

DRAFT MINUTES
Special Meeting
Historic District Commission of the Town of Greenwich
Wednesday, October 17, 2018, 7:00pm
Cafeteria – Downstairs Basement Level*, Town Hall

ATTENDEES PRESENT

COMMISSIONERS: STEPHEN BISHOP – CHAIRMAN, DARIUS TORABY, KATHRIN BROWN,

ALTERNATES: MARTIN KAGAN, SERENA BECHTEL, MARIE WILLIAMS (arr 7:12)

ABSENT: FI FI SHERIDAN, ARIS CRIST, ANNIE MCGINNIS, CYNTHIA SMITH

Mr. Bishop called the meeting to order at 7:06p.m.

CERTIFICATE OF APPROPRIATENESS AND ADVISORY OPINION TO
PLANNING & ZONING

226 and 230 Mason Street and 16 Havemeyer Place (buttressing
Greenwich Municipal Center – NRHP); and 230 Mason Street (National
Guard Armory Building – Contributing Structure to Greenwich Avenue
District, NRHP)

Owner: GDC Havemeyer, LLC and GFC, LLC

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

Review proposal to preserve the front portion of the Armory and construct a
synagogue on the corner of Mason Street and Havemeyer Place
[Continued from September 12, 2018 meeting]

Mr. Heagney began his presentation by providing a short review from when the application began in July:

The building design that was presented in July was one that the HDC thought was too modern in style and design; there was concern in overall bulk and how it related to other adjacent buildings. So the applicant incorporated those comments and produced a revised design that was presented in September to the HDC.

One of the items that was expressed in the July meeting was that the building had too many curves, the entrance should be more prominent and more welcoming and that it should relate in some way to the buildings in the surrounding area. So the revised design shows that the curved glass portion of the sanctuary was brought back away from the property line so you would have a 2-story element on the street with a third story being recessed in the back. The entrance was changed to become

more prominent and welcoming and we changed the curved portion of the glass facing east sanctuary recessed back so when you are on Mason Street you are seeing a 2-story rather than a 3-story façade. We had a pattern of the Jerusalem limestone that is more rectangular that is moving towards a match of the design of the Central Fire Station. There were additional concerns that the Commission expressed and we thought we had brought to you a more traditional design and the Commission still asked for more changes. We went back to the drawing board and made a number of changes addressing the comments made in September.

Erik Zabell (Granoff Architects – project architect) spoke on past HDC comments:

The past curves seen in September's HDC meeting didn't make sense and were removed on the wings, on the third floor and the curved porte-cochere columns. A stepped entry was created to give cover and open to the public. Another modification was to lighten up the way the building sits and interacts with the street. Previously there was a stonewall with a pocket park and play area and this has now been turned into a metal fence so the greenery is more visible to the public. Likewise, the center portion of the Mason street side has been set back to allow for planting on Mason Street.

Ms. Brown asked if the oak trees had to be removed. Mr. Zabell responded yes. Ms. Brown then asked what would be substituted in their place. Mr. Zabell replied that they will be street trees in order to be hardy. He further added that the design had not 'gone through landscape' so he did not know which exact tree(s) would be recommended. If the oak trees are advised could survive and HDC wants them, then that will be considered.

Mr. Zabell continued addressing the center portion on Mason street and has been simplified with a rhythm of 2-story windows (as seen at the Fire House and educational building). Another iteration is the modeling of the Jerusalem stone. And a corrugated stepping has been added at the corners that relates to scale of the brick the Armory to bring in a relationship with the building.

Mr. Zabell continued saying that another big change (this was had through conversations with the [Chabad] building committee) was eliminating the stain glass that was previously on the entry and have gone with the iconic tablet. Further, the granite based was raised; the windows were recessed a bit more; the parapets were lowered a bit (3 feet) and the windows raised a bit (one foot) to alleviate some of the 'heaviness' of the scale.

Mr. Kagan asked if there was a reason why the other 'two sides' of the building were not being shown.

Mr. Zabell responded that the design team had not been concentrating on those. On the Armory side where the shed is, the applicant is keeping the brick façade and the roof is to be removed with a planting bed on the edge of the parking deck there.

Mr. Kagan stated that the Commission has only seen two sides of the proposal since its beginning and not all four.

Mr. Heagney stated that HDC had been showed what was going to be seen and that the rest is hidden by a wall and the parking deck.

Mr. Kagan replied that there is a visual element when looking down the driveway.

Mr. Heagney said that you would then see a connection between . . .

Mr. Kagan interrupted and said that the HDC had not seen any drawings of that to date.

