

MINUTES
Regular Meeting of the
Historic District Commission of the Town of Greenwich
Wednesday, July 12, 2017, 7:00pm
Mazza Room, Town Hall

ATTENDEES PRESENT

COMMISSIONERS: STEPHEN BISHOP – CHAIRMAN, DARIUS TORABY, FI FI
SHERIDAN, KATHRIN BROWN, ARIS CRIST,

ALTERNATES: MARTIN KAGAN, MARIE WILLIAMS

ABSENT: ANNIE MCGINNIS, SERENA BECHTEL

Mr. Bishop called meeting to order at 7:05pm.

1. ADVISORY TO PLANNING & ZONING

63 CHURCH STREET

Owner: Fisk Management LLC

Represented by: Thomas J Heagney, Esq., Heagney, Lennon & Slane, LLP

Architect: Richard F. Hein Architects & Assoc PC

Review revisions to previously approved plans to convert existing 3-bedroom house in the front with a 1-story connector to the office building in the rear into a multi-family structure with one 2-bedroom unit in the front, a covered walkway in the middle and four 1-bedroom units in the former office space at the back of the property

Mr. Heagney opened the presentation by identifying the structure within the Fourth Ward in order to give the proposed design a geographical context.

The applicant has returned based upon a ZBA comment of “too much bulk” (on a design already approved by HDC in April) on the second floor going along vertically. They felt it encroached into the air on the properties on either side and that the overall bulk building (being proposed) is greater than what is there now. The architect addressed those concerns and incorporated that into the design now being presented by Mr. Hein (the architect) to the HDC.

Mr. Hein presented the new rendering showing a new profile. It is now a design with a more modest scale. Additionally he presented the ARC approved landscape and lighting plans.

Mr. Bishop commented that the roof is now a four-sided mansard – Mr. Hein concurred. Mr. Bishop asked what the applicant was looking for.

Mr. Heagney replied that the applicant is looking for conceptual approval by the Commission to then re-approach the ZBA.

Mr. Hein reminded the Commission that they are looking at the issue of bulk and overhang.

Mr. Bishop said that the chimneys were removed due to the bulk and overhang onto the setback issue? Hein concurred and expressed dismay that that had to have happened but that the existing footprint has not been altered.

Mr. Toraby commented that he understood about the excessive mass that was objected to. He suggested that the link between the two buildings (seen from the street) should be a flat roof and not follow the roofline and reduce bulk. Thus part of the mansard would go away replaced by a flat parapet.

Mr. Crist inquired if the applicant would be returning to discuss materials. Mr. Heagney agreed that the applicant would return at a future date for that discussion but today's meeting was for approval of a conceptual design.

Mr. Bishop expressed curiosity about the first floor and asked for clarification. Mr. Hein responded that it is a preexisting building that is being adapted for reuse. The siding would be peeled back to reveal its original materials (which is what the rendering is attempting to replicate) – a concrete CMU with rock base. Mr. Bishop suggested that then it was a precast concrete block that has a 'simulated' rock face? Mr. Bishop expressed concern whether this was an appropriate choice, as it doesn't relate to the rest of the structure even though it is an interesting building element. He would prefer more uniformity.

Ms. Sheridan opened her comments by referring to Church's Street's contextual architectural design that reflected 'farmhouse', a moderate income 'in town' house available during the 1900s. She felt that the current design bears very little resemblance between what we know and Church Street – a street of clapboard and late Victorian buildings. Ms. Sheridan stated that she is puzzled by the proposal, as it doesn't reflect the historic context of the Fourth Ward.

Mr. Hein agreed and commented that the proposed structure is a taller building than what is there now. Ms. Dantas declared that appropriate research had been conducted and that there were elements incorporated into the proposal that could be found on several other Church Street structures and that the applicant is solely here at HDC looking for comments on the structure itself.

Ms. Sheridan appreciated the curatorial selection of architectural elements but felt that the end product was not evocative of the historic Fourth Ward. She felt that the proposal was a brand new design – it doesn't 'read' historic.

