CITY OF MINNEAPOLIS
CPED PLANNING DIVISION
HERITAGE PRESERVATION COMMISSION STAFF REPORT
BZH #26881

ADDRESS: 110 5th Avenue SE
CATEGORY/DISTRICT: St. Anthony Falls Historic District
CLASSIFICATION: Historic Variance
APPLICANT: The Soap Factory
CONTACT PERSON: Ryan Kronzer, AIA, 612-669-7925
DATE OF APPLICATION: May 20, 2011
PUBLICATION DATE: June 14, 2011
DATE OF HEARING: June 21, 2011
APPEAL PERIOD EXPIRATION: July 1, 2011
STAFF INVESTIGATION AND REPORT: Chris Vrchota, 612-673-5467
REQUEST: Historic variance to reduce the minimum required off-street parking from 68 spaces to 10 spaces.

A. SITE DESCRIPTION AND BACKGROUND:

The subject property is a former warehouse and factory, located at the intersection of 2nd Street SE and 5th Avenue SE. The block of 5th Avenue SE between 2nd Street SE and Main Street is a privately owned road. The Soap Factory owns the eastern half of this road. The original 3-story building was constructed in 1892. It was set back approximately 71 feet from the property line along 2nd Street SE and 40'-9" from the west property line. A large 2-story addition was constructed in 1937 that brought the building up to 2nd Street SE, extending the existing building wall along 5th Avenue SE. The property served as a factory for National Purity Soap until 1992. The Soap Factory has operated informally as an art exhibition space since 1996 without a permanent Certificate of Occupancy. Temporary use permits have been issued during this time.

CLASSIFICATION:	
Local Historic District	St. Anthony Falls
Period of Significance	1858-1940
Criteria of significance	Architecture, Commerce/Industry
Date of local designation	1971
Applicable Design Guidelines	St. Anthony Falls Historic District Guidelines, Secretary of Interior Standards for Treatment of Historic Properties

PROPERTY INFORMATION	
Current name	The Soap Factory
Historic Name	Purity Soap Company
Current Address	110 5th Avenue SE
Historic Address	110 5th Avenue SE
Original Construction Date	1892; Substantial addition in 1937
Original Contractor	Unknown
Original Architect	Unknown
Historic Use	Factory, Warehouse
Current Use	Art Exhibition Space
Proposed Use	Art Exhibition Space

B. PROPOSED CHANGES:

The property owner is under orders from the City's Regulatory Services Department to bring the site into compliance with both building and zoning requirements so that a permanent Certificate of Occupancy can be granted. The Soap Factory has been working with various City departments to make the necessary improvements and gain the needed approvals to bring the site into compliance.

On-street parking on the site is presently located on 5th Avenue SE which is part of the parcel and a privately owned road. These stalls are not striped and there is no formally designed or approved parking lot. The Applicant is proposing to provide 10 off-street parking spaces provided on the property on 5th Avenue SE (see site plan on Appendix D-1).

Under the current zoning (I1 with the Industrial Living Overlay), the off-street parking requirement for a meeting hall (the highest use applied to the property) is 90 stalls. Per section 541.430 of the Zoning Ordinance, off street parking requirements for contributing resources in historic districts are reduced to 75% of the minimum requirement. This reduces the required number of off street parking spaces for the site to 68.

The Applicant is requesting a Historic Variance to reduce the minimum number of off-street parking spaces on the site from 68 to 10.

C. FINDINGS REQUIRED FOR A HISTORIC VARIANCE:

1. Before recommending approval of a historic variance, the commission shall make findings that the variance is compatible with the preservation of the property and with other properties in the area.

The *Master Plan for the Marcy-Holmes Neighborhood*, adopted in 2003, supports the eventual reconnection of 5th Avenue SE to the street grid. (See Appendix H.) Reconnecting missing links in the street grid is crucial to the preservation efforts in the St. Anthony Falls historic district. It is also critical for reconnecting the neighborhood to and through the central riverfront. Going forward, the City will explore the potential for the reconstruction of this portion of 5th Avenue SE with the property owner in the future. If the Soap Factory is amenable to such plans, curbside street parking could be provided along this alignment.

