



Milwaukee Historic Preservation Commission Staff Report

LIVING WITH HISTORY

HPC meeting date	9/9/2024	CCF # 240610
Ald. Zamarripa	Staff reviewer: Tim Askin	
Property	1942 S Muskego Avenue	Lorenz Paetzold House
Owner/Applicant	Mandeep Dhawan	

Proposal

Demolish fire-damaged house.

Staff comments

The Lorenz Paetzold House is architecturally significant as an unusual example of folk architecture in which an artisan later expressed his craft in the construction of his home by cladding the entire exterior in slate tiles. The resulting structure is a unique expression in Milwaukee of the tile-hung houses found in Central Europe. It was built in approximately 1882. Paetzold lived in the house until 1919 and it remained in the family until 1970.

The property was sold out of city hands in early 2017 with a preservation easement and development agreement. It was then resold at least 3 more times since then. No owner has attempted compliance with the development agreement. Accordingly, the city has complete reversion rights and may re-acquire the property at any time for breach of contract. The property has also been sold at significant private profit compared to the original purchase price from the city (approximately 10-fold).

On September 6, 2023 a fire broke out at the property, approximately one month after the purchase by the current owner. Milwaukee Fire Department investigators determined that there was recent unpermitted electrical work and that the fire was intentionally set. There do not appear to be any suspects in the case.

The owner had a qualified engineer visually inspect the building, providing this conclusion:

“It appears that the cost encountered in order to restore the existing single-family residence to existing or better conditions along with the minimum life safety code required updates is not feasible. The structure in its current state is unsafe and it is recommended that the existing building be razed.”

There are many other factors at issue, including the suspicious circumstances and the city’s right to re-acquire the property. Additional input is needed from the City Attorney, Neighborhood Services, and the Alderwoman before HPC should act on this matter. Further, authority to approve demolition under the easement is not given to the Commission. Criteria for demolition are given on the next page, staff declines to analyze them in full at this time due to the many open questions in this case.

Recommendation

HOLD/DEFER. Further direction from the Office of the City Attorney, Neighborhood Services, and Alderwoman Zamarripa are required. The City has the right to seize the property for failure to comply with the development agreement.

Criteria for Demolition

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.

h-2. Whether the structure, although not itself an individually-designed 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.

Not applicable.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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, any new structure, other than an accessory structure, addition thereto or reconstructed features thereof, proposed to be constructed, or changes character proposed to be made, is all of the following...

Not applicable.