

HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION MEETING
TOWN HALL MEETING ROOM
GREENWICH, CT
MAY 11, 2016

MINUTES

ATTENDEES PRESENT

COMMISSIONERS: STEPHEN BISHOP – CHAIRMAN, NOBLE WELCH, FI FI
SHERIDAN, KATHRIN BROWN,

ALTERNATES: MARIE WILLIAMS

ABSENT: ARIS CRIS, LLOYD HULL, DARIUS TORABY, JENNIFER KOSSLER HAOUARI

Mr. Bishop called meeting to order at 7:08pm.

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1. 117 GREENWICH AVENUE
GREENWICH, CT

PRESENTED BY: BRUCE COHEN AND PETER HELMS

REPRESENTED BY: BRUCE F. COHEN, ESQ., FOGERTY COHEN SELBY & NEMIROFF
LLC

OWNER: 117 GREEN LLC

ADVISORY OPINION TO PLANNING & ZONING

Review proposal to permit an office use on the second floor of the building not related to the retail use on the first floor and evaluate the appropriateness of that use as it relates to the request for Historic Overlay designation.

[NOTE: continued from last month's meeting AND 117 Greenwich Avenue was formerly owned and operated by Betteridge Jewelers for many decades]

Mr. Cohen began his presentation by stating that he and his team reexamined 117 Greenwich Avenue with the HDC's comments. He commented that the design of the storefront was focused on the fact that it was designed for a jewelry store and that the exterior panels were created to frame the jewelry display. So the present façade is unusual – one with a small frame focused upon jewelry displays. Mr. Cohen

continued his description drawing attention to a 1909 photograph which is believed to be the original design prior to Betteridge changing the façade and shows a full length window with a panel below it. The proposed design tries to match that look (1909 photograph) that includes recessed lower panels that Mr. Cohen believed was a direction that the HDC was looking for based upon their prior comments. Mr. Cohen then asked if there were any questions.

Ms. Williams asked what would the panels be made out of and what color paint would be used.

Mr. Cohen said the paint is specified in the submitted proposed design and the panels are to be made from a wood substitute called AZEK that is durable.

Mr. Bishop commented that the proposed design is heading in the right direction and that he would like to see a few other things if possible.

Ms. Brown echoed both Mr. Bishop's comments and drew attention to the proposed aluminum door instead of a preferred wood door. If a wood door could not be included then an AZEK door could be substituted.

Mr. Cohen asked Mr. Helms (Peter Helmes, architect) if that was possible. Mr. Helmes replied that a wood door would not hold up and that an ASAK door cannot be made that large. Mr. Helmes further commented that based on the 1909 photograph that he believed the materials facing the street may or may not have been painted wood and in order to give the store support, painted metal would have been chosen. Additionally, the hardware is a well-rubbed bronze to pick up the bronze on the handrails.

Mr. Bishop asked if the cornice that currently exists be replicated to match the one seen in the 1909 photograph.

Mr. Cohen said that change (the elimination of the second cornice) was made probably 65 years ago. Mr. Cohen believed the change was a result of an updated awning.

Mr. Helmes interjected and said that the Italianate style in relation to townhouses had a minor band and focused on the heavy bracketed cornice making it a strong architectural element. By adding the second cornice as seen in the 1909 photograph, it becomes bulky.

Mr. Cohen offered a photograph of the building circa 1950s and stated that there is a new awning and this reflects the fact that the brackets have been removed. So the present 'look' has existed since then.

Mr. Bishop then asked if the applicant could take the existing ledge and put brackets below it?

Mr. Helmes then said that if you look at the 1909 there is no place to put signage board so it was tacked on the top cornice probably to accommodate an awning. Mr. Helmes suggested that simplicity be the goal and can be achieved by painting the cornice darker which will provide a contrast and make for a handsome and classic building.

Mr. Cohen offered a summary and said that there is only one other building on Greenwich Avenue that has HO status (see Post Office) and further added that if buildings qualify they should pursue this designation. But in considering HO status, the commission needs to be mindful that the old buildings need to have an economic viability to them as in this case where the owner is trying to accommodate this building to today's use and keep it historic.

Mr. Bishop agreed that the building should be made economically viable and he personally wants to see the brackets added.

