

City of Excelsior
Heritage Preservation Commission
Minutes
Tuesday, October 16, 2012

1. CALL TO ORDER/ROLL CALL

Chair Sanders called the meeting to order at 7:03 p.m.

Present: Bolles, Finch, Macpherson, Meyer, Mueller, Roden, Sanders

Absent: None

Also Present: City Planner Braaten, Advisor Caron, Planning Consultant Richards,
City Attorney Staunton

2. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

a. Heritage Preservation Commission Meeting of September 18, 2012

It was moved by Finch, seconded by Mueller, to approve the minutes as written.
Approved unanimously.

3. CITIZEN REPORTS or COMMENTS

None.

4. MISCELLANEOUS/COMMISSIONER'S COMMENTS

a. Recent City Council Actions

Staunton reported that the Council held three meetings in October. They discussed a proposed charter amendment and a companion ordinance, passed an ordinance to increase the number of liquor licenses, and adopted an ordinance regarding non-conforming structures. The Council also discussed adjustments to the permitted hours of construction activities in the City. They approved a revised garage plan at 531 Third Street, a new restaurant parking impact fee, the elementary school adding a multipurpose room and kitchen, and held a discussion of possibly modifying the City Hall roof siren, but decided to make no change at this time.

5. NEW BUSINESS

a. Site Alteration Permit for New Construction at 10 Water Street -- Charles James

Richards introduced a new application for construction of a 58 unit hotel building with a restaurant and a ballroom on the roof level. The property is a non-contributing site in the Downtown Historic District. A concept plan for the project was approved by the City Council, which also agreed to combine a general and final plan review. The application was deemed complete on October 8, which means that under the HPC ordinance, a decision must be made by November 21 under the 45 day rule. Since the last HPC review, the building has been pulled back 12 feet to accommodate an easement to the adjacent theatre parking area. This is the most significant change to the plans since the 2010 application for the project. The pullback on the side reduces the massing somewhat. The height of the building is a nominal 35 feet for the main portion of the structure, but with an upper story that makes the height over 50 feet. The proposed turret element is not counted in determining the height. The Council determined that the mass, scale and height were appropriate at least for PUD concept plan purposes. The HPC, however, has a permit process that is separate from the PUD process and therefore it must consider these issues separately as part of its ordinance standards. The height of the main structure facing toward Water Street is approximately 35 feet, but the height as measured by the ordinance is 55.83 feet.

Charlie James, the applicant, stated that he was here with his wife Ann. This site is the first property he owned and has been in his family for over 35 years. From the 1890s to the 1920s, the property was part of the site of a hotel, and they would like to encourage more visitors to come to Excelsior. This is the largest single piece of land in downtown Excelsior north of 3rd Street. The proposed building covers only about 30% of the property area. The plans represent several years of planning and design. They have updated a number of studies. The design is inspired by the many historic hotels that once occupied the shores of Lake Minnetonka and contains elements from turn of the century buildings, with each room having a balcony. The setbacks reduce the allowable volume of the building, and a portion of this volume is replaced with a rooftop ballroom structure and other amenities. The upper level will be covered in a copper clad product that will develop a patina. The Water Street elevation was designed to achieve a 35 foot height to appear compatible with other structures and the area's height limit, and to achieve fenestration on the Lake Street elevation.

Neil Weber, the project architect, presented an overview of the plan. He presented a massing model of the immediate area to demonstrate the proposed

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building's scale in conjunction with immediately adjacent structures and to show the setbacks from the property lines. He explained that the model is a more realistic depiction of the project than the elevation drawings, which are misleading and do not present the building as it will actually be seen. None of the rooftop elements will be seen and the height of the structure viewed from Water Street is 35 feet. He noted that the Excelsior Bay Hotel formerly occupied the site but burned in 1928 and the Carish family bought the property and built the theatre. The former hotels on Lake Minnetonka were of wood construction and many burned down. He stated that the footprint of the building is 30.6% of the site not including the areas built over the drive aisles. It will be constructed of post-tension concrete. The copper elements are on the front siding and cupola only.

Commissioners clarified that based on the drawings, the height to the cornice is actually 36.6 feet rather than 35 feet on Water Street, and the actual height of the building is 55 feet, or 47 feet on the Water Street side. They asked questions regarding the model and streetscape depiction, which do not feature today's Excelsior Dock cinema but rather a hypothetical future development that would meet the Zoning Code. Weber explained that the building's massing is minimized by articulation on Water Street created by a series of separate planes with a 4 foot difference in depth and an arbor on the upper story for further differentiation. The Lake Street side creates three planes. The plan features an open corner at Water Street beyond the setback line to accommodate some views of the lake.

