



Milwaukee Historic Preservation Commission Staff Report

LIVING WITH HISTORY

HPC meeting date: 7/11/2022
District: 3
Staff reviewer: Carlen Hatala
PTS #115284
CC File # 220279

Property

2618 N. HACKETT AV.

Owner/Applicant

RECTOR WARDENS & VESTRYMEN
OF ST MARK'S CHURCH OF MILW
A/K/A ST MARK'S EPISCOPAL CH
2618 N HACKETT AVE
MILWAUKEE WI 53211

DiMichele Co.
2639 N. Downer
Suite 4
Milwaukee, WI 53211
Phone: (414) 861-4444

Proposal

This proposal consists of two parts and a demolition.

St. Mark's Church will demolish its 1949 parish hall and build a new one story parish hall with green roof. The roof will be accessed by a stair at the front of the building facing Hackett. The cladding materials will be either brick or stone in a dark color to match the stone on the church. The new parish hall will form the north side of the cloister. The cloister will remain and the church will not be altered in this project.

St. Mark's is selling its vacant parcel to the north for development. The new 55-unit, 4-story flat roofed apartment building will be constructed on this vacant land to the north of the church. It has a central courtyard facing Hackett Avenue and a shallower one at the rear. Masonry color and design emulates the former apartment buildings (now condos) across the street. Balconies at the corners are set into the building and have simple iron railings. Parking is provided in the basement.

Staff comments

The applicants have provided responses to the 4 preservation guidelines for new construction in the Downer Avenue Commercial Historic District. These 4 guidelines include Siting, Scale, Form and Materials. The responses are in line with what HPC staff would have written. These comments are included as attachments to this staff report.

The applicants have shown thoughtful consideration of the needs of St. Mark's and the new parish house is simple in design and does not compete with the historic church.

The new apartment building, although holding 55 units, is broken up with a center courtyard so the oblique views of the building will make it appear as two buildings. The balconies likewise help with breaking up the mass. The height is 2 feet shorter than Church in the City but the apartment will be closer to the street than the Church in the city.

Recommendation

Staff recommends the demolition of the 1949 parish house. It does not meet the criteria of the guidelines for the Downer Avenue Commercial Historic District.

Its **CONDITION** is marginal and exterior elements are failing with a chance that the stone work will literally fall off.

Its **IMPORTANCE** is minimal to the historic district. The parish house is not an outstanding example of mid-century design and lacks the architectural details of the other buildings in the district.

Its **LOCATION** is such that it does not contribute to the general street appearance and does not have a positive effect on other buildings in the district or St. Mark's.

Its **POTENTIAL** for restoration is beyond the feasibility of St. mark's to repair.

It is an **ADDITION** that is later than the church and is not in keeping with the original design of St. mark's.

Staff recommends the construction of the new parish house with conditions below. It is designed to complete the courtyard but is minimalist in form and smaller in size than the previous parish house. Staff prefers the use of stone for the building.

Staff recommends approval of the proposed new apartment building with condition below. It appears to meet the criteria of the guidelines. Unlike other new apartment buildings in the city it is designed with traditional elements that are compatible with the district and neighborhood.

Conditions

1. In an early version of the plan for the parish house, the linear windows facing Hackett Avenue had lancet tops; this feature better ties the building to the cloister and church. Staff thinks this is better solution and enhances the new parish house's plain façade.
2. The exterior open staircase at the parish house appears stark. Perhaps the railing system can be modified to show some detail. The system continues to the roof. It is acknowledged that the architects wanted the railing system to disappear but perhaps some detail can be incorporated.
3. The roofed structure at the rear of the green roof needs a better description and drawing. What is the roof made of? How are the glass panels installed? Are the vertical elements meant to be some form of shades?
4. For the apartment balconies the railings are almost too minimalist in contrast to the mass of the building. A better design would help.
5. Perhaps a projecting cornice would give a top to the apartments.

These conditions can be worked out on a staff level.

Previous HPC action

Previous Council Actions

H. Guidelines for New Construction (Hackett Avenue Apartment Building)

It is important that new construction be designed so as to be as sympathetic as possible with the character of the district.