Mr. Bishop commented that the porch on the existing building runs the entire face. The new proposal does not seem to have that. Mr. Hein affirmed and said that the reason is to be sympathetic to a building two structures away (which is a new building) and is a good metaphor.

Mr. Toraby felt that the proposal is going to change the streetscape. Mr. Hein suggested that perhaps the design should tone down heroics of the detailing. Ms. Dantas added that zoning restrictions did not allow for creativity for its proposed use.

Mr. Toraby asked if the existing second story is to be demolished and then rebuilt? What is being demolished? Mr. Hein replied that the roof, the gambrel structure in the back building and motioned to portions on the design. Mr. Hein continued with addressing the front of the building and pointed out that preservation will occur up to the second floor and then the applicant is elevating the eaves of the first floor and creating a Mansard.

Mr. Toraby agreed with Ms. Sheridan that the current proposal is going to change the feeling of Church Street.

Mr. Bishop stated that he felt the proposal had merits.

Mr. Toraby responded and stated that what the applicant is proposing is a new design, thoroughly put together, good on proportions and height but feels that one of the objections is toward the mansard roof. Perhaps either diminish it or reduce it.

Ms. Brown concurred with Mr. Toraby's comments in making the roof simpler.

Mr. Hein said that the design went the opposite direction in looking to have the building feel more antiquated but appreciated the comments. Mr. Toraby wants the design to be more sympathetic to streetscape as best as possible.

Mr. Hein then asked if the Commission would want double hung windows. The Commission agreed and also asked for the "SDL" feature (simulated divided light).

Mr. Hein then asked about the cladding of windows. Mr. Bishop asked what color the siding was to be and Mr. Hein responded that the siding would be a 'dove gray' and that the shutters would be a darker gray. Mr. Bishop then said that white would be fine for the windows.

Mr. Bishop then asked if anyone wanted to comment on the proposal.

Mr. Jay Haverson (Haverson Architecture) introduced himself as a former owner of the 63 Church Street.

Mr. Haverson supported Ms. Sheridan's comments. He further stated that if the building is left untouched, then there are no issues with Planning & Zoning and feels that all the proposed uses by the applicant could be accommodated within the current structure.

Mr. Haverson said that he believes the current proposal, which is a proposed teardown, is inconsistent with the HDC. The buildings on Church Street are very modest and that there is only one other building on Church Street with a mansard roof. The rest of the buildings with mansard roofs were built and approved later when they were the rage. Mr. Haverson suggested that the building in the front be preserved in some fashion. When Mr. Haverson was preserving the structure, he followed the comment of the then HDC Chair (Susan Richardson) to add a front porch. And he felt the suggestion was a good one as it benefits both the scale of the structure and blends with the streetscape. Mr. Haverson then stated that if the changes that are being proposed aren't based upon improvements, then why change the building's design?

Mr. Haverson then discussed the rear building and felt that the design did not compliment the historicity of the property. Mr. Haverson was primarily concerned about preserving the front of the property.

Mr. Toraby respectfully stated that he felt that the front of the building is not of landmark quality that it does not have any specific design character. Mr. Toraby added that what is being proposed is a more attractive option to have on the street. But Mr. Toraby felt that HDC needs to decide whether to keep the history or allow for improvement. Mr. Toraby felt that Ms. Sheridan's point was quite valid that the current proposal will change the character of the street and will it improve it or detract from its historic value. Mr. Toraby further stated that if the alterations were sensitively and appropriately done, he did not have an objection to the approach being taken.

Mr. Toraby then asked Mr. Haverson for his opinion to the historicity of the building and possible suggestions. Mr. Haverson responded saying that the two structures contribute overall to the context of the Fourth Ward neighborhood. Mr. Haverson went on to say that he would eliminate the connector between the two buildings so the two buildings read as separate and this would allow for either parking or addition of electricals; that the building in the front should at least retain its shell; that the building in the rear should maintain its current setbacks and have it retain the same exterior but alter the interior.

