

City of Excelsior
Heritage Preservation Commission
Special Meeting/Work Session Minutes
Wednesday, June 4, 2014

1. CALL TO ORDER/ROLL CALL

Chair Schmidt called the meeting to order at 7:05 p.m.

Present: Bipes, Bolles, Brabec, Macpherson, Nelson, Schmidt

Absent: Finch

Also Present: City Planner Smith, Advisor Caron

2. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

- a. Continued Discussion of Site Alteration Permit for Second Story Addition to Historic Wheeler Building—Martin's

Schmidt stated that at its last meeting, the HPC by a 4-2 vote gave concept approval to the addition of a second level on the historic Wheeler Building (currently Martin's). This work session was set up to provide an opportunity for the Commission to discuss some of the proposed details of the addition. Schmidt stated that the City Attorney has advised him that there will be an appeal of the HPC's concept approval decision to the City Council. He stated that the consensus of those that he has discussed this with in the City believe that this decision presents an important issue for the community. He stated that he recognizes the inconsistency between the HPC's vote and many aspects of the Secretary of the Interior Standards.

Bolles asked how Schmidt knows that those persons that he has interviewed in the community are representative of prevailing sentiment on the issue. Schmidt stated that the Council and City Attorney view this as an open question that may have to be determined by the Council. He recognizes the good work done by City staff in summarizing the applicable Standards. Schmidt then distributed a document providing potential findings regarding how this decision might be justified under language in the ordinance and design standards, and read several excerpts from the draft findings. He questioned how controlling the Secretary of the Interior Standards are on the HPC's decisions. Schmidt stated that introductory language in the ordinances and Standards stated that they are not intended to be prescriptive and should be interpreted flexibly, and that the Standards should be interpreted expansively enough to allow zero setbacks for new rooftop additions. Bolles stated that Schmidt may be confusing the issue of rooftop additions on existing designated historic buildings with new construction, where no setback is appropriate. He stated that he had not yet had a chance to review the findings that had just been distributed, so could not comment on them specifically.

Project architect Magney presented a schematic sketch of the West side of Water Street to show how the new building might appear in context. Nelson sought clarification that the task before the Commission this evening is to seek to come to agreement on a design concept for the rooftop addition that would be acceptable for adoption at the Commission's next meeting. Schmidt agreed and stated that he plans to attend the appeal hearing and will seek to present both the majority and minority opinions of Commission members at the hearing. Schmidt believes that the overall design is attractive, but in certain respects overshadows the historic building. He has a concern about the fanciness of the windows and parapet. Magney presented four options for different parapets and rooflines; Option A had a raised parapet with a flat top, Option B had a raised parapet with an arched top, Option C had a flat parapet, and Option D had a flat parapet with less corbel detailing. Deanna Swenson, the project interior designer, displayed the options on the projection screen. Nelson stated that she is interested in retaining the downtown's feeling of whimsy, but she feels that Commissioners may be looking at whimsy differently, some with respect to whether the buildings have first and second stories and some with respect to the presence of varied design elements. There is variation on both sides of Water Street.

The Commission discussed the proposed windows. Magney stated that the windows are taller and the sill is higher than that on the other buildings with second stories on the West side of Water Street. She stated that the window dimensions also do not match those on the Jake O'Connor's building next door, as this addition will make the building taller than that building. This design is intended to add some decorative features to provide visual interest in the top level.

Macpherson stated that elaboration in architectural features is appropriate for new buildings but not for a new addition, since under the Standards, new additions are not supposed to detract from the original historic building's architecture and should be inconspicuous. Nelson stated that most of us don't look up at the buildings, so it is hard to say that this addition would detract from the original building. Nelson commented that, in her view, the parapet contributes to the whimsy of the downtown and relates to some detail on the other side of the street and therefore is consistent with the rest of the downtown.

Schmidt asked whether there were concerns about other proposed details. He stated that the Commission can choose to uphold some guidelines and not others, so the spirit of the standards is upheld as long as the addition doesn't seek to replicate the old building by providing differentiation through variation in brick color. He would not choose the precise style or color of the brick, but leave that up to the applicants, and he believes that all of the proposed window options are consistent with the district.

Magney clarified that the current proposal features a one foot setback for the second level addition. Nelson stated that she believes that the addition should be flush, and believes that one of the guidelines supports that the addition be flush with the front elevation.

Bolles stated that the proposed raised parapets are inappropriate, since they detract from the historic buildings in the district due to their level of elaborate detailing and roofline shape, their height relative to other buildings, and the inclusion of an inset nameplate. The Commissioners clarified the meaning of parapet. Magney stated that the raised parapets distinguish Options A and B from Options C and D. Bolles also stated that to preserve the rhythm of the district, the height of the addition should be lowered as much as possible by reducing the floor to ceiling height, and that the parapet should not extend more than 8" above the roof. Magney stated that she had already lowered the height of the addition, and that a 12 foot floor to ceiling height is standard for new construction and minimal. Bolles stated that everything that can be done to minimize the visual height impact on the Water Street elevation should be done to enhance compatibility with the district. He did not have a comment on the degree of brick contrast for the addition, but he expressed concerns with the window compatibility, since the proposed window height and horizontal banding is not consistent with the other adjacent buildings, and this is an important issue in determining compatibility under the Secretary's Standards. Adjusting the height of the second floor elevation would allow the windows to be set lower and be more in keeping with the horizontal location of other windows in the district, and the windows should also be smaller to be more compatible.