The existing building, which is a contributing resource in the St. Anthony Falls Historic District, covers well over half of the site. In order to provide additional on-site parking, the Applicant would need to either acquire additional property adjacent to the site or demolish a portion of the building. As outlined in the materials provided by the Applicant, there are a number of surface parking lots within relatively close proximity to the site. (See Appendix C-2 – C-3.) Additionally, there is on-street parking in the immediate vicinity of the site. These options can accommodate the parking needs for The Soap Factory on the limited number of dates during which the highest occupant load is experienced.

CPED is recommending that the minimum number of spaces be varied to zero. Doing so would leave 5th Avenue SE open for use as a roadway, rather than for parking. Reducing the number of required off-street parking spaces for the site would be compatible with the preservation of the property and other properties in the area by eliminating the need to convert additional space within the district into surface parking lots, or to demolish a portion of the building to meet the minimum parking requirement. Reducing the required parking to zero would be a substantial step towards the preservation of the subject property as well as several other nearby contributing resources within the St. Anthony Falls Historic District.

2. Before recommending approval of a historic variance, the commission shall make findings that the variance is necessary to alleviate undue hardship due to special conditions or circumstances unique to the property and not created by the applicant.

The subject parcel measures approximately 159’-7” x 200’-6”, totaling approximately 31,996 square feet. The existing building has a footprint of 17,235 square feet. The remainder of the lot area is comprised of the loading dock area at the front (northeast) corner of the building, loading docks and railroad tracks at the rear of the building, and the area aligned with 5th Avenue SE on the west side of the building.

There is no viable location to provide additional off-street parking on the parcel without removing a portion of the building. Adjacent parcels are not owned by the Applicant and are slated for redevelopment to uses more productive and sensitive to the historic district than surface parking lots.

The 10 parking spaces proposed by the Applicant do not meet the zoning code requirements for drive aisle width and maneuvering area. Section 541.290 of the Zoning Code states: "All maneuvers associated with parking shall occur in the off-street parking area, except where accessory to single or two-family dwellings, or cluster developments, or multiple-family dwellings of three (3) or four (4) units. Public streets shall not be used to conduct any parking maneuver, including backing out onto the street."

For angled parking stalls with a one way aisle, the zoning code requires a minimum stall depth of 18'-9" and a 12' drive aisle. The stalls proposed by the Applicant are 19 feet deep and therefore meet the depth requirement. However, the required 12 foot drive aisle is not provided. To access and use these parking spaces, drivers would need to maneuver on the western half of the private road, a portion of which is not owned by the Applicant. Maneuvering to leave the spaces would also need to be done on the western portion of the road. No easement has been granted by the neighboring property owner for use of the west portion of 5th Avenue SE for maneuvering on the subject property. Because the parking area does not meet the requirements of the zoning code, it would not make sense to grant a variance that counts the stalls as legal.

The lack of useable space on the property to provide off-street parking is an undue hardship, which is due to special circumstances that are unique to the property and were not created by the Applicant. Granting a variance to alleviate any need for off-street parking will ensure that the zoning considerations will be brought into compliance, thus allowing preservation efforts at the Soap Factory and in the surrounding district to proceed. For this reason, CPED is recommending approval of a variance to allow for no (zero) off-street parking on the site.

D. PUBLIC COMMENT

The Applicant has included letters of support for the variance in their application materials. Staff has received one e-mail commenting on the proposed variance (see Appendix I.)

E. STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends that the Heritage Preservation Commission **adopt** staff findings and **approve** the Historic Variance to reduce the minimum required off-street parking from 68 spaces to zero spaces subject to the following condition(s):

1. Parking spaces meeting minimum City requirements shall be permitted on 5th Avenue SE. A parking plan for this area shall be reviewed and approved by CPED-Zoning staff prior to the striping of any parking stalls.

Attachments

A. Vicinity Map (prepared by staff)
B. Application (submitted by Applicant)
C. Project Narrative (Submitted by Applicant)
D. Plans (submitted by Applicant)
E. Letter to Councilmember and Neighborhood Group (submitted by Applicant)
F. Photos (submitted by Applicant)
G. Letters from Others (submitted by Applicant)
H. Excerpts from *Master Plan for the Marcy-Holmes Neighborhood*
I. Letters from Others