



Milwaukee Historic Preservation Commission Staff Report

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HPC meeting date: 9/11/2017
Ald. Nik Kovac District: 3
Staff reviewer: Tim Askin
PTS #114357 CCF #170674

Property 1945 N. BARTLETT AV. **Firehouse No. 5 / Ladder Co. No. 5**

Owner/Applicant JALEM GETZ The Consortium AE, LLC
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Proposal Convert property to residential use, initially to single family, but containing features allowing the option for a duplex conversion in the future.

The project involves:

The rehabilitation of the Bartlett Avenue elevation with new painted wood doors and windows, cleaning and tuck pointing of brick masonry;

The rehabilitation of the Irving Place elevation with new painted wood windows, cleaning and tuck pointing of brick masonry, elimination of ghost sign, replacement of missing decorative gable pediment, restoration of hay loft beam, doors and a safety railing (French balcony), landscaping between the City sidewalk and building, removal of concrete walk/pediment at building rear and replacement with decorative iron gated entry and paver covered concrete walk to ground floor entrance;

The rehabilitation of the rear elevation, cleaning and tuck-pointing of brick masonry, new painted replacement wood doors and windows, addition of a new balcony (iron railing) and new door/transom balcony access;

The rehabilitation of the SW elevation (not street visible), cleaning and tuck-pointing of brick masonry, new painted replacement wood window and new window and opening in 2nd floor bedroom;

New construction consists of a Rooftop (third floor) penthouse addition set back from parapets on Irving Place and Bartlett Ave elevations. It is designed as a clearly modern addition with metal panel cladding and extensive fenestration. It will also incorporate rooftop decks at the front and rear, but not on the Irving (north) elevation.

Site work to include: the restoration of the parkway between the street curb and sidewalk to a greenway and replacement of paving infill between building and Irving Place sidewalk with landscape plantings.

Staff comments Sebastian Brand's Milwaukee Fire House Ladder Company No 5 building is located at the south corner of Bartlett Avenue and Irving Place. Construction was completed in 1886 and it was closed as a firehouse in 1914. For the next decade, it was used occasionally for social services and storage. It was sold to a storage company in 1924 and has remained in that use to this day. It is a long-neglected building that has never had any kind of plumbing because of its early abandonment as inhabited building.

(cont.)

Staff comments (cont.)

The new owner desires to rehabilitate the building, bringing back most of its original exterior condition. He will also convert the use to a personal residence with the potential for later duplex conversion.

The project is not tax-credit eligible, so all decision-making rests with this Commission.

Guidelines and Restoration of Lost Features

The specific guidelines for this property suggest that neither deep masonry cleaning nor a penthouse should be allowed. However, on balance, there are great pains being taken to rehabilitate the property. This includes restoring long-lost features based on photographic evidence such as a proper firehouse garage door, block and tackle for the hayloft, and the north false gable.

Penthouse

A substantial rooftop addition is proposed with 900sf footprint within the building's 2200sf footprint. The stair tower already exists as a freight elevator shaft. The elevator will be removed and replaced with a circular staircase to address egress issues, though the tower will remain.

- The proposed cladding appears much too reflective as currently proposed. It is understood that it weathers to a less reflective state, however, staff would request that the patinated version be used initially, known as the "Pre-Patina II" finish. The unpatinated finish is reminiscent of Gehry's Los Angeles Concert Hall.
- Two membrane options are proposed for the roof. Both are acceptable.
- Staff recommends approval with an increase in setback at the northeast corner, rounding or clipping said corner, and using the patinated finish on the cladding.
- Staff would prefer the fire door exiting the stair tower to the south have a less modern commercial appearance and not have the slit-style glazing typical in these doors.

Rehabilitation of Existing Building

Balconies

Two balconies are proposed. One is on the rear and the other does not project and allows the hayloft door to be operable with modern residential codes. The addition of the two balconies is a reasonable accommodation to the new use.

