

MINNEAPOLIS CITY PLANNING DEPARTMENT REPORT
HERITAGE PRESERVATION DESIGNATION

DATE OF ZONING AND PLANNING COMMITTEE REVIEW: October 2, 2003

DATE OF HPC REVIEW: August 19, 2003 public hearing
September 16, 2003 recommendation

ADDRESS OF PROPERTY: University of Minnesota Greek Letter Chapter House
Historic District (see attached map)

STAFF CONTACT AND PHONE: Amy Lucas, 673-2422

PROPERTY OWNER: Numerous separate properties. (See attached map.)

WARD: 2 NEIGHBORHOOD ORGANIZATION: Marcy Holmes Neighborhood
Association, Prospect Park East River Road Improvement Association (PPERRIA),
University of Minnesota

BACKGROUND:

On August 20, 2002, the Heritage Preservation Commission (HPC) directed the Planning Department to commence a study of the historical significance of properties associated with fraternity and sorority use. (letter attached) The study area is delineated on the attached maps 1 and 2. On September 3, 2002, the Planning Department mailed a letter to all property owners in the study area notifying them of the study and an information session that was held on September 10, 2002. (letter attached) The Planning Department contracted with Carole Zellie of Landscape Research to conduct the designation study. The University of Minnesota Greek Letter Chapter House Designation Study was completed in May, 2003. The report inventoried 81 properties and concludes that the "Fraternity Row Historic District" with 22 buildings and the "Off the Row" area with 11 buildings meet the criteria for local designation. A copy of the designation study is attached. The Planning Department mailed letters on May 23, 2003 to property owners within the study area and informed them of the completion of the study and its availability by calling the Planning Department. (letter attached)

The State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) was sent the University of Minnesota Greek Letter Chapter House Designation Study pursuant to the requirements of state law and section 599.250 of the city's Heritage Preservation Regulations. SHPO has determined that the "Fraternity Row Historic District" and the 11 properties described as "Off the row" meet the local criteria for designation. The SHPO comments are contained in letters dated June 3, 2003 and June 18, 2003 which are attached.

In addition, the proposed designation was submitted to the City Planning Commission (CPC) for its review and comment, pursuant to section 599.260 of the Heritage Preservation Regulations. The CPC was asked to consider the relationship of the proposed designation to the city's comprehensive plan, the effect of the proposed designation on the surrounding area, and the consistency of the proposed designation with applicable development plans or objectives. On August 4, 2003, the CPC adopted the findings and recommendation included in the Planning Department staff report. A copy of the staff report dated July 31, 2003 is attached.

AUTHORITY FOR REVIEW:

Sections 599.270 and 599.280 of the Heritage Preservation Regulations authorize the HPC to hold a public hearing to consider proposed designations and to make findings and recommendations to the Zoning and Planning Committee of the City Council with respect to proposed designations, as follows:

599.270. Designation hearing. Following completion of the designation study the commission shall hold a public hearing to consider the proposed designation, as provided in section 599.170. Any person having a legal or equitable interest in a nominated property shall be allowed reasonable opportunity to give testimony or present evidence concerning the proposed designation.

599.280. Commission recommendation. Following the public hearing, the commission shall make findings with respect to the proposed designation and shall submit the same together with its recommendation to the zoning and planning committee of the city council. In making its findings and recommendation, the commission shall consider the designation criteria contained in section 599.210, the information contained in the designation study, the state historic preservation officer's comments, the city planning commission's comments, the planning director's report and all testimony and evidence received at the public hearing relating to the designation.

DESIGNATION CRITERIA:

Section 599.210 of the Heritage Preservation Regulations establishes criteria to be considered in determining whether a property is worthy of designation as a landmark or historic district because of its historical, cultural, architectural, archaeological or engineering significance. To be eligible for designation, a property must meet at least one of the following criteria:

- (1) The property is associated with significant events or with periods that exemplify broad patterns of cultural, political, economic or social history.
- (2) The property is associated with the lives of significant persons or groups.
- (3) The property contains or is associated with distinctive elements of city identity.

- (4) The property embodies the distinctive characteristics of an architectural or engineering type or style, or method of construction.
- (5) The property exemplifies a landscape design or development pattern distinguished by innovation, rarity, uniqueness or quality of design or detail.
- (6) The property exemplifies works of master builders, engineers, designers, artists, craftsmen or architects.
- (7) The property has yielded, or may be likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

FINDINGS

1. Consistency with designation criteria:

The University of Minnesota Greek Letter Chapter House Designation Study (May 2003) concludes that the “Fraternity Row Historic District” and the eleven properties described as “Off the Row” meet local designation criterion 1 and criterion 4. The “Fraternity Row Historic District” is a four block area along University Avenue SE between 15th Avenue SE and 19th Avenue SE. There are a total of 22 buildings in this proposed area and nineteen of the buildings are listed as contributing historic properties. The eleven individual properties are described in the designation study as “Off the Row” chapter houses. These 33 properties create the proposed University of Minnesota Greek Letter Chapter House Historic District.

