



Milwaukee Historic Preservation Commission Staff Report

LIVING WITH HISTORY

HPC meeting date: 12/11/2017
Ald. Robert Bauman District: 4
Staff reviewer: Tim Askin
PTS #114425 CCF #171154

Property	833 W. WISCONSIN AV.	ST JAMES EPISCOPAL CHURCH
Owner/Applicant	Josh Jeffers J. Jeffers & Co. P.O. Box 305 Milwaukee, WI 53201-0305 Phone: (414) 807-4869	Josh Jeffers J. Jeffers & Co. P.O. Box 305 Milwaukee, WI 53201-0305 Phone: (414) 807-4869

Proposal

Proposal for the St. James Episcopal Church consists of multiple parts, including:

- Demolition/removal of parish house
- New addition constructed in place of parish house
- Maintenance and repair of original church and apse

Background

St. James Church dates to 1868. The interior was rebuilt to the original plans after a fire in 1872; the rear parish or guildhall addition to dates to 1899. The exteriors of both parts of the building are effectively untouched since 1899, apart from the installation of additional stained glass windows and glass entry doors at the front of the church. The church was designed by Detroit architect Gordon William Lloyd. Local architect John A. Moller designed the parish hall.

The church interior was altered in 1914; it has seen little change since that date. The interior of the parish house was substantially remodeled in 1962 and only room, a large, heavy-timber vaulted chamber, retains integrity.

St. James is one of the oldest parishes in the city and is believed to be the oldest stone church in the city. Its parishioners have included the Mitchell family amongst many other luminaries of the city.

This is a very serious proposal to demolish an entire wing of a locally and nationally designated historic property. Such a level of partial demolition has not come before the Commission in the past.

Staff Comments: Demolition

The property is surrounded on all sides by National Register-listed properties. St. James itself, the St James Court Apartments, Central Library, Wisconsin Club/Mitchell House, and Calvary Presbyterian Church are all individually listed on the National Register. All are part of the National Register-listed Near West Side Multiple Resource Area (a cover document that eases listing for properties in a defined geographic area, but still requires individual listing).

Criteria for Demolition

320-21-11-h. Criteria; Certificates to Allow Demolition. In determining whether to grant, grant with conditions, deny, or defer action on a certificate of appropriateness to allow partial or complete demolition, the commission shall consider any of the following:

h-1. Whether the structure is of such architectural or historic significance that its demolition would be detrimental to the public interest and contrary to the general welfare of the people of the city.

This Episcopal parish hall at St. James is not unique in the city, but is uncommon and reflects a movement toward attached church halls in this historical era. There is at least one other example of an attached, structurally integrated, parish hall. It was also a later addition to this other church, St. Marks' Episcopal on N. Hackett. The St. Mark church is substantially newer in both itself and its attached parish hall and therefore does not represent the same historical era (1911 and 1949 respectively). All Saints Episcopal Cathedral also has an attached parish hall, but it is attached at a corner and not structurally integrated.

However, its heavy use of masonry and direct attachment to the church is unusual for its period of construction. The historical significance of this parish to the city's history is greater than most others due to its parishioners (including the Mitchell family) and its effect on public education in the city. A home economics curriculum that its school created was adopted by Milwaukee Public Schools.

h-2. Whether the structure, although not itself an individually-designated historic structure, contributes to the distinctive architectural or historic character of the district as a whole and should be preserved for the benefit of the people of the city.

The parish hall contributes to the architectural character of the overall complex, to its National Register listing, and to the National Register Near West Side Multiple Resource Area.

h-3. Whether demolition of the structure on a historic site or within a historic district would be contrary to the purpose and intent of this section and to the objectives of the historic preservation plan for the applicable district as duly adopted by the common council.

The parish hall has become an integral part of the structure. It is well over 100 years old itself. It is impossible to judge the appropriateness of demolition in accordance with this guideline without a formal evaluation indicating that adaptive reuse is infeasible. The intent of the ordinance is to preserve historic structures within the city when feasible; therefore, this information should be provided. This information would be required if the applicant were to appeal a denial of the Certificate of Appropriateness for demolition.

h-4. Whether the structure is of such old and unusual or uncommon design, texture, or material that it could not be reproduced without great difficulty or expense.

The design is old, unusual, and uncommon. Parish halls like this are no longer being built in the city. Few places anywhere in the country are building parish halls of such substantial masonry and elaborate heavy timber framing. There would be great difficulty and expense in reproducing anything similar due to limited availability of materials and a reduced number of skilled craftsmen capable of the work since 1899.

h-5. Whether retention of the structure would promote the general welfare of the people of the city and state by encouraging the study of American history, architecture, and design, or by developing an understanding of American culture and heritage.

