

**CITY OF SAINT PAUL  
HERITAGE PRESERVATION COMMISSION STAFF REPORT**

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FILE NAME: 900 Summit Avenue (880 Summit Avenue - House)  
DATE OF APPLICATION: November 20, 2007  
APPLICANT: Saint Paul's United Church of Christ  
OWNER: same  
DATE OF HEARING: December 6, 2007  
HPC SITE/DISTRICT: Hill Historic District  
CATEGORY: Non-Contributing (Church) & Contributing (House)  
CLASSIFICATION: Lot Split  
STAFF INVESTIGATION AND REPORT: Christine Barr  
DATE: November 28, 2007

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**A) SITE DESCRIPTION:**

Saint Paul's United Church of Christ at 900 Summit Avenue is a modern church with smoothly dressed buff-colored limestone exterior constructed in the 1960s. It has an intersecting gable roof with asphalt shingles and a tall rectangular bell tower with gabled roof topped by a tall metal spire with a cross finial. The entrance is topped by a tall stone sculpted figure of Christ. This church encompasses a large portion of the block between Milton and Victoria Streets and is categorized as non-contributing to the Hill Historic District, as it was constructed outside of the period of significance.

The Fred C. Norlander House at 880 Summit Avenue is a one- and one-half-story bungalow, constructed in 1923. It has an offset, slightly projecting gable roofed entrance porch supported by square brick columns with geometric concrete ornamentations at the capital level that spans one bay of the main facade and continues along the west elevation. The exterior is a reddish-black brick and half-timbered stucco in the gables. The intersecting gable roof is red ceramic tile and there is one central chimney. This house was originally located at 894 Summit Avenue and was moved to this location in 1950. There is a stuccoed, two-car garage at the rear projecting into the parking lot. The property is categorized as contributing to the Hill Historic District.

**B) PROPOSED CHANGES:**

The applicant is proposing a lot split that would divide the lot that 880 Summit is sited on from the larger church parcel and combine and add the lots at 21 and 25 South Victoria Street (part of the parking lot) to the church parcel.

The survey notes that the garage is to be removed, however a permit has not been applied for at this time and will require a separate review by HPC staff.

**C) BACKGROUND:**

Lot splits are reviewed and approved by the planning administrator in the City of Saint Paul and there are several conditions that must be met in order for a lot split to be approved. Chapter 69 of the City's Legislative Code states that the administrator "*shall cause the application to be reviewed by the public works department and other affected city departments, if appropriate, and shall notify the applicant of any required modifications.*"

**D) GUIDELINE CITATIONS:**

**Historic Hill District Guidelines**

1. *Every reasonable effort shall be made to provide a compatible use for a property which requires minimal alteration of the building, structure, or site and its environment, or to use a property for its originally*

*intended purpose.*

2. *The distinguishing original qualities or character of a building, structure, or site and its environment shall not be destroyed. The removal or alteration of any historic material or distinctive architectural features should be avoided when possible.*
3. *All buildings, structures, and sites shall be recognized as products of their own time. Alterations that have no historical basis and which seek to create an earlier appearance shall be discouraged.*
4. *Changes which may have taken place in the course of time are evidence of the history and development of a building, structure, or site and its environment. These changes may have acquired significance in their own right, and this significance shall be recognized and respected.*
5. *Distinctive stylistic features or examples of skilled craftsmanship which characterize a building, structure, or site shall be treated with sensitivity.*
6. *Deteriorated architectural features shall be repaired rather than replaced, whenever possible. In the event replacement is necessary, the new material should match the material being replaced in composition, design, color, texture, and other visual qualities. Repair or replacement of missing architectural features should be based on accurate duplications of features, substantiated by historic, physical, or pictorial evidence rather than on conjectural designs or the availability of different architectural elements from other buildings or structures.*
7. *The surface cleaning of structures shall be undertaken with the gentlest means possible. Sandblasting and other cleaning methods that will damage the historic building materials shall not be undertaken.*
8. *Every reasonable effort shall be made to protect and preserve archaeological resources affected by, or adjacent to any project.*
9. *Contemporary design for alterations and additions to existing properties shall not be discouraged when such alterations and additions do not destroy significant historical, architectural or cultural material, and such design is compatible with the size, scale, color, material, and character of the property, neighborhood, or environment.*
10. *Wherever possible, new additions or alterations to structures shall be done in such a manner that if such alterations were to be removed in the future, the essential form and integrity of the structure would be unimpaired.*

