



Milwaukee Historic Preservation Commission Staff Report

LIVING WITH HISTORY

HPC meeting date: 4/7/2005
Ald. Robert Bauman District: 4
Staff reviewer: Paul Jakubovich
PTS #7000

Property 925 W. WINNEBAGO ST.

Owner/Applicant
JUNEAU AVENUE PARTNERS LLC
Attention: Dan McCarthy
301 W. Wisconsin Ave., Suite 400
Milwaukee, WI 53203

Owner
BCR GROUP
Attention: James C. Haertel
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Wauwatosa, WI 53226

Proposal The applicants are petitioning to exempt most of the existing structures in the Pabst Brewery Historic District from guidelines pertaining to building rehabilitation, new construction, demolition, location of fire escapes, and signage. If adopted, the guidelines would apply only to buildings #9, 10, 20, 21, 27, 28, 29 and 35. The petition also seeks to delete all guidelines regarding streetscapes within the complex.

The petition seeks exemption for Buildings 1, 2 and 4 (Storage Cellars, dating from 1875 - 1933); Building 5 (Stock House, 1930); Building 6 (Fermenting and Storage, 1948); Building 7 (Yeast and Ale Plant, 1913); Building 8 (Rack Room and Finishing Cellar, 1890); Building 11 (Dried Grains Building, 1909); Building 11a (c1970); Building 14 (Research Lab, 1913-1946); Building 15 (Wagon Room/Research Lab, 1894 and 1946); Building 22 (Power Plant, 1948); Building 23 (Forst Keller (1872, 1898); Building 24 (Grain Bins, 1891); and Building 25 (Malt House, 1882, 1891).

Background The Pabst complex, once the largest brewery on earth, stands out today as an irreplaceable group of buildings that has the character of a small city. The complex features the largest concentration of German-inspired commercial buildings in the country. The preservation of German-inspired architecture, which is referred to as one type of "ethnic architecture," is a top priority for the Wisconsin State Historical Society and the National Park Service. The Pabst buildings are also the nation's last surviving cluster of large cream brick commercial buildings. The veritable canyons of brick buildings in the complex are a unique and dramatic feature. While it was beer that helped to make Milwaukee famous years ago, it was the area's unique golden colored brick used to build the Pabst complex that helped to earn the city its "Cream City" nickname.

The applicant has proposed to rehabilitate five buildings in the complex and in addition to that, a second owner is proposing to restore the office-building complex. That work is a welcome step toward the goal of a developing a new "Pabst City." Presently slated for restoration/reuse are Building 9, the garage or Keg House (1911); Building 20 and 21, The Mill house (1891) and the Brew house (1877); Building 29, the Bottle house (1891; 1911), Building 10, the former Boiler house (1890), and Buildings 27, 28 and 35, the office complex (1858 – 1933).

Buildings #3, #16, #17, #20a, #21a, #41, #42 have already been approved for demolition by the city's HPC, the State Historical Society and National Park Service.

Staff comments

The original study report that was the basis of the designation of the Pabst Brewery Local Historic District noted that the district was significant for two reasons: its role in Milwaukee's brewing history, and "its concentration of period industrial buildings from the 19th and early 20th centuries." The guidelines enumerated in the study report are intended to maintain "consistency in scale, setback, siting, and materials."

In analyzing the petition to amend the guidelines, we felt it important to apply two key criteria to each building that would be affected:

- 1) Does this building contribute significantly to the "concentration of period industrial buildings from the 19th and early 20th centuries?" Would eliminating this building from the guidelines undermine the essence of the historic district itself?
- 2) Is this building beyond repair?

As a result of our building-by-building assessment, we concluded that the adoption of the petition as presented would have the effect of destroying the concentration of buildings that made the complex worthy of designation. This is cause for concern for several reasons. Foremost, the loss of this grouping of buildings means the loss of an irreplaceable part of Milwaukee's industrial and architectural legacy. Also, the removal of 15 buildings from the complex would likely threaten the designation of the district on the National Register of Historic Places. This is significant, because the loss of National Register designation would make the property ineligible for historic tax credits to support restoration. While the petition applicant does not plan to make use of historic tax credits, the delisting of the district also could affect tax credit eligibility for a second property owner within the district.

At the same time, we determined that it would be possible to remove several buildings from the purview of the guidelines without significantly affecting the integrity of the district. These buildings are:

Buildings #1, #2, #5, #6, #11, 11a

We believe that amendment of the guidelines to allow demolition or inappropriate renovation of the following buildings would undermine the essence of the district:

Building #4. Storage Cellar (1875) This is a 5-story contributing structure in the district that is in restorable condition.

Building #23. Former German Methodist Church (1872) This structure is one of the most eye-catching in the district and there is nothing else quite like in Milwaukee today. It is also one of only two surviving church buildings in Milwaukee dating from the 1870s. It is in restorable condition and pivotal to the character of the district.

Building #25. Malt House (1874) The largest surviving malt house in the world, this prominent structure was essential to the brewing process, and it occupies a pivotal corner in the district. It's also the building that the famous Pabst sign is attached to. Its loss would leave an unsettling void in the district that would greatly diminish the character of the Pabst Brewery Historic District. We note that the maintenance of the exterior façade, building new floors inside the shell, would allow modern re-use of the structure without compromising its critical presence within the district.

Building #7. (1918, according to National Register nomination) This building is listed as a contributing structure in the National Register nomination, and is restorable.

Building #8. (1890) A smaller two story cream brick building, it has numerous windows and is an excellent example of a small commercial building. It is in restorable condition.

Buildings #14 (1913) and #15 (1894). These structures anchor the far northwest corner of the complex. (Dates of construction from National Register nomination.)

Building #22 (1948). Although built in the mid-20th century, the distinctive smokestack of this building is pivotal to defining the unique skyline of the brewery.

**Staff
Recommendation**

Staff recommends amendment of the guidelines to indicate that buildings 1, 2, 5, 6, 11 and 11a are exempt from the following sections of the guidelines: Section IX. A (rehabilitation), Section IX. E (demolition), Section IX. F (fire escapes), and Section IX. G (signs).

Staff recommends amendment of the guidelines in Section IX. E (demolition) to indicate that demolition of building 25 is permitted if the façade is preserved.

Because very little information has been made available regarding the proposed design for new buildings to replace those demolished, it is impossible to determine whether the size, scale, design and materials of replacement buildings would be compatible with the remaining buildings. Thus, staff recommends no amendment to the guidelines contained in Sections IX. C and IX. D (new construction). Also, because streetscape design will have an impact on the remaining buildings, no amendment is recommended regarding Section IX. B (streetscapes).