St. James Church previously had a different, detached parish hall on its premises. A wood-framed Greek Revival former church was moved to the site to serve the parish hall function. The construction of the purpose-built attached parish hall with multiple functions indicates the increase in services provided by churches generally in the late 19th century that required larger and custom-built accommodations.

h-6. Whether the structure is in such a deteriorated condition that it is not structurally or economically feasible to preserve, restore, or use it, provided that any hardship or difficulty claimed by the owner which is self-created or a result of demolition by neglect cannot qualify as a basis for the issuance of a certificate of appropriateness.

No consequential deterioration is evident. It is notable that interior integrity is negligible except for one room that is a large, heavy-timber framed chamber. The applicant's proposal includes deconstructing this chamber and rebuilding it within the replacement structure.

Applicant states that for his proposed use of the main church building, preservation and restoration of the church hall are infeasible. Asbestos abatement at this property would be excessive; it is moderated

slightly by a lesser requirement for containment in a demolition rather than rehabilitation. Change of use dictates multiple accessible entries, although ramps or wheelchair lifts could be accommodated.

h-7. If the structure is located on a historic site or within a historic district, whether, and with consideration of design review recommendations issued by the department of city development ...

N/A

Replacement. Demolition criteria for districts typically include consideration of the replacement structure. *“Consideration will be given to whether or not the building is to be replaced by a compatible building of similar age, architectural style, and scale or by a new building that would fulfill the same aesthetic function in the area as did the old structure.”* (Brady Street Commercial Historic District Guideline [D].6.) Although this criterion is not binding, it is worthy of mention and the Commission’s consideration.

The proposed replacement is new construction therefore not of similar age. The new proposal is contemporary. It lacks ornamentation and carved or rusticated masonry detail. Therefore, the replacement building would not fulfill a similar aesthetic function. At minimum, the Wisconsin Avenue façade of the parish hall should be retained and creative methods explored for creating accessible entry into it from this façade.

Staff Comments: Replacement Addition

The qualities of the new addition are described as having a dark masonry base with a light masonry entrance to compliment the material of the existing church. A courtyard will be developed as an extension of the event venues (in the new addition) and function as an additional outdoor gathering space. An extensive landscaping is expected if the proposal is approved, but has not been submitted as part of this project.

The remaining portion of the addition will be programmed as housing and applicant states that it will provide a backdrop to the church as to not detract from its historic character. Applicant states that the darker fiber cement panels will enhance the visual character of the church (owner notes that the color in the rendering is darker than intended). Applicant has indicated an intention to re-use masonry from the demolition on the interior of the public portions of the new building and to relocate the timber-framed chamber into the new building.

Addition Guidelines

The north, east and west elevations and roofline are integral to the structure’s architectural significance. Additions require the approval of the Commission. Approval shall be based upon the addition’s design compatibility with the building in terms of height, roof configuration, fenestration, scale, design, color and materials, and the degree to which it visually intrudes upon the principal elevations.

- Height
 - The height is out proportion to the existing building, but is compatible with other, later buildings in the immediate vicinity.
- Roof Configuration
 - The flat roof could be compatible if some sort of cornice detail were added to tie in to the St. James Court Apartments and the buttress details of the church.
- Fenestration
 - Fenestration consists of contemporary metal windows and spandrel panels in a rectangular configuration. Nearly all window in the church and parish house have a pointed gothic arch and are of historic, non-aluminum materials
- Scale
 - Scale could be improved with some setback detailing; however, it is acknowledged that this is a tight, landlocked site.
- Design
 - The design is based strictly on rectangles. There is no influence of the angles and curves of the church’s gothic revival ecclesiastical architecture. No architectural influence from surrounding historic buildings of a similar historic era is apparent.

- Color
 - The proposed addition is compatible in color, with the caveat that the owner had indicated that the color in the rendering is darker than intended and will be more of a cream brick tone.
- Materials
 - Materials are modern cementitious panels and glass with “masonry” on portions of the ground through third floors. The masonry is not described beyond general color tones.

Staff Comments: Maintenance and Repair of the Main Church Structure

The application provides insufficient information to rule on this issue... Repairs are welcomed, but only general information was provided and specific methods, materials, or locations are mentioned. It is acknowledged that much of the work may require exploratory demolition and further analysis of the building that has only recently changed ownership.

Recommendation

Recommend HPC hold all portions of the application. Staff recommends that the applicant revise his application and return in January or February, taking into consideration guidance on compatibility and differentiation offered by staff and by including at least partial retention of the exterior of the parish house. All documentation should be submitted at least one full week before January 8, 2018 meeting or on the regular deadline for the February meeting.