Mr. Zabell produced some renderings. Mr. Heagney began speaking indicating a drawing with a bird's eye view showing the existing wall of the Armory that will be retained and the parapet above it and the south side. The space between the synagogue and gallery space is about 25 feet wide (two way).

Mr. Toraby commented that that particular elevation was not shown. Mr. Heagney replied that it was shown in an earlier version and should be considered essentially a blank wall.

Mr. Heagney then preceded to show the building in context to indicate that the parapet level of the proposed building is the same height as the Armory.

Mr. Toraby asked how high was that?

Mr. Heagney replied that it is roughly 27 feet (both buildings).

Mr. Toraby said there is an existing 27 feet that matches the Armory but there seems to be more for the sanctuary. Mr. Zabell said that the height of the sanctuary is about 40 feet. Mr. Heagney reminded that the front sides on both Mason and Havemeyer were 27 feet.

Mr. Heagney wanted to add a bit more history as it was important to context. This is the third application that the HDC has seen in the last 11 years. In 2007, a condominium project was approved and was 27,000+ square feet and was also 40 feet high. The difference in the proposal is that plan called for taking down everything but the façade of the Armory. HDC also saw in 2017 and this was also a condominium project (28,000+ square feet) that called for retaining the Armory but removing the shed (present parking garage) and it too was also 40 feet high. Mr. Heagney brought the past designs to the HDC's attention remarking that those past designs were greater in square footage than what is being proposed (26,000+ square feet).

Mr. Heagney stated that the Armory Building is being retained and only the Drilling Shed is being removed.

Mr. Kagan asked that a precise number for what percentage of the Armory is to be demolished and what is to be built needs to be clearly identified as it has been misrepresented in past correspondence.

Mr. Heagney continued saying that he believes the present design is sensitive to the Armory, aspects of the firehouse have been incorporated and hopes that HDC will approve the present design.

Mr. Bishop thanked Mr. Heagney for his presentation and opened the meeting to HDC members for their comments.

Mr. Toraby mentioned that the design 'took' from the fire house building across the street.

Mr. Zabell said that the design tried to 'relate' to it.

Mr. Toraby understood but stated that as the proposed design is on the Armory site and it should more relate to the Armory than the Central Fire station.

Mr. Zabell said that historically, the present open parking was actually a gas station prior to its demolition and not part of the Armory site.

Mr. Toraby said that the group is trying to have the proposed building's design have a relationship to the historic building it will be sitting next to.

Mr. Heagney said that we changed the material on the first and second floor corners in keeping with the Armory as it now has a brick texture and is mimicked on the corners of the synagogue.

Mr. Toraby said that he didn't see that at all. He further added that he appreciated Mr. Heagney's review of past projects as he feels that the HDC hasn't seen any relationship from the existing proposal to Armory or Fire House.

Mr. Zabell felt that the Commission had not directly stated that specific aspects had to be incorporated into the design. He felt that the reality of the situation is that the new design that is being creating for the client in a historic district is one where the client does not want red brick.

Mr. Toraby responded that with all due respect, the applicant has made a great attempt compared to the previous proposal but now there is a recess on Mason Street with no entrance on that side. He further added that when he recently visited the site, the fire station alarm went off and the fire trucks were dispatched with all kinds of commotion and hugging the sidewalk curb of the proposed site. Mr. Toraby

stated that that type of occurrence will happen without any notice. And should a group of people be exiting (with children), this design poses a serious element of danger to the congregant's safety (in his opinion). Mr. Toraby further added that in regard to the height relationship and fenestration of the proposed design, he saw that the applicant tried to make the translation more proportionate to the amount of solid work that you have but if you look at the Armory and all the other buildings at the corner, the fenestration is minor and the masonry is major. Here you have a 'prison' wall (ground wall) that is looming around the entire building. That does not relate to anything.

Mr. Heagney said that is the facing wall of the sanctuary.

Mr. Toraby continued and addressed the bulkhead at the sidewalk level and felt that if you looked at the presentation it is completely divorced from the building. It is too high.

Mr. Heagney asked if Mr. Toraby was suggesting different material? For it to be lower?

Mr. Toraby said it seems that the building was placed on the podium which is a four-foot high different material, different color. Mr. Toraby encouraged other HDC members to speak.

Ms. Bechtel agree with Mr. Toraby's analysis of the entrance.

Mr. Toraby said that the Armory is a landmark -- a magnificent structure with important history in Greenwich. Any effort made to design with the building on this site should respect that in terms of finding out if there are their any deficiencies in regard to the restoration of the building? You are asking for historic overlay, what are we getting in return?