1. Siting

New construction must respect the historic siting of the district. It should be accomplished so as to maintain the cohesiveness of the district as a group of contiguous, stylistically compatible structures.

The siting of the new apartment building follows a typical apartment building type found on nearby streets: a “U-Shape” building with the courtyard facing the street as an entrance court. The wings facing the street have a 15’ setback from the property line (following the zoning formula of averaging but not exceeding 15’). Side yard setbacks are 16’, with a generous rear setback of 20’. A shared drive ramp with St. Mark’s Church to the south produces a 25’ open space width between the new apartment building and the Church Parish Hall. The unusually wide city block on which this site resides (150’ depth lots typical on the block) allows this building to be nicely accommodated.

2. Scale

Overall building height and bulk, the expression of major building divisions including foundation, body and roof, and individual building components such as overhangs and fenestration that are in proximity to historic buildings must be compatible to and sympathetic with the design of the buildings.

The new building would be in keeping with the heights established by 3 immediately adjacent historic buildings. The existing historic Church in the City Building immediately north of the site on Hackett is 46’ tall above City Datum 108’. The new apartment building would be around 2’ shorter than this adjacent historic building with 4 floors of apartment at 11.1’ floor to floor producing a 44.4’ tall building above grade. Two historic multi-family housing buildings across Hackett are 36’-6” and 41’-4” above their grade.

The existing historic housing buildings along Hackett all use a single brick with limestone belt courses to define base, middle, and top. The new apartment building follows this language by establishing a base up to the windowsills of the second floor, a body with levels 2 & 3, and a top of the building with a belt course at the 4th floor windowsills. Ornamental brick patterns with help articulate the base and top.

Existing historic housing buildings across the street and nearby feature a preponderance of large (6’ tall) and wide (3’-4” to 4’ wide) double hung windows. The new building follows this language, including the use of a divided top lite typical to the district.

Balconies for the new buildings are cut into the volume of the building (and not just hung on) as can be seen in several nearby historic housing buildings. Vertical black iron pickets (as found in the area) are used for railings.

3. Form

The massing of new construction must be compatible with the goal of maintaining the integrity of the complex as a cohesive group of historic structures. The profiles of roofs and building elements that project and recede from any new construction in the complex should express the same design continuity established in the historic complex.

The “U-Shape” form of the new apartment building strongly relates to nearby historic precedents and reduces the bulk of the building on Hackett Avenue. The form creates an inviting entry courtyard off Hackett which joins several existing enclosed courtyards on the block (like the St. Mark’s courtyard). The rear of the building also features a court recess that reduces the bulk along the rear property line. The roof of the new building follows the direction established by most nearby historic housing and uses a flat roof with a slight brick parapet. On Hackett, the masonry of the four corner balconies are cut away to become open terraces, giving the appearance of a reduced top floor footprint.

4. Materials

The building materials, which are visible from the public right-of-way and in proximity to the district, should be consistent with the colors, textures, proportions and combinations of cladding materials used on the individual buildings. The physical composition of the materials may be different from that of the historic materials, but the same appearance should be maintained.

The 4 existing buildings directly across Hackett Avenue are clad in a similar rust/rose color brick masonry with horizontal limestone belt courses on the street facades. Bases and top floors of these buildings feature variations of pulled-out or pushed-in brick patterns. Mid-block facades and light courts are clad in a lighter, lesser masonry to reflect light down into narrower mid-block spaces. The new apartment building follows the architectural language of these historic buildings, using a similar color and range clay brick for the street and street-facing courtyard, switching to a light grey brick masonry for facades internal to the block. Recessed brick courses on the base of the building and a diagonal pattern of pulled-out bricks on the top articulate the new building Without slavishly copying the historic structures. For all new brick masonry on the street and street facing courtyard, bricks are 2 1/4” tall just like all nearby historic bricks, but the length of the new bricks are 15 5/8” long to subtly suggest the contemporary origin of the new building.

H. Guidelines for New Construction (St. Mark's Parish Hall Addition)

It is important that new construction be designed so as to be as sympathetic as possible with the character of the district.

1. Siting

New construction must respect the historic siting of the district. It should be accomplished so as to maintain the cohesiveness of the district as a group of contiguous, stylistically compatible structures.

