



Project Name & Address: Filene House Landmark Nomination
1617 Sherman Avenue

Application Type(s): Review of local landmark nomination

Legistar File ID # [75226](#)

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Background Information

Parcel Location/Information: The subject site contains two lots, addressed as 1617 and 1601 Sherman, creating an 8.22 acre site containing a two-story commercial structure constructed in 1950, with additions in 1966 and 2000. There is also a surface parking lot located behind the structure.

Relevant Ordinance Sections:

41.07 DESIGNATING LANDMARKS.

- (1) Designation. The Common Council, after considering the recommendation of the Landmarks Commission under sub. (5) below, may designate a landmark according to this section.
- (2) Standards. A site, improvement, or site with improvements may be designated as a landmark if the proposed landmark meets any of the following:
 - (a) It is associated with broad patterns of cultural, political, economic or social history of the nation, state or community.
 - (b) It is associated with the lives of important persons or with important event(s) in national, state or local history.
 - (c) It has important archaeological or anthropological significance.
 - (d) It embodies the distinguishing characteristics of an architectural type inherently valuable as representative of a period, style, or method of construction, or of indigenous materials or craftsmanship.
 - (e) It is representative of the work of a master builder, designer or architect.
- (3) Nomination. Any person may nominate a site, improvement, or site with improvements for designation as a landmark. The person shall submit the nomination to the City Planning Division, to the attention of the Preservation Planner, on a nomination form approved by the Landmarks Commission. The nomination shall clearly identify the proposed landmark, landmark site, and document why it qualifies under sub. (2). The Preservation Planner may ask the person to submit additional information and documentation as needed to complete or clarify the nomination. When the Preservation Planner determines that the nomination is complete, the Preservation Planner shall refer the nomination to the Landmarks Commission.
- (4) Landmarks Commission Review and Public Hearing. Whenever the Landmarks Commission receives a complete, accurate nomination under sub. (3), the Commission shall review the nomination. As part of its review, the Commission shall publish a hearing notice according to Sec. 41.06 and hold a public hearing on the nomination. The Commission may also conduct its own investigation of the facts, as it deems necessary.
- (5) Landmarks Commission Action. After the Landmarks Commission holds a public hearing and completes its review under sub. (4), the Commission shall report to the Common Council a

- recommendation supporting or opposing the proposed landmark designation. The Commission may recommend landmark designation subject to terms and conditions that are consistent with this chapter. The Commission shall send a notice of the recommendation to each owner of record of each lot on which the proposed landmark is located at least ten (10) days before any meeting at which the Common Council may act on the Commission's recommendation.
- (6) Common Council Action. After considering the Landmarks Commission's report recommendation under sub. (5), and based on the standards under sub. (2), the Common Council shall vote to designate or decline to designate the property as a landmark. The City Clerk shall promptly notify the Building Inspector and the City Assessor of each landmark designation. The City Clerk shall record the designation with the Dane County Register of Deeds at the City's expense.
 - (7) Voluntary Supplemental Restrictions. The Common Council may at any time supplement the terms of a landmark designation, pursuant to an agreement between the landmark owner and the Landmarks Commission, to enhance the preservation and protection of the landmark.
 - (8) Recognition of Landmarks. Whenever the Common Council designates a landmark under sub. (6), the Landmarks Commission shall affix a plaque identifying the property as a landmark to the landmark or landmark site. The plaque shall be placed so that it is easily visible to passing pedestrians. In the case of a landmark structure, the plaque shall include the accepted name of the landmark, the date of its construction, and other information that the Landmarks Commission considers appropriate. In the case of a landmark that is not a structure, the plaque shall include the common name of the landmark and other information that the Commission considers appropriate. If the Commission determines that because the landmark is ecologically or culturally sensitive a plaque would be inappropriate, no plaque is required. No person may remove or modify a plaque without approval of the Preservation Planner.

Analysis and Conclusion

The property at 1617 Sherman Avenue is proposed for landmark designation and includes a structure built in 1950, which was the first permanent location of Credit Union National Association (CUNA) in Madison until they relocated in 1979. The nominator is making the argument that the structure is eligible for designation under Criteria A & B with a period of significant from 1950-1979. The property also includes a surface parking lot located behind the structure.

MGO 41.07(2) Criterion A: It is associated with broad patterns of cultural, political, economic or social history of the nation, state or community.

