

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

FILE NAME: Western Avenue from Selby to Marshall
DATE OF APPLICATION: April 17, 2014 (revised)
APPLICANT: Department of Public Works–Traffic Division
DATE OF PUBLIC HEARING/PERMIT REVIEW:
HPC SITE/DISTRICT: Hill Historic District
CATEGORY: contributing
CLASSIFICATION: Right-of-Way permit
STAFF INVESTIGATION AND REPORT: Amy Spang
DATE: April 30, 2014

A. SITE DESCRIPTION:

The stretch of Western Avenue being proposed for reconstruction starts at the north side of Selby along Western and extends north to the south side of University Avenue, including the bridge over Highway 94. Two blocks of the reconstruction are within (at the edge) the locally designated Hill Heritage Preservation District, one block is along the west side of St. Joseph’s Academy which is both locally and nationally designated as an individual landmark and one block along the west side of the Old Home Food Building which is nationally designated but not locally and undergoing a rehabilitation with new development. This staff report and review focuses on the portion of the reconstruction within the Hill Heritage Preservation District.

Public Works staff have verified that there is no historic granite curbing, tile sidewalks or brick streets present along this stretch of Western. Both Selby and Western had streetcar lines and there would have been brick at a minimum in between the tracks. There are lantern lights that are similar to the historic lights that were approved by the HPC in 1997. The pattern of the street, curbs and boulevards are still in the same configuration and general dimensions. The sidewalks from Selby to Dayton are concrete from the curb to the building edge while the sidewalks from Dayton to Marshall have a grass boulevard and concrete sidewalk. Staff has verified that this condition is consistent with early photographs as the block from Selby to Dayton was more of a commercial node.

The National Register nomination describes this area of Ramsey Hill (north of Summit Avenue) as being the earliest of the areas in the National Register boundaries to be platted and therefore contains the largest concentration of early architectural examples. Structures generally fall within the time range of mid-1860s up to the late 1880s. The nomination states that many pre-turn of the century structures along Selby (a major early commercial and transportation corridor) were removed through urban renewal efforts with the exception of the Western-Selby node. The nomination describes this node as “a major pivotal axis which contains two structures of major significance” (The Blair House (Angus Hotel) and The Dakota (W.A. Frost)). Staff will show a map of the remaining contributing and non-contributing structures at the meeting.

B. PROPOSED CHANGES:

The Department of Public Works is proposing to reconstruct Western Avenue from the north side of Selby to the south side of University Avenue. The project will include:

- 1.Repaving the asphalt roadway with new asphalt and replacing the sidewalks with new concrete.
- 2.Installing a concrete integral curb and gutter. Currently there is an integral curb and gutter.
- 3.Reusing the existing lantern lights approved by the HPC under File #2915 in 1997.
- 4.Replacing all corner ADA (pedestrian) ramps to meet current standards.

5. Removing ash trees and diseased trees and planting new Lindens and Oaks in the location noted on the plans.
6. Adding curb bump-outs at both intersections of the north side of Selby/Western and at Dayton/Western. Adding a hex-tile pattern is proposed in the plans as part of the bump-outs.
7. Replacing the current concrete boulevard between Selby and Dayton with a grass boulevard.

The application outlines the goals for the reconstruction project to improve the safety and accessibility for non-motorized users as an arterial connection to the Western Avenue Station and to meet current ADA standards. The main alterations from the existing or historic character are the addition of the bump-outs, new ADA ramps that now require a metal plate with texture, and adding a grass boulevard where concrete was historically (and currently) with tree openings. Public Works cites the main reasons for the bump-outs are to prevent illegal parking in crosswalks, to decrease the pedestrian crossing distance and to slow traffic. Federal funds are being used for this project but because the reconstruction is adjacent to and not within the boundaries of the National Register Hill District, MN DOT determined that no historic properties are affected. They do not review or comment on any impacts to historic properties within the local Hill Historic District boundaries as that is the role of the HPC and adopted City code.

