



Milwaukee Historic Preservation Commission
Staff Report

LIVING WITH HISTORY

HPC meeting date: 6/6/2022
Ald. District: 3, Currently Vacant
Staff reviewer: Carlen Hatala
PTS #115266
CC File # 220040

Property 3138 N. CAMBRIDGE AV.

Owner/Applicant STEVEN F TILTON & Steven F Tilton
NOLA J HITCHCOCK CROSS
LIVING TRUST Phone: (262) 358-1678
3138 N CAMBRIDGE AVE
MILWAUKEE WI 53211

Proposal The applicant wants to demolish the existing lighthouse because it is in disrepair and falling over. He will build a new lighthouse to match the historic lighthouse. The matter of the demolition was considered by the HPC on August 2, 2021 and August 12, 2021 and the item was Held in Committee under File # 210519

The HPC is now considering the demolition of the lighthouse as well as the building of a new lighthouse at the same location, which will replicate the original.

Staff comments

The date of the lighthouse is thought to be about a year after the boat house was completed in December, 1923. A historic photo shows the boathouse without the lighthouse with Cambridge and Hampshire still unpaved. Other nautical features that once graced the property, like the wave-shaped picket fence and boat-shaped planter are now gone.

The lighthouse is in disrepair and leaning. It has been repaired over the years with the current surface being composed of Styrofoam and stucco. Removing the deteriorated materials would leave little original fabric left to work with. The owner wants to take down the lighthouse and rebuild it to match the original. Drawings are provided of the proposed replacement.

This proposal will require two actions: the approval/disapproval of the lighthouse demolition, and the approval/disapproval of the new lighthouse.

DEMOLITION: The historic preservation ordinance (320-21-11-h) provides guidance for the HPC to follow.
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Criteria for demolition are as follows:

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.

The lighthouse has become a distinctive visual landmark of the property as well as to its East Side neighborhood. Its demolition would take away from Milwaukee's inventory of unique structures.

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.

N/A This is not a historic district

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.

Although the goal of the historic preservation ordinance is to keep buildings and structures standing, there are instances when buildings and structures are deteriorated beyond reasonable hope of repair and repair would constitute removal of most of the structure. Outright demolition of the lighthouse with no replacement would be unacceptable.

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.

In this instance the new lighthouse will be built with the same construction techniques and materials, and in the same dimensions as the original.

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.

The original lighthouse was built to complement the boathouse, itself a nod to the Great Lakes and all the associations with recreation and commercial fishing. The replacement will do the same.

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

The current owner purchased the property in 2018. It appears much of the deterioration was already present at that time. The owner has indicated that he has made efforts to have the lighthouse evaluated to determine repair vs. demolition and replacement. Newspaper articles write about prior owners doing repairs but the structure continued to lean.

NEW CONSTRUCTION: Measured drawings are provided to the HPC and show interior features as well as exterior. The new lighthouse will have beacon lamp as in the original and stucco cladding. It will be built at the same location as the original

Recommendation

Approve the demolition
Approve building a new lighthouse that matches the original.

Conditions

The new lighthouse will salvage whatever elements are usable from the original including glass, metal mullions, and door hardware.

Supply the HPC staff with documentary photos showing the existing conditions:
The lighthouse in context with the property
Details of exterior materials
Photos of the interior to the extent possible.
Details of the current foundation

Previous HPC action

HPC reviewed this proposal on August 2, 2021 and August 12, 2021 under CC File # 210519. The item was held in committee.

Previous Council action