Bolles asked whether the addition is proposed to be flush with the front elevation of the historic building. Magney stated that she is not proposing that it be flush, since she believes that the existing parapet should be left intact. Bolles agreed, and stated that he believed that building directly on top of the original parapet could be structurally detrimental to the parapet and its corbelled brick. He also stated that he was concerned about adding a second story and associated load on top of a 100 plus year-old building. The addition could cause a collapse due to excessive stormwater loading, especially because the proposed addition gets higher at the rear of the building where the water drains and water routed through pipes as here can freeze and back up onto the roof. Macpherson clarified with Larry Martin and Magney that a structural engineer had examined this issue.

Bipes stated that he thinks that Options C and D are better, since raised parapets might fit better on buildings across the street. He does not see the proposed windows as a problem, as he thinks the architect has explained their flow along the street. He would like to see less of a contrast in color in the added-on brick facade. He thinks the height fits in very well, and is consistent with other tall ceilings in the district. Bolles asked whether he had checked on the height of other second level ceilings in the district, and Bipes said he had not. Bipes stated that a setback of the addition by about a foot would be appropriate. Nelson agreed and stated that she would defer to architects and engineers on whether the building should be flush or have a one foot setback. Bolles asked what exactly had been approved in the second level concept decision at the last meeting. Caron read from the minutes that the concept decision approved an addition that was flush to the sidewalk. Bolles asked whether the Commission was now changing its decision to allow for a setback. Schmidt stated that he did not see any procedural issue with clarifying what would be considered flush.

Macpherson stated that he had discussed the concept decision to allow addition of a rooftop addition with an architectural preservation expert and a member of another HPC, and had he been in attendance, he would have voted with the minority to deny the proposed addition, so the vote would have been 4-3. The Standards call for new additions to historic structures to be simple and unobtrusive, and elaborate parapets do not meet the Standards. The ratio of brick to glass on the addition is also greater than any similar building in the downtown district, and he has a concern about the texture of the proposed brick which is not compatible with the original brick (Magney agreed that the texture is not yet appropriate, but is still looking for better material samples) and too dark in coloration. Nelson asked which brick the new addition should relate to, the color on Jake O'Connor's next door or on the historic Wheeler Building beneath. Macpherson stated that the Standards require that an addition relate to the historic building, not an adjacent building. Macpherson also stated that he believes that the new addition should be set back further to meet the Secretary's Standards for new additions, but that does not seem to be the majority view of the Commission, so whether the addition is flush versus slight set back should be based on a sound engineering decision.

Brabec stated that she believes that Option D is the most appropriate option, with a slight setback determined by the engineer, the brick color contrast should not be too extreme, and the rough texture brick shown doesn't seem appropriate. The proposed windows are interesting and more current in style and good for residential use with divided light panes. She has no problem with the amount of glass, and likes the more subdued parapet that doesn't draw as much attention to the second floor.

Schmidt stated that he believes that Options C or D without the raised parapet would be more compatible with the West side of Water Street. He agrees with Macpherson that the ratio of glass to brick is not compatible. He would like to see only a minimal brick color contrast so as not to attract attention. He is okay with the overall height of the addition. He prefers a flush front façade but is okay with a one foot setback.

Bolles stated that he thought a minimal change in brick color for the addition would be compatible, in a slightly darker tone, and minimal change in brick type. Schmidt agreed.

Magney stated that she prefers Option C because it introduces interest at the top of the building. Nelson stated that she feels that the corbelling was important on the new library and also seems to be the case here. Schmidt stated that he could vote for Option C. Bolles stated that he is still concerned about the setback. Schmidt asked if any of the discussion had influenced Commissioner views on the proposal. Nelson stated that she was not worried about the color of the brick and will defer to the experts. She still likes the raised parapet, but any of the options would contribute, so she would be fine with Option C. Bolles stated that he remains concerned about the setback which should follow the Standards at 23 feet, but if forced to select an option, would favor Option C. Bipes stated that he is not concerned about the ratio of glass to brick. Macpherson stated that he still thinks there should be a setback, and the proposal should decrease the ratio of glass to brick. Martin stated that there is a problem of

getting enough natural light into the interior of the residential space. Bolles stated that reducing the large size of the addition would let more light into the center section of the condominium. Brabec stated that she prefers Option D, and is okay with the proposed windows and the contemporary look. She would like to see the actual brick to be used before moving forward.

Magney asked for clarification on next steps. Smith stated that at the next HPC meeting, there would be a decision on the Site Alteration Permit. Commissioners discussed the need to compare the proposed new brick on site for compatibility. They agreed to meet on site at 6:45 p.m. before their next regular meeting to review any available brick sample. Smith stated that this review could be added to the meeting notice so the public could attend. Magney stated that part of the challenge of reviewing the brick color is that the original brick on the building is currently painted, and they are assuming that it is the same color as the adjacent Remax storefront but that this elevation appears to have a film applied to seal the brick. The Commission clarified that the review will be to ensure that the brick selected is only minimally contrasting in brick color and that the texture is similar to the original brick. Macpherson stated that a subcommittee review on-site would also be a possible approach if the applicant can't find suitable brick by the next HPC meeting.

3. MISCELLANEOUS

Bolles stated that he has philosophical concerns with how the Commission is dealing with the Standards. He stated that he applauds the City staff's appeal, because when Standards and ordinances are ignored, we are going down the wrong road. Schmidt stated that he believes the Standards are to be flexibly applied, and this concept is in both the HPC ordinance and in the preamble to the Standards. He believes that allowing a second level setback is disharmonious to the character of district. The guidelines provided by staff show large buildings with a setback but no low buildings with a setback, and he believes the guidelines are not appropriate when applied to low buildings. He also believes that not allowing second level additions is inverse condemnation and goes too far, regardless of what the Supreme Court has said.

4. ADJOURNMENT

It was moved by Nelson, seconded by Bipes, to adjourn. Approved unanimously. Adjourned at 8:40 p.m.

Tim Caron
Recording Secretary