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.(g) Public infrastructure:

(1) The traditional pattern of public streets, curbs, boulevards and sidewalks in the area should be maintained. Distinctive features of public spaces in the area such as brick alleys, stone slab sidewalks, granite curbs and the early twentieth century lantern-style street lights should be preserved. The same style should be used when new street lights are installed. New street furniture such as benches, bus shelters, telephone booths, kiosks, sign standards, trash containers, planters and fences should be compatible with the character of the district.

(2) Brick alleys and stone slab sidewalks generally should be maintained and repaired as necessary with original materials; asphalt and concrete patches should not be used. When concrete tile public sidewalks need to be replaced, new poured concrete sidewalks should be the same width as the existing sidewalks and should be scored in a two-foot square or 18-inch square pattern to resemble the old tiles; expansion joints should match the scoring. Handicap ramps should be installed on the inside of curbs as part of the poured concrete sidewalk; where there is granite curbing, a section should be lowered for the ramp.

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

***The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation
U.S. Department of the Interior National Park Service (1990)***

****EXCERPT* District/Neighborhood***

Recommended:

-Identifying, retaining, and preserving buildings, and streetscape, and landscape features which are important in defining the overall historic character of the district or neighborhood. Such features can include streets, alleys, paving, walkways, street lights, signs, benches, parks and gardens, and trees.

-Retaining the historic relationship between buildings, and streetscape and landscape features such as a town square comprised of row houses and stores surrounding a communal park or open space.

-Protecting and maintaining the historic masonry, wood, and architectural metals which comprise building and streetscape features, through appropriate surface treatments such as cleaning, rust removal, limited paint removal, and reapplication of protective coating systems; and protecting and maintaining landscape features, including plant material.

-Protecting buildings, paving, iron fencing, etc. against arson and vandalism before rehabilitation work begins by erecting protective fencing and installing alarm systems that are keyed into local protection agencies.

-Evaluating the overall condition of building, streetscape and landscape materials to determine whether more than protection and maintenance are required, that is, if repairs to features will be necessary.

-Repairing features of the building, streetscape, or landscape by reinforcing the historic materials. Repair will also generally include the replacement in kind - or with a compatible substitute material - of those extensively deteriorated or missing parts of features when there are surviving prototypes such as porch balustrades, paving materials, or streetlight standards.

-Replacing in kind an entire feature of the building, streetscape, or landscape that is too deteriorated to repair - when the overall form and detailing are still evident - using the physical evidence to guide the new work. This could include a storefront, a walkway, or a garden. If using the same kind of material is not technically or economically feasible, then a compatible substitute material may be considered.

Design for Missing Historic Features

-Designing and constructing a new feature of the building streetscape, or landscape when the historic feature is completely missing, such as row house steps, a porch, streetlight, or terrace. It may be a restoration based on

historical, pictorial, and physical documentation; or be a new design that is compatible with the historic character of the district or neighborhood.

Alterations/Additions for the New Use

-Designing required new parking so that it is as unobtrusive as possible, i.e., on side streets or at the rear of buildings. Shared parking should also be planned so that several businesses' can utilize one parking area as opposed to introducing random, multiple lots.

-Designing and constructing new additions to historic buildings when required by the new use. New work should be compatible with the historic character of the district or neighborhood in terms of size, scale, design, material, color, and texture.

-Removing non-significant buildings, additions, or streetscape and landscape features which detract from the historic character of the district or the neighborhood.

Not Recommended:

-Removing or radically changing those features of the district or neighborhood which are important in defining the overall historic character so that, as a result, the character is diminished.

-Destroying streetscape and landscape features by widening existing streets, changing paving material, or introducing inappropriately located new streets or parking lots.

-Removing or relocating historic buildings, or features of the streetscape and landscape, thus destroying the historic relationship between buildings, features and open space.

-Failing to provide adequate protection of materials on a cyclical basis so that deterioration of building, streetscape, and landscape feature results.

-Permitting buildings to remain unprotected so that windows are broken; and interior features are damaged.

-Stripping features from buildings or the streetscape such as wood siding, iron fencing, or terra cotta balusters; or removing or destroying landscape features, including plant material.

-Failing to undertake adequate measures to assure the preservation of building, streetscape, and landscape features.

-Replacing an entire feature of the building, streetscape, or landscape such as a porch, walkway, or streetlight, when repair of materials and limited replacement of deteriorated or missing parts are appropriate.