The siting of the new Parish Hall Addition pays careful attention to existing and complex historical site conditions. The Original 1910 main gabled façade was constructed around 24'-8" back from the Hackett Ave. property line. We would match this setback for the new main façade of the Parish Center. The original historic church also had a low gabled entrance vestibule that protruded 8' in front of the main façade. In 1949 a low cloister walk was constructed 7'-4" proud of the historic church main façade engaging the historic vestibule which now protrudes 8" from the Cloister. We propose to closely match the setback of this 1949 cloister walk with a new access stair to a roof garden on top of the new Parish Hall, closely locking the new work into the two historical setbacks.

The new Parish Hall would also serve to define the northern boundary of an existing historic garden courtyard that would remain intact. New doors from the Parish Center would allow access to this historic garden denied by the 1949 Parish Hall design.

2. Scale

Overall building height and bulk, the expression of major building divisions including foundation, body and roof, and individual building components such as overhangs and fenestration that are in proximity to historic buildings must be compatible to and sympathetic with the design of the buildings.

The existing Church and Cloister are relatively small and low 1-story buildings on Hackett, with the cloister walk being only 8'-10" above its floor, with the main church gable springing from 16'-8" above its floor to a gable peak of 38' (low for most historic churches). We propose to match the 16'-8" eave of the historic gable (which is strongly marked on the façade with a flat stone coping return) for the height of the new Parish Hall roof terrace. We observe that the existing 2-story Parish Hall (23' tall above its floor) slightly overpowers the diminutive scale of the Cloister and Church and hope to improve upon this condition.

The typical window width of the existing architecture on Hackett is 4' wide with recessed windows. We proposed to use this 4' width for our most typical window on Hackett, using recessed windows with vertical projecting subdivisions 16" on center, a treatment found on the existing façade that recalls the English Perpendicular Gothic.

We also propose to use the 1949 north Cloister entrance as the main entrance to the new Parish Hall, eliminating the problem of having to do a new third entry on Hackett.

3. Form

The massing of new construction must be compatible with the goal of maintaining the integrity of the complex as a cohesive group of historic structures. The profiles of roofs and building elements that project and recede from any new construction in the complex should express the same design continuity established in the historic complex.

The existing form of the Church complex uses both gables and flat roofs, with gables reserved for the main worship space and for entrances. Other elements like the cloister walk and the Priest's apartment have flat roofs. We accept his language and propose a flat-roofed Parish Hall with an accessible green roof terrace above. To access this new roof garden, we propose a new exterior stair precisely in plane with the 1949 Cloister Walk. Like the existing Cloister, this stair is devoted to circulation and access to a garden. The stepping up of the stairs towards the north helps to integrate the low cloister façade with a proposed new taller apartment building to the north along Hackett.

We propose to use the existing north gable of the 1949 Cloister as our new main entrance to the Parish Center, eliminating the need for a third entrance form on Hackett.

Also proposed is a modest 2nd floor pavilion for roof access and roof activity support and set this work as far back from the street as possible, immediately adjacent to the existing 2nd floor of the Priest's Apartment at the rear of the site.

4. Materials

The building materials, which are visible from the public right-of-way and in proximity to the district, should be consistent with the colors, textures, proportions and combinations of cladding materials used on the individual buildings. The physical composition of the materials may be different from that of the historic materials, but the same appearance should be maintained.

The existing 1910 Church and 1949 Cloister are clad in blocks of hand-rocked limestone with a granular sandstone-like finish that we have not been able to identify. This stone has acquired a dark, charcoal-black mottled patina over the last 112-73 years that marks many of the stones. Such dark patina marks are familiar to anyone who has toured historic stone churches in Britain. While at one time stone cleaning for aesthetic reasons was commonplace in preservation, a new understanding of the potential hazards of cleaning and the questioning of the very idea of making old buildings look new there is now an appreciation of leaving the patina of age in place. With this in mind, we are reluctant to clad the new Parish Hall Addition in bright, light new limestone that might require 50 years to acquire the same dark patina. We have instead opted to suggest cladding the addition in either brick or stone that closely matches the dark, charcoal-black patina itself. This will help make the addition recessive as if in shadow or entirely patinated, sending it into the background as opposed to the lighter, black-mottled limestone.