scoring pattern from the central sidewalk will be incorporated into the new design.
2. Elevate the grade along the western half of the front and side of the property and construct a sidewalk. This requires blocking in a basement window on the front façade and adding dirt/fill up the stone façade at the angle indicated on the plans. The applicant believes this elevated walkway can be installed without fully removing the large shrubs that are present on both sides of the entry landing.
3. Alter the stone wall surrounding the entry landing by cutting the west side to accommodate the elevated sidewalk at the front entry landing.
4. A sidewalk will be constructed around the west side of the property and will continue to the front to connect with the central entry walk.

C. BACKGROUND:

In order for the applicant to use the property as a hotel, a Conditional Use Permit with a parking variance is required. The Zoning Committee of the Planning Commission held a Public Hearing on August 28, 2014 and the Planning Commission then approved the CUP with several conditions. The decision was appealed and the City Council upheld the Planning Commission’s decision during a Public Hearing on October 15, 2014 with the following conditions (please note the City Council resolution has not been formally memorialized):

- 1) *A minimum of three off-street parking spaces must be provided on the property, subject to approval by the Heritage Preservation Commission.*
- 2) *The property will not be used as a reception hall, banquet facility or assembly hall.*

- 3) *The applicant will acquire all necessary and appropriate licenses and permits prior to establishing the use.*
- 4) *All exterior alterations to the structures and site must be approved by the Heritage Preservation Commission.*
- 5) *No food or beverage service is to be offered to the general public.*
- 6) *Changes to the driveway to provide for all non-commercial vehicles to exit forward onto Summit Avenue.*
- 7) *All commercial vehicles providing delivery or services must be accommodated on site, without blocking travel, parking or bicycle lanes, or the public sidewalk.*
- 8) *All site work to accommodate conditions for this use must be approved by the appropriate entities and completed before the use is established.*

The HPC reviewed this proposal during a Public Hearing on November 20, 2014 and voted 8-2 to continue the hearing in order to provide additional information. The decision letter states that in order to be scheduled for an upcoming HPC meeting the following items must be completed/submitted:

1. *A meeting of all parties-zoning, plan review, building official, historic preservation staff and the applicant's architect and preservation consultant-shall be scheduled to discuss the exterior proposal within the context of the interior layout and function.*
2. *A written evaluation be prepared by a preservation architect showing that all possible accessible routes into the first level of the house have been fully explored and the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation have been taken into account. The written evaluation shall follow the recommendations and considerations outlined in Preservation Brief #32: Making Historic Properties Accessible. Work shall not commence on the interior until an appropriate exterior solution is approved by the HPC, because an appropriate solution for exterior access may require interior modifications to the current plans in the Department of Safety and Inspections. If you choose not to hire a preservation consultant or architect, then provide information that your current architect meets the Professional Qualification Standards by the Secretary of the Interior for Historic Architecture.*
3. *Submit site plans showing the existing grading and the proposed grading.*
4. *Upon receipt of item 1, 2 and 3 above, which may then facilitate revised drawings, HPC staff will schedule the hearing on an HPC meeting agenda following applicable deadlines for materials.*

The applicant submitted materials requested in items #2 and #3 on December 30, 2014. Staff responded to that submittal on January 16, 2015 informing that the proposal was scheduled for the January 22nd HPC meeting but then responded the item would be withdrawn. Mainly, because not all the information requested was complete, item #1 had not yet occurred, and an HPC decision would have been premature given there was still no resolution of the parking requirements and meeting the conditions of the Planning Commission.

A meeting was then held with various city staff, the owner and architect (#1) in DSI on January 22, 2015. Parking was discussed and determined that stacked parking with one accessible spot on the existing driveway would be acceptable. During that time, the owner and building official discussed many items related to building, fire and accessibility codes for the interior and exterior areas. On March 31st the owner asked what was needed in order to be scheduled for the April HPC meeting. Staff responded and the applicant provided responses (included in the packet) to those questions on March 31st and the item would be scheduled/continued at the April 23rd hearing.