-Using a substitute material for the replacement part that does not convey the visual appearance of the surviving parts of the building, streetscape, or landscape feature or that is physically or chemically incompatible.

-Removing a feature of the building, streetscape, or landscape that is unrepairable and not replacing it; or replacing it with a new feature that does not convey the same visual appearance.

Design for Missing Historic Features

-Creating a false historical appearance because the replaced feature is based on insufficient historical, pictorial and physical documentation.

-Introducing a new building, streetscape or landscape feature that is out of scale or otherwise inappropriate to the setting's historic character, e.g., replacing picket fencing with chain link fencing.

Alterations/Additions for the New Use

-Placing parking facilities directly adjacent to historic buildings which cause the removal of historic plantings, relocation of paths and walkways, or blocking of alleys.

-Introducing new construction into historic districts that is visually incompatible or that destroys historic relationships within the district or neighborhood.

-Removing a historic building, building feature, or landscape or streetscape feature that is important in defining the overall historic character of the district or the neighborhood.

D. FINDINGS

1. Public streetscape features, such as street patterns, curbs, sidewalks, lights and alleys, all contribute to the character of the Hill Heritage Preservation District.
2. On April 2, 1991, the Historic Hill Heritage Preservation District was established under Ordinance No. 17815, § 3(II). The City's 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). Heritage Preservation Sites is defined as including individual sites and districts.
3. In 1995 and 1996, the City established a Department of Public Works Neighborhoods Task Force that focused on improved communication among Public Works, neighborhoods, property owners and the HPC and standards when maintenance, reconstruction, and renovation of historic streets are proposed. The outcome was "*A Report on Policies for Preserving Saint Paul's Historic Streets, January 1996*" (1996 Report) which included recommended preservation policies for infrastructure projects, specifically within established historic districts. Pages 8 and 9 of this report are included and provide further direction, in addition to the adopted guidelines in the City's Legislative Code (Section C above). Staff is not aware of any additional policy discussions for streetscape projects within historic districts that involved the HPC. The application mentions the current drafting of the "*Saint Paul Street Design Manual*" however that has not been adopted as part of the City's Comprehensive Plan or reviewed by the HPC. The public review and comment process is being planned.

Bump-outs.

4. **Sec. 74.65(g)(1) Public Infrastructure:** The guidelines state that "*the traditional pattern of public streets, curbs, boulevards and sidewalks in the area should be maintained.*" The 1996 Report states "*Traditional street grids should be preserved*" and "*Changes in street and boulevard design (e.g. parking bays and bump-outs) should be considered only after all other options have been rejected.*" The existing street pattern with the proposed bump-outs along Western Avenue will be altered by this proposal and does not comply with this guideline. The bump-outs are not designed in a way that if *removed in the future, the essential form and integrity of the structure would be unimpaired* as they are integral with the sidewalk and boulevard. All solutions to increase safety while preserving the historic character and integrity of the streetscape should be explored before resorting to altering the historic pattern. Western Avenue was an early streetcar route and the commercial node at Selby and Western is significant as stated in the National Register nomination. It is therefore a "character-defining feature." Moving north on Western, is the edge of the local Hill Historic District boundaries so bump-outs may have less of a negative impact on the District's character and integrity.

Materials and Details.

4. **Sec. 74.65.(g)(2) Public infrastructure:** The guidelines states "*When concrete tile public sidewalks need to be replaced, new poured concrete sidewalks should be the same width as the existing sidewalks and should be scored in a two-foot square or 18-inch square pattern to resemble the old tiles; expansion joints should match the scoring. Handicap ramps should be installed on the inside of curbs as part of the poured concrete sidewalk; where there is granite curbing, a section should be lowered for the ramp.*" According to Public Works staff there are no longer granite curbs present or tile sidewalks and the current ADA ramps do not have lowered granite which was studied and approved by the HPC as an acceptable method as part of the 1996 Report and as recommended in the adopted guidelines.