Mr. Heagney appreciated the comments expressed by Mr. Haverson especially as Mr. Haverson had been a previous owner and brings a certain understanding to the structure. But as there is now a current owner, there is a different thought process.

Mr. Heagney said that the neighborhood is eclectic and diverse. Mr. Heagney stated that the applicant is looking to improve the character of the neighborhood. He added that he certainly appreciated the detailed comments and that they would be considered towards improving the façade but in order for the applicant to go forward with the Zoning Board of Appeals, an affirmative statement by the HDC that the bulk and overall mass of the building is appropriate is being requested.

Mr. Hein said that it is not a tear down it is an adaptive reuse and that there are many beneficial elements brought to bear with the proposed design.

Mr. Bishop summarized saying do we go with the basic design being proposed or do we try and save the existing building with tweaks. Mr. Bishop asked if the existing front house could be modified to make it work with the rear?

Mr. Hein said that the front building has two stories with a third story existing attic and low ceilings and would have too many revisits with stairways, ceiling heights and windows so its preservation is extremely challenging. Therefore the front building is not viable after the second floor.

Mr. Bishop said while it may not be viable now, could the front building be melded with the back building?

Ms. Dantas said that current zoning restriction prohibited that possibility.

Mr. Kagan stated that there is no question that the idea of the redesign of the back building to tie into the front building is a positive step. The look of the front building though is going to dictate the look of the back building. That those two elements need to be brought together. However, there is a feeling of the neighborhood in the current front building versus what is being proposed. So one of the options is to keep the feel of that front building and design the back building to have that same feeling too.

Ms. Dantas pointed out that there are height discrepancies between the front building and the back building.

Mr. Hein said that when examining how to 'unite' the two buildings the key was the mansard roof. Mr. Hein further stated that he didn't think he could make the back building work with the front building without the mansard roof.

Mr. Toraby suggested the element of style that has been selected for the new look is rather foreign to the street. If you remove those and make it more bare-boned, more simplified both in terms of the roof line, roof slope roof overhang in the front (maybe not as much in the back) and making sure the two buildings are/look separated is something that should be brought back to the Commission in the hopes that it would not be so 'clashy' with what was there before. Mr. Toraby is concerned that the proposed design is too far of a departure of what is present.

Ms. Williams suggested removing the link structure that would reduce the mass.

Ms. Dantas specified that P&Z determined that the two buildings needed to be linked.

Ms. Williams then offered that a glass-connecting hallway to make it more environmentally friendly. Like a glazed enclosed pergola.

Mr. Bishop asked the applicant if they are basically looking for an opinion from HDC regarding the bulk of the proposed design for ZBA?

Mr. Heagney replied that as significant changes are being made to the front, ZBA would also require an opinion from HDC regarding that aspect and as such, Mr. Heagney did not feel that the application was presentable enough to render such a decision.

Mr. Bishop commented that significant decision was to choose between the gabled roof that is there now or go with the mansard roof.

Mr. Hein felt that he would have to drop the eaves below the ceiling height if the gabled roof were to remain.

Mr. Toraby said he had no problem with a mansard roof as long as it is not as flared and that the design and decorative elements and the siding of the windows are in keeping with what is there now. Then it would be the same building with a new look.

Ms. Williams is in favor and also wants to see the connector concept with a flat roof as she feels it would reduce the bulk-look.

Mr. Crist felt that the mansard roof could work but it is difficult to decide without a design.

Mr. Hein asked if he could pursue a mansard roof on the rear building?

Mr. Bishop felt that it would be appropriate.

Ms. Brown would like to see the design simplified.

Mr. Kagan doesn't think that the roofline is as important as the porch, door and windows as it is these elements that reflect the neighborhood.

Mr. Bishop would like to see a porch that goes across the whole front.