#### **Site**

**Setback.** *New buildings should be sited at a distance not more than 5% out-of-line from the setback of existing adjacent buildings. Setbacks greater than those of adjacent buildings may be allowed in some cases. Reduced setbacks may be acceptable at corners. This happens quite often in the Historic Hill area and can lend delightful variation to the street.*

**Landscaping.** *Typically, open space in the Historic Hill District is divided into public, semipublic, semiprivate and private space. The public space of the street and sidewalk is often distinguished from the semipublic space of the front yard by a change in grade, a low hedge or a visually open fence.*

*The buildings, landscaping elements in front yards, and boulevard trees together provide a "wall of enclosure" for the street "room". Generally, landscaping which respects the street as a public room is encouraged. Enclosures which allow visual penetration of semipublic spaces, such as wrought-iron fences, painted picket fences, low hedges or limestone retaining walls, are characteristic of most of the Historic Hill area. This approach to landscaping and fences is encouraged in contrast to complete enclosure of semipublic space by an opaque fence, a tall "weathered wood" fence or tall hedge rows. Cyclone fence should not be used in front yards or in the front half of side yards. Landscape timber should not be used for retaining walls in front yards.*

*For the intimate space of a shallow setback, ground covers and low shrubs will provide more visual interest and require less maintenance than grass. When lots are left vacant, as green space or parking area, a visual hole in the street "wall" may result. Landscape treatment can eliminate this potential problem by providing a wall of enclosure from the street. Boulevard trees mark a separation between the automobile corridor and the rest of the streetscape, and should be maintained.*

**Garages and Parking.** *If an alley is adjacent to the dwelling, any new garage should be located off the alley. Where alleys do not exist, garages facing the street or driveway curb cuts may be acceptable. Garage doors should not face the street. If this is found necessary, single garage doors should be used to avoid the horizontal*

*orientation of two-car garage doors.*

*Parking spaces should not be located in front yards. Residential parking spaces should be located in rear yards. Parking lots for commercial uses should be to the side or rear of commercial structures and have a minimum number of curb cuts. All parking spaces should be adequately screened from the street and sidewalk by landscaping. The scale of parking lots should be minimized and the visual sweep of pavement should be broken up by use of planted areas. The scale, level of light output, and design of parking lot lighting should be compatible with the character of the district.*

### **District/Neighborhood**

#### **Recommended:**

- Identifying, retaining, and preserving buildings, and streetscape, and landscape features which are important in defining the overall historic character of the district or neighborhood. Such features can include streets, alleys, paving, walkways, street lights, signs, benches, parks and gardens, and trees.*
- Retaining the historic relationship between buildings, and streetscape and landscape features such as a town square comprised of row houses and stores surrounding a communal park or open space.*

#### **Alterations/Additions for the New Use**

- Designing required new parking so that it is as unobtrusive as possible, i.e., on side streets or at the rear of buildings. Shared parking should also be planned so that several businesses' can utilize one parking area as opposed to introducing random, multiple lots.*
- Designing and constructing new additions to historic buildings when required by the new use. New work should be compatible with the historic character of the district or neighborhood in terms of size, scale, design, material, color, and texture.*
- Removing nonsignificant buildings, additions, or streetscape and landscape features which detract from the historic character of the district or the neighborhood.*