Ms. Sheridan read from the minutes of the April 2016 HDC meeting "Mr. Toraby pointed out that the photos are excellent examples and why aren't you following the photographs ... Mr. Bishop inquired in the client would consider raising the lower part of the windows? ... Ms. Sheridan expressed her concern as the façade that is presented now in the proposal says nothing about the history of this street. She felt that the 1909 photograph offered a design that allows for a large glass display window. The proposal as it stands now does not speak to the street. She realized that there is an issue with maintenance. But, it is a short linear footage and should it needed to be painted every few years, wouldn't that be worth it to help maintain that sense of history on the street? ... Ms. Sheridan said that she is very much in favor of approving historic overlay status as long as what is being preserved is historic ... Ms. Kessler Haouari agreed and commented that trying to preserve the façade that's there. In order to have a historic overlay but then essentially demolish the façade and rebuild it is not historic."

Ms. Sheridan reminded the commission that Planning and Zoning may grant Historic Overlay, either Historic Residential/Office Zone (HRO) or Historic Overlay Zone (HO), or Façade Easement status to properties in Greenwich. The designations allow for zoning bonuses in exchange for a property owner's agreement to preserve and protect a significant historic or architectural asset.

Ms. Sheridan went on to comment that the building was included in the Architectural and Historic Resource Inventory for Downtown Greenwich as well as considered a contributing structure to the Greenwich Avenue Historic District (National Register of Historic Places).

Ms. Sheridan expressed concern that the new proposal called for removing the wood, removing the brass, removing the panels, enlarging the windows, using a cladding that did not exist at the time the building was constructed, removing two

Edwardian windows and in effect, the applicant is taking the history of this building away from the street. She further stated that the Commission recognizes the need to work with clients and the economic affect historic structures have and thus, make every effort to accommodate applicants' designs.

Ms. Sheridan noted that the 1909 photo along with the 1890 photo offers many ideas. Ms. Sheridan believed that the applicant is asking the Commission to disregard any historical elements of this façade and then give endorsements to P&Z to receive concessions and yet the current proposal does not propose to save any history of the structure. Ms. Sheridan did complement the applicant as having the ability and talent to produce a design that reintroduced absent historical elements and would welcome a proposal that offered such.

Mr. Bishop agreed with Ms. Sheridan. Mr. Bishop further noted that he would be flexible on several points but hoped the client would propose a design that offers many of the architectural elements seen in the 1909 photograph.

Ms. Brown interjected that she thought the current design that showed panels below the window were appropriate and Mr. Bishop agreed. But Ms. Brown was concerned with the current's proposal of using an aluminum door.

Mr. Bishop then stated that he wanted to see the bracket brought back or something quite similar to it. Mr. Bishop then inquired how the proposed design would look with an awning as there isn't a rendering for that.

Mr. Helmes replied that the mechanisms are there but the awning itself would be constructed based upon the tenant's design.

Mr. Bishop then asked if the awning shown in the 1909 photo is underneath and thus cannot that be replicated?

Mr. Cohen then introduced the building's owner, Jeffrey R. Kahn, who asked to address the Commission. Mr. Kahn stated that he felt it was unfair to characterize the building by saying that the façade is being demolished. Mr. Kahn went on the say that many of the original elements that were maintained by the former owner (Betteridge) have remained with the current proposal. Considering the building's placement on the street and its historic nature, Mr. Kahn believes that all attempts have been used in keeping what had been extant with the previous owner.

Mr. Kahn further stated that we have tried to do the best we can to maintain the elements of the building when we purchased it and that what has been presented to the HDC is a good blend – maintaining the existing elements, making the building practical and rentable.

Mr. Bishop moved the conversation to the two doors and commented that at one time there were transoms over the doors. Are they there now?

Mr. Helmes replied no and said that the goal of the project was to take the bulkiness out of the top painted panels and get more of a vertical element as tenants nowadays want to show off their merchandise. Because the awning is up at this point, a signage board is needed and that the only place to carry that is on top – thus trying to be sensitive and practical to the building and allow current and future tenants to use a signage board to market their brand.

Mr. Bishop asked where these transoms are now?

Mr. Helmes replied that a signage panel will be dropped in their place in the alcove.

Mr. Bishop stated then that is another detail we are losing and that applicant is not giving HDC much to work with as all that is being given by the client are two over two windows which isn't enough considering the building's past architectural elements. Mr. Bishop continued by suggesting that if the client were to consider replacing the bracket board then the building keeps its integrity. Mr. Bishop understood that the main/street level floor requires flexibility with today's modern environment but the floor/street side above the ground level should lend itself more to the history of the building.