Windows

Original windows are simple 1/1s, applicant requests one new window on the second floor of the south elevation. A neighbor has objected to the new opening, but staff does not object to this new opening. This new window is acceptable as it is a secondary elevation and assists in converting that portion of the building to a legal bedroom. Two bricked in rear windows will be reopened with replacement windows with new wood 1/1 windows.

Hayloft

Applicant requests to replace the existing, historic, hayloft doors with full-height glazed commercial style doors. Staff's strong preference is to repair the existing doors, as they appear to be one of only two original doors. Replication of the existing door can be reviewed by staff after inspection by staff and a bid for repair from a qualified carpenter. *Replacement doors with full-height glazing would change substantially alter the building's essence as firehouse from the era of horse drawn fire apparatus.* Staff would accept, as an alternative, flipping the existing doors upside down and inserting glazing into the top panel (shown in presentation). Restoration of the block and tackle is encouraged.

Doors

Both doors on the Bartlett façade will be replaced with replicas of the originals based on photographic evidence. Two new doors will be installed on the rear façade, filling existing openings. The door to the balcony will be full-height glazed with a transom. Design for the grade-level door is still pending. This door can be staff approved if it has minimal glazing.

North Gable

The restoration of the north gable is mostly acceptable as proposed. The design is appropriate, based on limited photographic evidence. As the photographic evidence is limited, special care will have to be taken to make it clear that is a reproduction. This can be accomplished by using a slightly different mortar color or using modern cream brick instead of salvaged original brick.

Cleaning

Applicant would like to clean the brick chemically. While this is not strictly in line with the building's guidelines, it is reasonable as part of a rehabilitation approach. The ghost signage is not compatible with the effort to restore the building's appearance as a firehouse. A comment from a neighbor requests that the south elevation not be cleaned because of the extremely tight lot lines. Staff suggests respecting this request at least in part by not cleaning the south elevation west of the chimney. The neighbor's front setback is sufficient that this area can be cleaned without significant interference to his enjoyment of his adjoining property.

Landscaping

Approve with condition that there are no structures and plants are no taller than 18". Otherwise, submit landscape plan.

Recommendation

Recommend HPC Approval with conditions

Conditions

1. Increase setback of the penthouse from northeast corner; clip or round off northeast corner of penthouse and its roof.
2. Lower new roofline at rear to match stairwell roof or encircle stair tower with new cornice.
3. Penthouse south door should be changed to something other than a standard fire door with slit glazing. It is too much of a modern commercial feature, even for use on the penthouse addition
4. Eliminate varnished wood from rear elevation and use paint/opaque stain if retaining wood, or use another material.
5. Masonry cleaning requires a city permit and on site evaluation of test panels by staff before cleaning will be approved.
6. Retain and repair existing hayloft doors. If requested by applicant, replication of the existing door can be reviewed by staff after inspection by staff and a bid for repair from a qualified carpenter.
7. Submit shop drawings for all new windows, doors, and railings
8. Submit landscape plan for review by staff, if it involves any retaining walls, structures, or plants exceed 18” at mature height.
9. Submit structural plans to staff. Tie-in to the existing building is not clear.
10. Formal mortar testing is strongly encouraged.
11. Test panels of mortar for tuckpointing and their chemical composition must be reviewed by staff before construction begins.
12. Reconstruction of north gable must be differentiated in materials from original building, see above.
13. Standard masonry conditions:
New mortar must match the original mortar in terms of color, texture, joint width, and joint finish/profile. Mortar that is too hard is subject to premature failure and could damage the masonry. In most cases this means a lime mortar with natural hydraulic cement rather than Portland cement. No joint of a width less than 3/8” may be cleaned of damaged/decomposed mortar with power disc grinders. No over-cutting of the joints is permitted. Remove decomposed mortar back into the wall 2.5 times the height of the joint for tuckpointing. New brick must match as closely as possible the color texture, size, and finish of the original brick.

Non-regulatory polite requests:

- Recommend having the cornice be painted a contrasting color from that of the cream brick
- Consider patching interior fire pole holes in a way that shows the original location and diameter with an outline.
- Recommend not cleaning the south elevation west of the chimney.

Previous HPC action Designated individually in 2003

Previous Council action Designated individually in 2003