The nomination makes a well-documented case for the significance of CUNA as the leader of the Credit Union movement during the period of significance, the organization's process for choosing Madison as its location for a permanent home, and the construction of this simple structure to convey the practical purpose of their work. That work was to broaden the opportunities of banking services beyond the property-owning elite through the creation of lending cooperatives in order to serve individuals and enterprises that had been shut out of traditional banking. The intent was to broaden economic opportunity, addressing the economic disenfranchisement of the banking system at the time. The nomination's case mainly focuses on the economic history of the Credit Union movement, citing the national and international impact of CUNA during the period of significance. This is most clearly summarized on pages 10-11 of the nomination:

CUNA's activities at Filene House included assisting in the formation and operation of local credit unions, lobbying federal and state governments on critical legislation/regulations, and providing training programs for member credit union personnel. From 1950 to 1980, the number of US member credit unions increased from about 12,000 to 22,000 and credit union membership increased from under 5 million to over 45 million. It was during CUNA's occupancy at Filene House that CUNA's international

activity blossomed, with significant sponsorship and growth of credit unions in Latin America, Asia, Africa and the Caribbean. In 1965, CUNA changed its name to Credit Union International, Inc.”

MGO 41.07(2) Criterion B: It is associated with the lives of important persons or with important event(s) in national, state or local history.

The nomination also makes the case that this building is significant due to the speech that President Truman gave at the building’s dedication, which placed CUNA and the Credit Union movement as a key component of that administration’s foreign policy under the Point Four Program, where credit unions would provide the economic aid to help reconstruct the economies of developing countries and those recovering from the impacts of World War II. While this strategy was marketed as a tool to combat the spread of communism, its goals were to foster cooperation and support among countries (which Senator Joseph McCarthy suggested was a communist tactic and possibly treasonous of the Truman administration), and a rebuke of the extremist branches of the Republican Party of the time, which was calling for American isolationism.

Truman’s speech at the building dedication on May 14, 1950, came just days before Congress finally approved the legislation associated with the Point Four Program, and the President used that speech to both highlight the potential international impacts of CUNA’s work and to campaign for the passage of the Point Four Program. The nomination argues that these activities show the dedication ceremony of CUNA building was thereby an important event in national history due to its connection with Point Four Program.

MGO 41.07(5) Landmarks Commission Action: “...the Commission shall report to the Common Council a recommendation supporting or opposing the proposed landmark designation. The Commission may recommend landmark designation subject to terms and conditions that are consistent with this chapter.”

The Landmarks Commission is a referring entity for landmark nominations. The role of the Commission is to review the proposed nomination and decide if the nomination makes a successful case in relation to the criteria in the Ordinance. The Commission’s recommendation is made to the Common Council, who will make a final determination on if the nomination meets the criteria for designation as a Madison landmark. The Commission should make specific findings for their recommendation of approval or denial. The Commission may recommend changes to the draft nomination.

Additional Considerations

This property is currently under consideration for redevelopment and a project team has engaged in neighborhood meetings and with City Planning staff as they develop their concept, but no land use application has been filed to date. The current conceptual plans do not include the integration of the existing structure into the reworking of a larger site that would include both 1617 and 1601 Sherman Ave.

Any development proposal submitting a land use application prior to Common Council’s decision regarding the proposed landmark designation would be subject to the regulations on the property at the time of the land use application. For that specific application, the standards of the Historic Preservation Ordinance would not be applicable. However, if the Common Council were to proceed with a designation, any subsequent development proposal submitted after the date of designation would be subject to the Historic Preservation Ordinance.

The Historic Preservation Ordinance encourages the adaptive reuse of historic structures for new and ongoing uses with the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation to guide that process, namely the following standards:

9. New additions, exterior alterations, or related new construction will not destroy historic materials, features, and spatial relationships that characterize the property. The new work will be differentiated from the old and will be compatible with the historic materials, features, size, scale and proportion, and massing to protect the integrity of the property and its environment.

10. New additions and adjacent or related new construction will be undertaken in such a manner that, if removed in the future, the essential form and integrity of the historic property and its environment would be unimpaired.

A landmark designation would not stop a redevelopment of this site for future land use applications. It would strongly encourage the adaptive reuse of the existing structure and integration of it into the redevelopment of the site, with a high threshold for approving demolition of the historic resource. The incorporation of the former Madison Catholic Association Clubhouse into Hilton's redevelopment at 15 E Wilson is an example of just such a project. Integration of the historic resource into a larger redevelopment would also align with the policy and purpose of the Historic Preservation Ordinance, namely MGO 41.01:

(2) Ensure that the City's growth sensitively incorporates the City's historic resources.

(6) Recognize that the city's historic resources are economic assets that can attract residents and visitors, create jobs, stabilize and improve property values, and stimulate business and industry.

(8) Promote the use of and investment in historic districts and landmarks for the education, pleasure and welfare of the people of the City.

The Historic Preservation Ordinance guides reinvestment in our historic places as they adapt for new and ongoing uses.

Recommendation

Staff believes the standards for designating the property as a Madison landmark are met and recommend the Landmarks Commission refer the nomination to Common Council for designation with the following conditions:

1. Include a description of the existing historic chimney
2. Correct three apostrophe errors:
 - a. p. 10 change 1950's to 1950s
 - b. p. 11 change two instances of 1970's to 1970s