The height of the adjacent apartment building is approximately 47 feet at the highest point. The Froehling building is about 28 feet from grade. The plan presents a progressively wider sidewalk to accommodate greater pedestrian traffic as Water Street approaches Lake Street. The turret element could be either stone or brick. Simplified brick detailing is proposed for articulation on cornice lines and between floor levels. Cast stone is used at the window band level and as a motif at all transom levels between the windows on the first level. Casota stone will be used for other stone areas. Metal fencing will be used for all railings. The retaining wall on Lake Street will be made of fieldstone similar to other walls in the Commons area. They propose to use low level lighting on the building. The Water Street side features a partial green roof, which will not be

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accessible to pedestrians. Landscaping will be small scale consisting of one tree and shrubs. The project will not affect the footings of the historic theatre building adjacent to the site. Weber stated that the theatre building was six inches over the property line, but Mr. James gave the prior owner the six inches of property so that the theatre could be expanded. The site will have pots with seasonal plantings. He stated that they will work with the City on boulevard trees and historic streetlamps. They have also proposed the possibility of creating bump outs at the corners to connect the property to the Port for pedestrian crossing, but this is not an element of the formal proposal.

The Commission took public comment. Bill Damberg, Excelsior business owner, stated that he hoped everyone could work collaboratively to achieve something good for the community and he believes that a hotel can be an asset to the City.

Linda Putnam, Excelsior resident, stated that she would like to encourage the hotel, which she has supported for a long time. She believes it would add elegance and could be an economic benefit.

Braaten noted that Paul Johnson, an Excelsior resident, had submitted written comments since he could not attend the meeting in person. His letter encouraged the HPC to hold the developer to high standards since special treatment was being sought through the PUD process. He expressed concerns about the disproportionate height of the structure, the economic viability of a hotel, and the design, which will dominate the lakefront. Any concessions in scale and design should be commensurate with public benefits greater than what has been proposed to date.

Commissioners discussed their preliminary concerns with the plans. Macpherson noted that there are many issues with the project that are beyond the HPC's jurisdiction that should be raised in a proper forum. He agreed that the process should be a collaborative one between the City and the applicant. He expressed concern that the plans did not provide enough detail and it was difficult to imagine from the photos presented of other illustrative buildings exactly what the building would look like. The drawings in general are too much like concepts and not a final design that can be reviewed. He disagreed with the contention that building elevations are not important, because they highlight

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horizontal banding and other items that make a visual impact. He was confused by the actual versus apparent height discussion of the architect, and the appearance from public views is that the building occupies close to 100% of the site, not 30%. He questioned whether, since the turret contains usable space, it should be excluded from the height. While he likes the concept of a hotel in town, he needs much more detail and a sense that the project has been designed to be compatible with the downtown.

Meyer stated that he did not think the turret design was compatible with the downtown and looks like it is attempting to recreate a building from somewhere else. He thought the depictions of the height and massing of the building were misleading and thought that other options to make the building more compatible should be explored, as was done with the new library.

Macpherson commented that a hotel must be big due to its function, but it is important that it be made to look like it fits into downtown Excelsior. While stepbacks and other devices have been used in an attempt to manage the large mass of the building, there are other devices that might be more appropriate to address this issue in Excelsior's downtown. Sanders stated that she had looked at some pictures of other hotels in historic communities, and though large, they mimic the other historic buildings in town. She felt that the stepbacks may not solve as many problems as they create.

Mueller expressed concern about the height and massing of the building. She felt that the structure is still very large, the size and massing has not been justified as necessary, and the turret is not a compatible element in this setting. Finch commented that this proposal does not provide the same level of detail regarding materials, colors, etc. as has been required of other applicants. In reviewing the HPC's 10 new construction standards, he finds that the proposal meets one or two of the standards but does not meet four to five of the others for compatibility with the district, like the height, scale and massing, the skyline and roof profile, the materials and colors, and the ground level setback.

Commissioners expressed concern that the main entrance was off the drive aisle in the rear, and that the exits to the street are secondary and not prominent for pedestrians.

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Macpherson expressed concern with the extensive use of copper siding on the upper level and noted that it remains shiny and does not patina quickly based on other applications he is familiar with. Drawings that more clearly address that element might be helpful.