D. GUIDELINE CITATIONS:

The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation:

1. *A property will be used as it was historically or be given a new use that requires minimal changes to its distinctive materials, features, spaces, and spatial relationships.*

2. *The historic character of a property will be retained and preserved. The removal of distinctive materials or alteration of features, spaces, and spatial relationships that characterize a property will be avoided.*
3. *Each property will be recognized as a physical record of its time, place, and use. Changes that create a false sense of historical development, such as adding conjectural features or elements from other historic properties, will not be undertaken.*
4. *Changes to a property that have acquired historic significance in their own right will be retained and preserved.*
5. *Distinctive materials, features, finishes, and construction techniques or examples of craftsmanship that characterize a property will be preserved.*
6. *Deteriorated historic features will be repaired rather than replaced. Where the severity of deterioration requires replacement of a distinctive feature, the new feature will match the old in design, color, texture, and, where possible, materials. Replacement of missing features will be substantiated by documentary and physical evidence.*
7. *Chemical or physical treatments, if appropriate, will be undertaken using the gentlest means possible. Treatments that cause damage to historic materials will not be used.*
8. *Archeological resources will be protected and preserved in place. If such resources must be disturbed, mitigation measures will be undertaken.*
9. *New additions, exterior alterations, or related new construction will not destroy historic materials, features, and spatial relationships that characterize a property. The new work shall be differentiated from the old and will be compatible with the historic materials, features, size, scale and proportion, and massing to protect the integrity of the property and its environment.*
10. *New additions and adjacent or related new construction will 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.*

Historic Hill Heritage Preservation District 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.*

(b) *Masonry and Foundations:*

(1) *Whenever possible, original masonry and mortar should be retained without the application of any surface treatment. Masonry should be cleaned only when necessary to halt deterioration and always with the gentlest method possible, such as low-pressure water and soft natural bristle brushes. Brick and stone surfaces should not be sandblasted because it erodes the surface of the material and accelerates deterioration. Chemical cleaning products which could have an adverse chemical reaction with the masonry material should not be used.*

(2) *Original mortar joint size and profile should be retained and replacement mortar should match the original mortar in color and texture. Materials and ingredient proportions similar to the original mortar should be used when repointing, with replacement mortar softer than the masonry units and no harder than the historic mortar. This will create a bond similar to the original and is necessary to prevent damage to the masonry units. Repointing with mortar of high portland cement content often creates a bond stronger than is appropriate for the original building materials, possibly resulting in cracking or other damage. Mortar joints should be carefully washed after setup to retain the neatness of the joint lines and keep extraneous mortar off of masonry surfaces.*

(3) *The original color and texture of masonry surfaces should be retained. While unpainted masonry surfaces should not be painted, paint should not be indiscriminately removed from masonry surfaces because some brick surfaces were originally meant to be painted.*

(f) Porches and Exterior Architectural Features:

(1) *Decorative architectural features such as cornices, brackets, railings, and those around front doors and windows should be preserved. New material used to repair or replace, where necessary, deteriorated architectural features of wood, iron, cast iron, terracotta, tile and brick should match the original as closely as possible.*

(2) *Decorative architectural features such as cornices, brackets, railings, and those around front doors and windows should be preserved. New material used to repair or replace, where necessary, deteriorated architectural features of wood, iron, cast iron, terracotta, tile and brick should match the original as closely as possible.*

(3) *Shutters should not be used on buildings not designed for them. If used, they should be large enough to cover the entire window area, should be functional and operable, and should not look as if they were simply flat-mounted on the wall.*

(4) *Deck and firestair additions may be acceptable in some cases, but should be kept to the rear of buildings where they will be the most inconspicuous and detract the least from the historical context. The detailing of decks and exterior stairs should be compatible with the period and style of the building.*