Mr. Bishop also indicated his preference for wood doors and questioned why the client could not also produce a wooden door with their street level entrance.

Mr. Cohen then asked Mr. Bishop for a recess that was granted.

Mr. Cohen returned and began by readdressing Mr. Bishop's request to reinstate the building's brackets and stated that the owner would be willing to do so as seen in the 1909 photograph and would then hope that the HDC sees fit to approve the application.

Mr. Bishop responded by asking for confirmation of the reinstallation of the building's brackets as seen in the 1909 photograph.

Mr. Cohen confirmed and added that it would be reproduced as closely as possible.

Mr. Bishop then asked if the applicant would be willing to do anything on the doors.

Mr. Cohen replied that the applicant could not as the doors had been already ordered.

Ms. Sheridan inquired why were they ordered?

Mr. Cohen replied that ARC had approved this item (note: the ARC approval was prior to the applicant's pursuit of HO status) and the doors are waiting to be installed.

Mr. Bishop asked what are the materials being used?

Mr. Helmes replied that the doors are a metal (aluminum) framed and can withstand a lot of abuse. Its aluminum frame would to match the Chelsea gray color used on the side of the building.

Mr. Bishop asked if there were any samples on hand.

Mr. Helmes could not immediately provide one.

Mr. Cohen said it was a glass door (as seen in the first proposal).

Mr. Bishop asked what the window surrounds are made out of what?

Mr. Helmes replied that those are painted metal like the 1909 photo. Mr. Helmes further added that the thin frames and clear glass store fronts – will remain. Further, the historic sills and traditional panels (made out of AZEK) will be included and the applicant will introduce a cornice element and he hoped that these additions would be sufficient for the HDC to grant HO approval.

Mr. Bishop asked if panels could be applied on the doors as the 1909 photograph indicated that the panels from the sides continued and were used on the doors.

Mr. Helmes responded that by doing so would weaken the door and a special custom panel is required which is not recommended by the manufacturer.

Ms. Sheridan said that in terms of the doors, HDC needed to make an independent decision. Ms. Sheridan continued by stating that it would be fair to say that there will be a financial gain/benefit if the HO was approved to the applicant so that HDC was within its purview to ask that wooden doors be included in the application.

Mr. Cohen said that HDC should make their decision free of any economic considerations.

Ms. Sheridan then expressed her concern that the applicant did not provide any samples of the materials that were to be used.

Mr. Bishop expressed his concern that he would like to see the transoms recreated somehow as well as the rosettes

Mr. Robert Kahn then spoke and said that he and his son purchased the building knowing that it was historic. Mr. Kahn further stated that he knew that for an owner to keep the building historic there has to be an economic return. In this instance, there has been neglect from the previous tenant. Mr. Kahn added that what is being presented to the HDC is a keeping of all that is possible knowing that a tremendous amount of work is being required on top of repairing the work neglected by the

previous tenant. Mr. Kahn then pointed out that what was good for previous tenants is not good in today's world. In order to save historic commercial buildings, you must have an economic return. You cannot restore it to the exact way it was built. There has to be some flexibility to accommodate today's retail tenants. Mr. Kahn stated that he is trying to save this old building and that his design keeps 2/3 of the building with the way it was intentionally supposed to look. The building was designated as historic without those brackets when placed on the National Register of Historic Places. We are trying to do the best we can. Mr. Kahn ended by saying that we need you to appreciate what we have done with a very old and abused building in the hopes of keeping it for another 100 years.

Mr. Bishop said that he appreciated the owner's concern for the history here. These are always a complicated mix of economics and modern day stuff which is never an easy blend. The problem is once we agree and P&Z approves it then the design is locked in.

Ms. Sheridan pointed out that what is being locked in is a very contemporary treatment and very little of history is being preserved.

Mr. Bishop said that doors still remain to be addressed.

Mr. Helmes said that if a panel is required, we will talk to the manufacturer.

Mr. Cohen understood the commission's frustration and asked would you ever have approved the façade changes as it looked in 1989 as compared to the 1909 photograph? Probably not. So how do you preserve the history and still have a modern feel? Mr. Cohen asked that the commission please accept the fact that the many details that appear in 1909 are just not applicable in today's world. The transom was there to let air in as air conditioning had not yet been invented. When you try to make this work according to today's needs based on outdated uses is futile. Mr. Cohen specified that you need to be prepared that new materials will be used as long as they are compatible with the old.