NO DECISION – APPLICANT TO RETURN

2. CERTIFICATE OF APPROPRIATENESS / ADVISORY OPINION TO PLANNING & ZONING

33 LEWIS STREET

Owners: Anthis Corporation

Represented by: Christopher D. Bristol, Esq., Gilbride, Tusa, Last & Spellane LLC

Architect: E. Ronald Gushue, ERG ARCHITECT

Review proposed exterior changes including new windows and doors on first floor, new exterior lighting and awning with signage and change to building's color

Mr. Bristol reminded the Commission that the first floor of the building housed Toscana restaurant and now there is a salon. The first floor occupant is driving the proposed changes.

Mr. Gushue would like to bring the building back to the original color that can currently be seen on the side. The windows will remain the way they are. The three masonry openings will remain with an emphasis on the structure rather than the window. A nicely detail trim will be added to the first floor windows. There would be four lights on the first floor.

Mr. Kagan asked if there was a greater detail of the window and door. Mr. Bristol offered a drawing and reminded the HDC that there is great depth to it.

Mr. Toraby felt that the proposal is changing both the character of the building and the street.

Mr. Bristol acknowledged the change but felt it was a change from the former Tuscan character (based on the former tenant -- restaurant's style and menu) back to the original -- a more simplified design. And continued, saying the coins will be uniform and the trim and the crown molding will be a clear natural mahogany.

The other uses will provide for salon expansion into the basement level and the second floor will offer administrative services for the salon and the third floor would be an apartment pending receiving zoning approval.

Mr. Toraby inquired about the transom. Mr. Bristol stated, as there is no horizontal element anywhere in the building that would align or indicate there ever was a transom, the doors will be independent of a transom. In this case, the doors will be 9' and will have a panel bottom for support.

Mr. Bishop understood the concern of losing some detail but felt that if the trim is done well, it can make up for the loss to a certain degree. As this is a commercial enterprise, HDC wants to support exposure and branding but up to a certain degree.

Mr. Toraby asked if the mahogany on the door extended down to the sidewalk. Mr. Bristol confirmed.

Mr. Crist asked for confirmation the color of the building will be changed to "White Tie" (Farrow & Ball)? Mr. Bristol confirmed except for the cornice and the window trim.

Motion to accept the design that includes new windows and doors on first floor (using mahogany), new exterior lighting (Hinkley Lighting as proposed), repainting the exterior using Farrow & Ball's "White Tie" and proposed awning with signage

Moved by Ms. Sheridan
Seconded by Mr. Kagan

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

Opposed: Mr. Toraby

ADMINISTRATION

47 LAFAYETTE PLACE
Presented by Stephen Bishop

Mr. Bishop stated that he received a call to approve the restoration work being done by L & M Company at 47 Lafayette Place (The Greenwich Lodge). Mr. Bishop pronounced his intention to approve this administratively as the applicant has already done work there restoring one side of the building and is now doing another side. They are replacing all materials with like kind and color, and there are no changes. They have confirmed this to me in writing, and they have attached their bid, which also shows all the work to be like-kind replacement/repair.

Motion to support Mr. Bishop's approval of restoration work being performed at 47 Lafayette Place by L & M Company

Moved by Mr. Kagan
Seconded by Ms. Brown
Unanimous vote

Voting in favor: Mr. Bishop, Ms. Sheridan, Ms. Brown, Mr. Kagan, Ms. Williams, Mr. Crist, Mr. Toraby

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Motion to approve June 14, 2017 minutes

Moved by Mr. Kagan
Seconded by Ms. Brown
Unanimous vote

Voting in favor: Mr. Bishop, Ms. Sheridan, Ms. Brown, Mr. Kagan, Ms. Williams, Mr. Crist, Mr. Toraby

DEMOLITIONS

UPDATE ON:

18 Grigg Street

Ms. Sheridan along with Diane Fox and Eric Brower met with 18 Grigg Street owner to present various incentives (which, if accepted, allows a gain of 3X FAR) – application is still pending

171 North Maple Ave
Greenwich, CT

141 Milbank Ave
Greenwich, CT

[note: any Greenwich resident may place a stay on a noticed demolition].

Motion to end the meeting

Moved by Mr. Kagan

Seconded by Mr. Crist

Mr. Bishop closed the meeting at 9:04p.m.