Staff researched the historic sidewalks and found evidence of square tiles along Western Avenue. Given that there are no historic materials visibly present, the proposal will not result in the loss of distinguishing materials and complies with **Sec. 74.64. (a) General Principles (2), (4) and (5)** with the exception of changing the concrete boulevard between Selby and Dayton to grass which alters the commercial character of this important

transportation node. Scoring a tile pattern along the new sidewalks would bring back an historic feature that is missing which is recommended by the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation and states *"It may be a restoration based on historical, pictorial, and physical documentation; or be a new design that is compatible with the historic character of the district or neighborhood."*

The proposed hex-tile pattern within the new bump-outs does not comply with the Standards which do not recommend *"Creating a false historical appearance because the replaced feature is based on insufficient historical, pictorial and physical documentation"* and *"Introducing a new building, streetscape or landscape feature that is out of scale or otherwise inappropriate to the setting's historic character."* Public Works and HPC staff discussed this before HPC staff was able to conduct additional research. Staff found evidence of square tiles and not hex-tiles. Also, installing them in bump-outs that were not historically present creates a false historical appearance.

Street Lights.

5. The current street lights are from 1997 and mimic the historic street lanterns present throughout the Hill Historic District. The proposal to reuse these lights complies with the HPC approval from 1997 under File #2915 and the applicable guidelines.

Street Trees.

6. There are already street trees present along the two blocks within the Hill Historic District. Diseased and ash trees will be removed and replaced with two varieties Sentry Linden and Regal Prince Oak. Both species have very dense foliage with is often not recommended for placement in front of historic facades. HPC staff and Forestry staff should discuss appropriate tree types that have a less dense coverage and ones that are hardy enough to grow in a planting area that does not extend the entire length of the block between Selby and Dayton.

Integral Curbs and Gutter.

7. Historically, Ramsey Hill streets had granite or sandstone curbs and the brick streets abutted the granite curbs. A Standard City Curb does not have an integral gutter and visually conveys a similar look and condition as the historic stone curbs with the street abutting. These are present elsewhere within the Hill District. At some point an integral concrete curb and gutter was installed along this stretch of Western Avenue. Given there is no historic granite or sandstone remaining and there is already a visually changed condition, using a new integral curb and gutter will not have a negative impact. The use of a Standard City Curb, however, at the Selby/Western intersection will bring back a feature that is missing which is recommended by the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation and states *"It may be a restoration based on historical, pictorial, and physical documentation; or be a new design that is compatible with the historic character of the district or neighborhood."*

8. The proposal to reconstruct Western Avenue within the boundaries of the Hill Heritage Preservation District will not adversely affect the Program for the Preservation and architectural control of the Historic Hill Heritage Preservation District (Leg. Code §73.06 (e)) as long as the proposed conditions are met.

E. STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Based on the findings, staff recommends approval of the permit to reconstruct Western Avenue provided the following conditions are met:

1. Given the guidelines and historic significance of the intersection at Selby and Western--both because of significant landmarks present and the early development and pattern of Selby and Western as transportation/streetcar corridors, no bump-outs will be installed at Selby. Bump-outs are allowed at Dayton Avenue within the Hill District and HPC and PW staff shall discuss the possibility of reducing the size of the extension for the bump-out in order to reduce its impact to the Historic District.

2. No hex-tiles will be installed within the bump-outs but a simple concrete with standard expansion joints will be installed. A final scoring design shall be submitted to staff for final review and approval.
3. A continuous grass boulevard will not be installed between Selby and Dayton given the early and current commercial node character. HPC and Forestry staff shall discuss inserting an appropriate number of trees and species that will minimize the size of the standard openings within the concrete. The species shall also have less dense foliage. A wider sidewalk will also allow for flexibility should the use of the historic storefront buildings change (ie. Sidewalk patios or display of goods).
4. The standard ADA ramps are acceptable at all intersections given there is no granite present.
5. Public Works staff shall explore the ability (technically and financially) to saw cut the sidewalks into a square tile pattern within only the two block sections of the Hill Historic District. Discuss with HPC staff and submit a final scoring plan if this is feasible.
6. If clay bricks are present beneath the current road, Public Works and HPC staff should discuss the feasibility of salvaging and reusing brick for the planned reconstruction of Maiden Lane and Virginia Streets.