Mr Helmes said as a result of the initial meeting with HDC, an awning in that style would not be appropriate with today's streetscape as there is no room for signage. Mr. Helmes showed the commission a design scheme of a bracket and stated that it could come out 16 inches but the awning would have to be freestanding. There are certain details that must be incorporated in order to accommodate bracket and have the bracket fit into the space. The awning would overlap the signage boarding a bit.

Mr. Bishop said that the proportions needs to be right.

Mr. Kahn said that if you have a cornice on the upper level, then the lower cornice needs to be smaller.

Mr. Bishop followed up by saying that the commission needs to know the measurements to ensure that the lower brackets are smaller than the upper ones.

Mr. Bishop commented that on the design, the panels continue up and was curious about that feature.

Mr. Helmes said that the panels would be painted but said that an applied panel or molding is not difficult to do as that is only the solid wall as the rest is glass.

Mr. Bishop was impressed with the flexibility of the applicant but still queried them regarding using wooden doors rather than metal.

Ms. Sheridan said that if wood is not compatible here then we are moving away from the history of the building.

Mr Helmes said that you would not know the difference between a painted wood door and a painted metal door and believed that the facades were cast metal panels that were painted, not wood. He would prefer to have a panel on the doors to pick up on the bay windows.

Mr. Bishop agreed but was curious about the thoughts from the rest of the commissioners. Mr. Bishop also would be interested in seeing samples.

Mr. Welch understood the applicant's decision to use AZEK for maintenance reasons but he believed that ASAK takes away from the historic nature of the building and he would like to see a sample.

Mr. Bishop then ended the presentation and asked for a motion.

A motion to approve historic overlay be granted to 117 Greenwich Avenue regarding plans submitted to the Historic District Commission on May 11, 2016, *only* if the below conditions were met:

- 1.) The applicant shall restore the first floor cornice with brackets similar to what is shown in the 1909 photograph that was submitted with the proposal. The bracket design shall try to minimize the projection outward from the building and possibly reduce the bracket size somewhat in order to be more in keeping with the historic condition.
- 2.) The replication of the historic sill shown on the revised drawings shall be maintained and the applicant shall incorporate as best as possible the same motif or rosette (with the small curved return in the upper corners) similar to the 1909 (above mentioned) photo.
- 3.) The lower sill paneling noted above shall be carried over to both doors. The height of the bottom door panels shall be consistent with the height of the panels

under the bay windows.

4.) The solid wall on the right hand side of the entrance door to the second and third floor levels will need to incorporate an applied molding similar to the 1909 photograph.

5.) Transom windows shall be installed above each of the doors to provide a similar look as shown in the 1909 photograph. [Note: These will be new transom windows and the large square transoms that currently exist do not need to be maintained.]

6.) An opening in the ceiling inside the left door shall be provided to allow light from the transom window into the retail space. The ceiling in the foyer for the residential tenants is already at a height to accommodate the transom at this entrance.

7.) The applicant shall return to the HDC with construction drawings and present samples of all materials, including the aluminum frame door, color samples, Azek material, shutters and shutterdog hardware.

Moved by: Ms. Williams

Seconded by: Ms. Brown

Majority vote: 3-2

Voting in favor: Mr. Bishop, Ms. Brown, Ms. Williams

Voting as opposed: Mr. Welch, Ms. Sheridan

DEMOLITIONS

41 Overlook Drive
Greenwich, CT

28 Husted Drive
Old Greenwich, CT

MINUTES

Motion to approve minutes from April 13, 2016 meeting

Moved by Ms. Brown

Seconded by Ms. Williams

Unanimous vote

Voting in favor: Mr. Bishop, Mr. Welch, Ms. Brown, Ms. Williams, Ms. Sheridan

NEW BUSINESS

Ms. Young introduced to the HDC members that Conservation Commission will be approaching the Town of Greenwich regarding the acquisition of Byram Cemetery. Ms. Young did not know if public comment would be made available but asked if possible that HDC would encourage preservation efforts as well as application for historic designations.

Ms. Young also informed the HDC members that the next upcoming P&Z meeting on May 17th regarded an application submitted by Greenwich Historical Society and reminded the members that HDC would rule upon the building but according to The Handbook for Historic District Commission and Historic Property Commissions in Connecticut, the HDC MUST review features and landscapes (as well) that contribute to the character of the local historic district as well as the arrangement of public amenities (these all work together to define the physical setting and as such, must all work together to form a cohesive whole).

Mr. Bishop closed the meeting at 9:00 pm.