



Milwaukee Historic Preservation Commission Staff Report

LIVING WITH HISTORY

HPC meeting date: 7/12/2021
Ald. Robert Bauman District: 4
Staff reviewer: Tim Askin
PTS #115165 CCF # 210363

Property	924 E. WELLS ST.	University Club
Owner/Applicant	UNIVERSITY CLUB OF MILWAUKEE 924 E WELLS ST MILWAUKEE WI 53202	Quorum Architects 3112 W Highland Blvd Milwaukee, WI 53208

Proposal

The University Club of Milwaukee was built in 1926 and designed by architect John Russell Pope in a Georgian style. At the time the building was five stories with a sixth-floor penthouse. Between 1953 and 1954 the sixth floor was added around the existing penthouse and does not adhere to the style of the main building; however, it was of its time. With this vertical penthouse addition (now sixth floor), the builders converted a portion of the sloped and recessed roof into usable space. The addition preserved a portion of the existing sloped copper roof. The penthouse was clad in copper sheets similar to the material used for the existing standing seam copper hip roof. The windows were of modern mill-finished aluminum construction that was in use during that period. Flanking the fixed windows are pivot sashes in aluminum frames. The existing framings are not insulated, and the glass and pivot sash seals have not held up over time. The existing sixth floor windows do not match with any historic precedent of the main building.

The proposed design is to remove the non-historic windows as noted on the plans, and replace with an energy-efficient, thermally broken system with operable stacking panels to allow the windows to be fully opened and the panels stored at the end(s) of the opening(s). The proposed new custom window system would replace the existing windows without changing the size of the existing openings. The new windows would respect the location of the existing pipe columns in the window mullion pattern. The sliding and stacking system allows for fully open windows for an indoor-outdoor feel to the space without altering the historic roof. The finish of the new custom window system would be painted a green color to match the copper patina of the existing roof.

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The 1950s rooftop addition presents an architectural challenge. It is not entirely disharmonious. It feels like the architects were trying to add an art deco touch that should have been in the original design, but was not done in a preference for extreme historicization. The primary homage the penthouse has to the main building is that its footprint is shaped like much of the windows on the lower floors.

The rooftop bar windows appear to be the only windows "original" to the building at this point. All others appear to have been replaced prior to our designation of the property. The rooftop windows are, nonetheless, not fulfilling their purpose. They have functionally failed for both operability and weatherproofing. Metal windows from the 1950s, particularly pivot windows, are not noted for their durability.

Staff comments

The existing windows can generally be described as Chicago windows with cottage sash sidelights. The bottom sash of the sidelights operates by pivot on a vertical axis. This is an extremely unusual configuration. If this proposal were a closer replication of the original window layouts, it would be brought before the Commission. The general case for replacement has been made. The question presented is one of appropriateness and the significance of the addition.

The present proposal is comparable to a Nanawall, which the Commission has traditionally regarded with caution. Window replacement guidelines for the property seem geared toward the lower floors, but are unequivocal with the following statement: "Respect the building's stylistic period. If the replacement of doors or window sash is necessary, the replacement should duplicate the appearance and design, material and profiles of the original window sash or door. Avoid using inappropriate sash and door replacements. ... Avoid using modern style window units, such as horizontal sliding sash or casements, in place of double-hung sash or the substitution of units with glazing configurations not appropriate to the style of the building."

Under this statement, the proposal does not meet the guidelines. However, for the Prospect Avenue frontage, what is presently proposed may well have been considered originally, had the technology existed.

For the south and west openings, a more traditional Chicago window appearance would make more sense with the character of the addition. This look could readily be achieved with four casements per opening and narrower sidelights. The Chicago Architecture Foundation's illustration for their definition of "Chicago window" provides a perfect illustration of how to accomplish this (shown below). <https://www.architecture.org/learn/resources/architecture-dictionary/entry/chicago-window/>

Recommendation

Window replacement is justified. Aluminum replacement windows of some sort are the historically accurate approach. However, the proposal does not strictly meet the guidelines. Increasing operability of the fenestration is reasonable and justified. A casement approach is probably more appropriate, particularly on the Wells frontage.

Conditions

Previous HPC action

Previous Council action