(f) *Site:*

(2) *Landscaping: a. Typically, open space in the Historic Hill District is divided into public, semipublic, semiprivate and private space. The public space of the street and sidewalk is often distinguished from the semipublic space of the front yard by a change in grade, a low hedge or a visually open fence. The buildings, landscaping elements in front yards, and boulevard trees together provide a "wall of enclosure" for the street "room." Generally, landscaping which respects the street as a public room is encouraged. Enclosures which allow visual penetration of semipublic spaces, such as wrought-iron fences, painted picket fences, low hedges or limestone retaining walls, are characteristic of most of the Historic Hill area. This approach to landscaping and fences is encouraged in contrast to complete enclosure of semipublic space by an opaque fence, a tall "weathered wood" fence or tall hedgerows. Cyclone fence should not be used in front yards or in the front half of side yards. Landscape timber should not be used for retaining walls in front yards.*

b. For the intimate space of a shallow setback, ground covers and low shrubs will provide more visual interest and require less maintenance than grass. When lots are left vacant as green space or parking area, a visual hole in the street "wall" may result. Landscape treatment can eliminate this potential problem by providing a wall of enclosure for the street. Boulevard trees mark a separation between the automobile corridor and the rest of the streetscape and should be maintained.

(3) *Garages and parking: b. Parking spaces should not be located in front yards. Residential parking spaces should be located in rear yards. Parking lots for commercial uses should be to the side or rear of commercial structures and have a minimum number of curb cuts. All parking spaces should be adequately screened from the street and sidewalk by landscaping. The scale of parking lots should be minimized and the visual sweep of pavement should be broken up by use of planted areas. The scale, level of light output and design of parking lot lighting should be compatible with the character of the district.*

E. FINDINGS:

1. On April 2, 1991, the most recent expansion of the Hill Heritage Preservation District was established under Ordinance No. 17815, § 3(II). The Legislative Code states 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).
2. The property is categorized as Pivotal to the local, State and National Register Hill Historic Districts.
3. *Elevated Walkway.* Elevating the walkway and grade against the primary façade and removing a portion of the stone wall at the front entry do not comply with General Principles (1), (2) and (10) under Leg. Code §74.64.
4. Principle (1) states that, "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." Originally the use was for a single family house and more recently was occupied by the College of Visual Arts for offices and classrooms. The applicant is proposing to use the building as a small hotel. Because this is a new category of use for the building, a conditional use permit is required and there are other requirements with respect to fire, building and accessibility codes. Elevating the grade along the principal façade of the building and removing a portion of the stone entry wall is not a "minimal alteration to the building." The grade does slope from the north to the south (front to back) which poses a challenge for adding a ramp to the rear or the side of the property.

5. Principle (2) states that *“The distinguishing original qualities or character of a building, structure, or site and its environment shall not be destroyed.”* The removal of the stone entry wall destroys a character-defining feature of the main entrance and this removal along with adding fill against the stone façade will not allow for the alteration to be removed without impairing the original features (Principle 10). This could be minimized or mitigated by building a ramp that does not result in changing the grade or covering up the existing exposed stone wall with water table with fill. A free-standing ramp that abuts the wall could be installed in a way that if removed in the future would not alter the front façade. The original landing height and material at this entrance has already been altered in the past. It has been raised to match the door threshold height.
6. The National Park Service Preservation Brief #32 on making historic properties accessible recommends a three-step approach to identify and implement accessibility modifications that will protect the integrity and historic character of historic properties:
 1. *Review the historical significance of the property and identify character-defining features;*
 2. *Assess the property's existing and required level of accessibility; and*
 3. *Evaluate accessibility options within a preservation context.*

The background section of this report and additional information submitted by the applicant addresses impacts that would result by constructing an access ramp or an enclosed lift at the other principle entrance on the east elevation. However, the report doesn't fully explore other options such as installing a lift on the interior or altering a window to become a door allowing level access.