Sanders and Braaten showed the applicant the type of drawings that have been submitted by previous applicants to depict a usual level of detail required for HPC review.

Bolles stated that it might be helpful to discuss “deal breakers” to help focus comments on the project. He felt that massing is a difficult concept and hotels are not a common building type in Excelsior. He thought a straw poll vote on certain elements of the project might be useful. Commissioners discussed whether their role was to look at structures rather than uses, since particular uses cannot be required. Bolles stated that a hotel is a type of historic building that has been lost in the area and it might be possible to recapture. The majority of these hotels were on standalone sites with no downtown building context and therefore are not a good model for comparison. Hotels by their nature are big and massive. Other Commissioners stated that their role was to make sure that its sheer bigness was not the most defining element of the building, but rather that it was a compatible building, regardless of its size.

Roden raised the Comprehensive Plan issues of mass and scale and expressed concern about the precedent of allowing each property in the downtown district to build to the hotel building’s height. Height is a major issue under the HPC’s review standards. He felt that the width element has been addressed somewhat on the plan by creating bays and adding the corner element, but it does not create compatible or standard bay widths.

Sanders expressed concern that the overall impression of the building is horizontal rather than vertical due to the use of continuous design elements. Macpherson agreed that there were too many continuous horizontal elements on the elevations and requested clearer scale drawings.

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Commissioners began discussing the application of their review standards to the proposal. Sanders noted that the roof elements on the top level do not line up with what is below to create a symmetrical effect with the bays beneath, and Macpherson was concerned about the prominence of the rooftop feature that does not exist elsewhere in town. Weber stated that an attempt was made to make the top level recede. Commissioners expressed concern with setting precedent for other buildings in the downtown and the design did not do enough to address the height. The Commission requested the applicant to provide other options to downplay the apparent massing and height.

Mr. James argued that the HPC was not taking into account that he was proposing a building below the allowable cubic volume under the Zoning Code, and that he was not going to design by committee. He stated that he was offended by some of the comments that had been made.

It was moved by Finch, seconded by Meyer, to continue this item and the remainder of the agenda to a special meeting due to the late hour and the applicant's expression of obvious frustration. Motion failed 4-2, with one abstention.

Commissioners continued their discussion of the 10 standards of compatibility. Commissioners questioned whether the width of the bays are compatible with other buildings in the district. They requested from the applicant a comparison of the façade bay widths of the proposed building to surrounding historic buildings. They also requested that the applicant try to carry through the façade widths on the upper stories.

Regarding the relationship to the street, Commissioners noted that the Water Street façade does not meet the standards for setbacks in the district. The retail door should access Water Street under the HPC standards.

Commissioners raised concerns with the cupola feature, which does not relate to the predominant roof and cornice forms in the district. They requested that the applicant consult with Stewart MacDonald on his design team for alternate cupola designs and reduced diameter dimensions that might relate better to the downtown, or elimination of the turret entirely. Commissioners identified the

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copper on the penthouse level siding as an issue to be addressed. They also identified as an issue the stepback design, which has no historical context, particularly on the Water Street elevation. The applicant was requested to explore alternative designs to make that elevation look like separate buildings to break up the massing, reduce horizontal lines and provide alternatives to the pergola feature and balcony which clutter the appearance of the building and have no historic reference in the downtown district. In general, the plans should be revised to take design cues from the buildings in the historic district.

The Commission requested façade composition dimensions relative to other buildings, with clear and complete descriptions of materials, finishes and unit sizes, similar to what other applicants have supplied. The elevations should also better depict the proportions of door and window openings on the top penthouse level and relate them to other buildings and the remainder of the building, including more detail on what emerges from the copper siding, and present options for alternate siding materials.

Weber showed the proposed brick and mortar color and the clad residential style windows similar in color to the Casota stone with pull-down screens.

It was moved by Mueller, seconded by Macpherson, to continue this item to a Special Meeting to be held on October 30 at 7:00 p.m. and to continue the remainder of the agenda to the next regular meeting. Approved unanimously.

City staff agreed to provide the applicant with a list of HPC requests for alternate design options and additional information so that all materials could be submitted in advance of the special meeting.

6. ADJOURNMENT

It was moved by Mueller, seconded by Macpherson, to adjourn. Approved unanimously.
Adjourned at 11:20 p.m.

Tim Caron
Recording Secretary