#### **Not Recommended:**

- Removing or radically changing those features of the district or neighborhood which are important in defining the overall historic character so that, as a result, the character is diminished.*
- Destroying streetscape and landscape features by widening existing streets, changing paving material, or introducing inappropriately located new streets or parking lots.*
- Removing or relocating historic buildings, or features of the streetscape and landscape, thus destroying the historic relationship between buildings, features and open space.*
- Failing to undertake adequate measures to assure the preservation of building, streetscape, and landscape features.*
- Replacing an entire feature of the building, streetscape, or landscape such as a porch, walkway, or streetlight, when repair of materials and limited replacement of deteriorated or missing parts are appropriate.*
- Using a substitute material for the replacement part that does not convey the visual appearance of the surviving parts of the building, streetscape, or landscape feature or that is physically or chemically incompatible.*
- Removing a feature of the building, streetscape, or landscape that is unrepairable and not replacing it; or replacing it with a new feature that does not convey the same visual appearance.*

#### **Design for Missing Historic Features**

- Introducing a new building, streetscape or landscape feature that is out of scale or otherwise inappropriate to the setting's historic character, e.g., replacing picket fencing with chain link fencing.*
- Placing parking facilities directly adjacent to historic buildings which cause the removal of historic plantings, relocation of paths and walkways, or blocking of alleys.*
- Introducing new construction into historic districts that is visually incompatible or that destroys historic relationships within the district or neighborhood.*
- Removing a historic building, building feature, or landscape or streetscape feature that is important in defining the overall historic character of the district or the neighborhood.*

**E) FINDINGS:**

1. The property at 880 Summit Avenue is categorized as contributing and 900 Summit Avenue is categorized as non-contributing to the Hill Historic District.

2. The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation state "*New additions, exterior alterations, or related new construction will not destroy historic materials, features, and spatial relationships that characterize a property. The new work shall 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.*" The proposed lot split would not negatively impact the spatial relationship with the house and the church buildings. Staff was not supplied information regarding the garage.

3. The National Register Nomination for the West Summit Avenue Historic District describes the significance of Summit Avenue:

*"The potential district is distinguished from its immediate surroundings by larger lots which range from 190 to 250 feet deep. Although lots were platted at 40 and 50 feet wide, most properties site on double or multiple lots. The average residence on Summit Avenue is sited on a lot of 75-80 feet wide. Overall, the feeling on the avenue is one of stateliness. This feeling is a result of the combination of large lots, large houses, compatible architectural styles, generous set-backs, the boulevard, and mature plantings. It is this combination which sets Summit Avenue apart from adjacent residential neighborhoods to the north and south and makes it a unique avenue in the Twin Cities."*

The lot split would make the Summit Avenue lot approximately 117 feet deep which is not within the range cited above; however, there is currently a parking lot at the rear of the property and the useable size of the lot would not change. There are two neighboring lots to the east with historic houses and similar lot depths. The lot split would not negatively impact the historical integrity of the site. Making this large lot smaller than what was originally intended and designed for Summit Avenue will not diminish the significance and stateliness referred to in the National Register Nomination.

4. The Hill District Guidelines state "*Every reasonable effort shall be made to provide a compatible use for a property which requires minimal alteration of the building, structure, or site and its environment, or to use a property for its originally intended purpose.*" Staff believes altering the environment in which the church and the Fred C. Norlander House is sited by splitting off the lot will not have a negative impact for the long-term preservation and stewardship of the site.

5. The Hill District Guidelines state, "*Where alleys do not exist, garages facing the street or driveway curb cuts may be acceptable. Garage doors should not face the street.*" The lot split would eliminate alley/parking access to the site. Access to the rear of the site for parking will require either an easement from the parking lot or a new curb cut and driveway from Summit Avenue that would need to be proposed separately for staff to review.

**F) RECOMMENDATION:**

Based on the findings, the HPC recommends approval of the lot split application.