Mr. Zabell said that we haven't addressed that as he believed something to that extent was already in place that was proposed by the Nitkin Group. Mr. Heagney added that the restoration and preservation of the building is tantamount to the project. We are committed to having the building preserved.

Mr. Toraby said that the applicant needed to specify what those activates would entail, at what point in time and at what length.

Mr. Heagney said that would be in the declaration of restrictions that would be signed by the property owner(s) in the land records.

Mr. Toraby said that HDC would and should know that.

Mr. Heagney stated that we are committing to preserving and restoring the Armory building in perpetuity.

Mr. Toraby is concerned that the building's character and design remain complete.

Mr. Bishop said that the entire structure needs to be documented with a detailed plan for restoration for HDC review.

Ms. Young asked if she might offer a question posed by Cynthia Smith (HDC member but not present) for the applicant. Mr. Bishop allowed. Ms Smith inquired " How did the applicant come up with needing 123 parking spaces? The design shows the temple needing space for 130 people. If you average for a family of four, then the temple needs 30-35 spaces – maybe 40, then you have the Armory offices and the school for students drop off etc (more during the week) – not conflict of service time. The present design shows ~80 spaces between the basement and level 1. Do you need the additional parking on levels 2 and 3?

Mr. Heagney said the answer is yes. The 91 spaces are by previous agreement are committed to the Armory space and the Financial Center (Monday through Friday). There are 32 spaces on the first floor for preschool. The entry and exit would be on Mason Street with staggered start and end times. The entrance into the lower garage will from the preexisting ramp that serves the Richard's building. The second level of the garage are associated with the offices in the Armory. The breakup of the parking serves all the constituents quite well.

Mr. Kagan questioned the feasibility of the 'drop off' of students within the garage.

Mr. Zabell said that the action would entail the child's guardian park and walk the child into the building. Mr. Zabell added that parking would be used by those attending Hebrew evening study. Mr. Heagney further added that congregants attending worship services on Saturday would be using the parking as well.

Mr. Toraby further commented on the orientation of the building facing the firehouse. He stated that when he visited the site, he felt that the most wonderful view with trees and buildings in the distance was to the east and your entrance is looking right at the three portals of the fire trucks. This is confusing and perhaps the orientation should be reconsidered.

Mr. Heagney said that the Rabbi and his building committee were the ones who felt that the entrance should be one that faces more towards Greenwich Avenue and is visible as you come down the Avenue.

Mr. Toraby said that he didn't see how this relates to Greenwich Avenue.

Mr. Heagney said the appropriate entrance is on Havemeyer Place.

Mr. Toraby said that it lacks in set backs for those exiting the services and there may be quite a number. Mr. Toraby said that he sees at Temple Shalom a very large

group of people exit, cars are driving, they are greeting each other, they are saying goodbye – he felt that the present design did not offer the congregants any room to participate in the social behaviors of exiting their place of worship. That there was no room on the sidewalk to do any of that. Mr. Toraby wants to ensure the design functions appropriately and well.

Mr. Bishop asked what the setback on both Havemeyer and Mason is.

Mr. Zabell said it goes from 15 feet to 2 feet to 7 seven feet on the corner. On Mason we are mirroring what is happening on the Armory and is minimal on Mason.

Ms. Brown asked how much of a set back was on the entrance on Havemeyer.

Mr. Zabell responded that from door to the property line is 8-9 feet. The actual portico comes out from that.

Mr. Bishop asked, in the zone, without HO, what are the zoning setbacks requirements on Mason and Havemeyer? Mr. Heagney thought it was 10 feet but we don't have that.

Mr. Heagney reminded that the project approved in 2017 was a .9 FAR.

Mr. Toraby said to that point those previous projects did not have that demand of parking. If you are comparing, those would have been people who exited in the morning and returned in the evening and as such, did not require a waiver for parking. In this scenario, as there will be special events at a variety of times, a huge requirement for parking is needed. But that is for another Board to review.

Mr. Heagney agreed.

[PLACEHOLDER]

Mr. Heagney responded to the public's comments stating that the plan that was actually voted on in 2007 by P&Z and discussed various past HDC recommendations on past applications and suggested that there was precedent to be followed.

Mr. Bishop asked if P&Z approved the 2017 plan? Mr. Heagney responded no.

Mr. Bishop closed comments from/by applicant and public.

A motion to end the meeting made by Ms. Brown and seconded by Ms. Williams at 9:17