7. *Parking.* Leg. Code §74.64(g)(3) states that parking should not be located in front yards, and when in side yards should be adequately screened by landscaping. The applicant proposes to use the existing driveway for parking which doesn't require any physical changes to the driveway to accommodate the proposed parking. Because the sidewalk extension will follow the pattern of the sidewalk and not the driveway, there will be minimal impact and no historic fabric affected. The sidewalk extension will be used as an auto turn-around. The proposed radiuses from the driveway should be modified to be more traditional in shape and less like an auto apron. This area should only be used for turning and not for parking as indicated in the guidelines.
8. *At Grade Sidewalks.* The proposal to widen the at grade sidewalk between the driveway and central entry sidewalk, and install an at grade sidewalk around the west side and front of the property will not have an adverse effect for the Program for the Preservation and architectural control of the Historic Hill Heritage Preservation District (Leg. Code §73.06 (e)).
9. The proposal to remove a portion of the stone wall at the entry landing and construct an elevated sidewalk against the front of the house will adversely affect the Program for the Preservation and architectural control of the Historic Hill Heritage Preservation District (Leg. Code §73.06 (e)). However, the proposed location of the ramp appears to be the better option when compared to what historic fabric would be required to be altered in order to accommodate a ramp and the visual impacts. The design of the ramp in its current location could be changed and would have greater reversibility and less damage to the stone façade.

E. STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Based on the findings, staff recommends approval of city permits to install a permanent accessible ramp, provided the conditions below are met:

1. The proposed location of a ramp along the front/primary elevation is accepted, however, the following conditions will mitigate loss of historic fabric, visual impacts and reversibility:
 - a. The grade shall not be altered and raised along the front stone elevation. The window well shall not be filled in but the basement window may be blocked in

- (with an approved material) provided there is a reveal/recess from the stone wall to recall the original window opening. This area will be properly graded and protected from drainage.
- b. The ramp shall be redesigned, still as a permanent structure, so that if removed, the only restoration work would be infilling the historic stone on the entry wall/railing.
 - c. The ramp shall be of a compatible and reversible material (painted if metal or wood) that can be installed up to the stone wall but not affixed to the wall, rather affixed with footings as required by code. The railing shall not be a solid structure but rather supported by posts.
 - d. The railing will be installed only where necessary (i.e. ramp height from grade) and will be designed to be visually light and to blend with the color of the stone. This may mean only a grip-able hand rail with a curb and not a full guardrail. The railing will be painted metal to blend with the stone color.
 - e. In this case, visual screening of the ramp will be allowed to be the existing mature shrubs. If the shrubs are damaged during the ramp construction, then replacement shrubs shall be required of an appropriate size and be maintained as screening.
 - f. The stone removed to accommodate the opening for the ramp shall be stored in a dry and secure location at the site with photo documentation before, during and after removal. The final treatment for the "cut" stone edges shall be submitted to staff for review and approval.
2. The architect shall meet with HPC staff and the Building Official to discuss the final ramp design prior to revising the drawings.
 3. All final materials, colors and products specifications shall be submitted to staff for final review and approval.
 4. A full size copy of the final construction plans submitted to the Department of Safety and Inspections for city permits shall be submitted to HPC staff.
 5. The HPC stamped approved construction level plans shall remain onsite for the duration of the project.
 6. Any changes or revisions to the approved HPC plans and city permits shall be submitted to the HPC and/or staff for review and approval.

F. ATTACHMENTS:

1. HPC design review application with photos and plans (submitted for 11-20-14 hearing)
2. Written testimony from 11-20-14 hearing
3. Additional information and grading plan dated 12-30-15
4. Correspondence dated 4-3-15 with additional information

For further reference on making historic properties accessible go to Preservation Brief #32 at:
<http://www.nps.gov/tps/how-to-preserve/briefs/32-accessibility.htm>