



Milwaukee Historic Preservation Commission Staff Report

LIVING WITH HISTORY

HPC meeting date: 4/10/2017
Ald. Robert Bauman District: 4
Staff reviewer: Tim Askin & Carlen Hatala
PTS #114238 CCF #161669

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| Property | 790 N. VAN BUREN ST., Wisconsin Consistory of the Scottish Rite | |
| Owner/Applicant | TRUSTEES, ANCIENT ACCEPTED SCOTTISH RITE, VALLEY OF MILWAUKEE 790 N VAN BUREN ST MILWAUKEE WI 53202 | Eric Nordeen Ascendant Holdings 324 E Wisconsin Ave Suite 1010 Milwaukee, WI 53202 Phone: (414) 299-4880 |

Proposal

Applicant requests to remove all of the large figural stained glass windows on the first and second floors and store them on site. There are 18 such windows. Transoms and side lites with stained glass at the entries will be retained.

Staff comments

As part of their earlier application, the applicants requested to remove all stained glass windows, which was effectively denied when the tower addition was approved in February. "Independent of interior uses ... the stained glass is important and ... work with staff to arrive at a suitable solution for that stained glass with a strong preference for retaining it in its historic location."

Historical and Comparative Notes

Freemasonry is a diverse organization with various sub-bodies such as Scottish Rite, York Rite, and Shriners. Scottish Rite is specifically defined as a higher level of Freemasonry. Ordinary free masonry stops at the degree of Master Mason, or the Third Degree. One must already be a Master Mason to join Scottish Rite where one can continue to the Thirty-third Degree.

In limited comparative research conducted by staff, stained glass windows appear to be a feature of the higher level Scottish Rite buildings. Pure clear glazing is more common in buildings designed for standard masonic buildings. Nonetheless, According to the Los Angeles Conservancy "many buildings for Masonic orders appear to be nearly window-less, creating an aura of secrecy," and therefore these stained glass windows may have been part of a design intent to be fulfilled after completion. Furthermore, Churches, much like the Scottish Rite building, have traditionally not been built with stained glass windows in place at building completion, but were introduced as money and donors allowed.

Scottish Rite buildings in other Midwestern cities, namely Wichita and Indianapolis, have managed to become successful event spaces without sacrificing figural stained glass windows. It is also not unheard of for Scottish Rite masons to convert a church for their purposes as the Scottish Rite of Minneapolis have done the same as Milwaukee.

Window Description

The windows are admittedly fairly dark and often religious in nature with Biblical quotes and Biblical figures. Some are less sectarian and generally medieval, but likely depict the Crusades as a reference to Masonic mythology about the Knights Templar. Some windows are strictly masonic, for example, a full window George Washington. Others are blended such as the Scottish Rite double-headed eagle above INRI, a Maltese cross, and a Masonic compass.

The majority of the windows here cannot pre-date 1938, but all seem to have been installed by 1950.

Outcomes

Staff feels there are four possible outcomes for this proposal:

1. Complete denial, all windows must stay in their existing locations.
2. Shuffle and relocate windows within existing openings or new rooftop spaces, but keep all on exterior display.
 - a. There are currently clear-glazed windows that could be swapped with stained glass windows. This would allow various rooms to have at least one clear-glazed opening. Some could be incorporated into the proposed rooftop biergarten, such that they would technically remain an exterior feature and therefore subject to review by the commission. This would allow selective removal from existing locations.
 - b. This seems to be the most reasonable option, as most of the windows appear to be individual works of art and not grouped in any meaningful manner. However, this is based on a cursory inspection and there may be meaning to the groupings upon closer inspection or even that are apparent only to Masons.
3. Selective removal, requiring a certain percentage to stay in their locations. This may also include relocating some of the windows within the existing clear-glazed openings and incorporation to new glazing. This may initially seem to be a reasonable compromise, but staff feels this would set an untenable precedent.
4. Grant removal of all windows. Staff feels this would set an unfortunate precedent for numerous other buildings under HPC jurisdiction. Churches have approached the Commission in the past to remove windows and been denied permission.

Recommendation

Recommend Denial or Approval with conditions. Because of the potential for precedent and the previous directive from the commission, staff can only recommend full denial or allowing windows to be moved, but kept on permanent exterior display (outcome 2).

Conditions

If the Commission chooses not to require the retention of all windows, staff requests that the Commission issue an explicit directive about the number or percentage of windows to be saved in their present location, relocated for continued exterior display, or otherwise. This would set a strong precedent and the Commission should carefully note that it cannot mandate retention of the windows once they are removed and cannot mandate interior display.

If any windows are to be removed and not restored to permanent public exterior display, all of the windows should be professionally photo-documented and researched as a condition of the removal.

Previous HPC action

Tower addition and temporary historic designation were approved at the February meeting.

The relevant portion of the motion by Blair Williams at the February meeting was as follows: "I'm going to move approval...subject to staff conditions that for the stained glass I choose to agree that independent of interior uses that the stained glass is important and that you work with staff to arrive at a suitable solution for that stained glass with a strong preference for retaining it in its historic location."

Previous Council action

Permanent Historic Designation is held to the call of the chair at ZND.