These properties meet designation criteria 1 and 4 contained in section 599.210 of the city’s Heritage Preservation Regulations:

- (1) *The property is associated with significant events or with periods that exemplify broad patterns of cultural, political, economic or social history.*

The “Fraternity Row Historic District” represents “the strength of the Greek letter system at the University of Minnesota during the first three decades of the twentieth century. Constructed during a time of great campus expansion, the houses reflect the fraternity membership, budgets, and programs marshaled to create their impressive facades and interiors.” Nineteen of the twenty-two properties are contributing to the district and twelve of the houses still house their original chapters. The period of significance is 1907-1930 for the district.

The eleven individual properties described as “Off the Row” chapter houses were built between 1911 to 1936. All of these eleven properties were constructed or heavily renovated as chapter houses during the period of significance and maintain their integrity today.

These proposed properties represent important cultural, social and urban development patterns in Minneapolis. The report states “between 1870 and 1930, the University of Minnesota grew from a small school with an enrollment of 212 to an institution of 17,522 with eleven professional schools and campuses in Minneapolis and St. Paul. The Greek letter system at the University of Minnesota reflected this growth, and engaged a significant number of the student body...the chapter houses remain important symbols of the Greek letter society’s impact on the University of Minnesota during a great period of expansion.” The “Fraternity Row Historic District” covers a dense four block area along University Avenue directly across from the main gates of the university, while the eleven individual chapter houses mainly grew out of the elegant residential area at 10th Avenue and 5th Street SE. These chapter houses are strong elements in the residential development of SE Minneapolis.

- (4) *The property embodies the distinctive characteristics of an architectural or engineering type or style, or method of construction.*

The “Fraternity Row Historic District” is described as a “highly symbolic, architecturally-conscious” row of buildings exemplifying distinctive architectural models. Each of the contributing nineteen buildings in the row is an exceptional and grand example of its particular 20th century revival style. The Georgian, Neoclassical and Tudor Revival buildings were designed by prominent architectural firms of the era including Kees and Coburn and Stebbins, Haxby & Bissell.

Many of the eleven properties “Off the Row” were sororities which were more often designed to fit within the residential character of the area, but also reflect the 20th century revival styles. The Prairie School-inspired Pi Beta Phi house is a rare design for Greek chapter houses and the Carl Stravs’ Phi Delta Theta Fraternity is a remarkable Viennese Secessionist design.

In general, these chapter houses were designed to be architecturally conspicuous designs in prominent 20th revival styles. The architects leaned towards the Tudor Revival style reminiscent of a castle and the Neoclassical Greek temples and each remain a strong example of its architectural style.

2. Consistency with the comprehensive plan:

The proposed designation promotes the preservation of historic resources and supports the goals and policies of *The Minneapolis Plan* as follows:

Goal 6. *Preserve, enhance and create a sustainable natural and historic environment citywide.*

Policy 1.7. *Minneapolis will recognize and celebrate its history.*

Policy 9.2. *Minneapolis will continue to preserve the natural ecology and the historical features that define its unique identity in the region.*

Policy 9.4. *Minneapolis will promote preservation as a tool for economic development and community revitalization.*

3. Consistency with applicable development objectives:

There are no applicable development plans or development objectives adopted by the city council for this property and the surrounding area.

4. Effect on the surrounding area:

Designation will not negatively affect the use of properties within the proposed district or the surrounding area.

RECOMMENDATION OF THE CITY PLANNING DEPARTMENT:

Planning Staff recommends that the Heritage Preservation Commission **adopt** the above findings and submit the same together with a recommendation to **approve** the landmark designation of the University of Minnesota Greek Letter Chapter House Historic District to the Zoning and Planning Committee of the City Council.

RECOMMENATION OF THE MINNEAPOLIS HERITAGE PRESERVATION COMMISSION:

A public hearing was held on August 19, 2003 and at the public meeting of September 26, 2003 the Minneapolis Heritage Preservation Commission voted to **adopt** the Planning Department findings and submit the same together with a recommendation to **approve** the landmark designation of the University of Minnesota Greek Letter Chapter House Historic District to the Zoning and Planning Committee of the City Council.

Attachments:

1. University of Minnesota Greek Letter Chapter House Designation Study, May 2003.
2. Planning Department letter to property owners, September 3, 2002.
3. Planning Department letter to property owners, May 23, 2003.
4. Planning Department staff report to City Planning Commission, July 31, 2003.
5. Map 1 and Map 2 of the eligible properties with Table 1 and Table 2 of descriptions.
6. State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) comments dated June 3, 2003 and June 18, 2003.
7. Public comment letters received by the Planning Department as of September 16, 2003.
8. Carole Zellie, consultant, response to Coalition for Non-Profit Student Housing report submitted September 16, 2003.