

City of Excelsior
Heritage Preservation Commission
Minutes of Special Meeting
Tuesday, October 30, 2012

1. CALL TO ORDER

Chair Sanders called the meeting to order at 7:02 p.m.

2. ROLL CALL

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

Absent: None

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

3. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

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

Richards stated that the applicant had presented an additional turret option and Water Street retail door information. He stated that the applicant would present these changes and address the HPC's standards as they applied to the project. The Commission discussed the timing of its eventual decision and various options for adopting its findings.

Weber provided a description of the orientation of the first floor, and pointed out the multiple street level entrances. He stated that he had provided 1/4 inch elevations as requested by the Commission and had slightly changed the plan to recess balconies on Lake Street to emphasize the different modules on the left and right sides of the Lake Street elevation, which result in a more flush surface on the left side. The elevations have been changed to substitute brick for stone on the turret. Weber introduced two different turret designs, one with a cupola 3 foot lower than the original. Bolles clarified that this was a change from a 12:12 to 8:12 pitch. Roden noted that this did not change the diameter of the turret as had been requested at the last meeting. Weber stated that he did not present that option because he believed it would not look good with rest of the building--too puny. Weber described the modules and step back levels used to reduce the massing of the building, consisting of 56, 44 and 56 foot wide modules to relate the Lake Street elevation to the adjacent apartment building. He stated that the step backs make the hotel building less imposing than the apartment building, although the hotel is taller in height due to use of the step back planes. He used 58 feet and 44 feet modules on Water Street to relate to the massing of the theatre building.

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Roden asked whether he had prepared the options regarding breaking up the Water Street façade into narrower bays as had been requested. Weber stated that he didn't want to change the appearance of the Water Street façade because he believes the property should relate to future zoning and redevelopment. He stated that the current theatre owner wants to build to 35 feet in the future. Also, the Water Street modules are set back from the property line to take advantage of potential sidewalk retail use. He stated that his design philosophy attempts to address the issues in the HPC standards.

Commissioners asked about the requested changes in the upper level to integrate with the bays below on the Lake Street elevation. Weber stated that he doesn't believe that the copper roof area window articulation should line up with the other building openings below since the upper level will not be visible from anywhere.

Roden questioned why the retail space could not look like a separate building to reduce the Water Street massing. Weber stated that he doesn't want to use different bricks or pull the third floor forward to eliminate the stepback or treat it like single building with different window openings. Commissioners noted that this option would help address the mass issue. Weber stated it would make the hotel appear disjointed. He also stated that he had retained the Water Street pergola as a transition to the residential hotel from the commercial area. He showed copper samples from Revere, both in raw form that would green out in 20 years and pre-patinaed form that would retain its appearance. A zinc/tin alloy (Freedom Gray) which will become weathered as a gray is a potential alternative, replicating an authentic historic material without lead, and will be remanufactured starting next year. Continental Bronze is also an option which is oxidized to mimic aged copper, will age from that point on and green out over time, and is not set chemically. Weber stated that these are three quality alternatives for the siding on the roof. The window locations on the rooftop element will not be seen from any vantage point and are intended as a separate element that need not relate to anything else on the building beneath.

Weber said he could accommodate a retail door onto Water Street.

Charlie James addressed the Commission and showed the project model. He emphasized that the site is 8/10ths of an acre, and only approximately 30.6% of

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the site is covered by building. He stated that City ordinances encourage building 3 stories up right at the property line, but 147,500 cubic feet of space have been removed from the building by various setbacks, and he was adding back only 87,000 cubic feet on the fourth level. There is also a green roof on part of the Water Street side of the building. The fourth level is set 38 feet back from the cornice line. He stated that he has not maximized the allowable volume under the City code, which should be taken into account.

The Commission took public comment. Nancy Middleton, Excelsior resident and former Deephaven Planning Commissioner and Councilmember, stated that changes had been made to the plans, but there was still a concern about a mass out of scale with the historic area. She felt that the project would be overbearing and not in keeping with the other buildings, and that this will put pressure on other properties to build higher and more massive, and that this would make Excelsior start to look like Wayzata. She also had a concern about a possible failed hotel and its impact on the City.

Matt Stone, Excelsior resident, stated that he admires the character and charm of the City and asks that the denial of the project be reaffirmed. The HPC's prior ruling concluded that the project design was not consistent with the proportions of neighboring buildings and materials. These aspects have not changed in the new plan, except that the turret pitch has slightly changed. He does not believe the change is enough to meet the Comprehensive Plan. He is also concerned about feasibility and whether the information submitted is enough to commence the project. The decision should be objective and not based on politics or personality. With this precedent, can each downtown building go up higher as you move away from the lake due to slope?

Doug Schmidt, Excelsior resident, stated that people want a building that restores a bit of history. James is offering an opportunity to put a building on the old Pizza Hut property that we should embrace.

Tim Howard stated that he has been in the development business for 20 years. Everyone is looking for something to happen on this corner property, but design philosophy is more than just materials. The drawings are misleading and there is a disjointed nature to the building design. The design should be distinguished but

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show continuity with the rest of downtown. There are too many disparate elements on the building that don't work together. He would like to see the right project on this site.

Steve Bubb, Excelsior resident, has lived in the community for many years, and converted the historic school building about 20 years ago into an office building. He believes this site presents a unique piece of property that can't be easily compared to other historic buildings in town. He thinks a hotel is an appropriate use for the City and area. None of the historic hotels looked like this proposal, but some components seem historically consistent without looking like every other building on Water Street. The developer had made an effort to fit his building into City rules as he interprets them. He wants to express gratitude to both sides. The developer has a good reputation and the project will contribute to the City. He encourages the HPC to work with the developer to achieve a good project.

Bill Damberg, Excelsior business owner and Board member of the Downtown Business Group, stated that he was also speaking on behalf of the Chamber of Commerce this evening. He stated that design is subjective. Architecture in Excelsior is interesting and eclectic, mostly built out of necessity, as efficiently and inexpensively as possible. Nothing in the City is as grand as this structure and he respects the work that the Commission does. He believes a grand hotel in downtown is a good thing, despite the difficulty in relating it to anything that exists here. He feels the City is lucky to have this opportunity, and hopes the Commission can continue to collaborate on the project.

Mike Rud, Excelsior resident, stated that his kids are growing up with a part of downtown Excelsior missing. There is potential downside risk with this project, but there is also upside potential and that should be considered. It may be awhile before another action is taken to develop the property. He is concerned about how long the property will be dormant.

Gary Stemler, Excelsior resident, stated that he wanted to thank Mr. James for bringing this proposal forward.

Sanders then asked if the Commissioners had any reaction to the changes that were presented in response to the HPC requests at the last meeting. Bolles

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asked for Mr. James to provide a sense of his financial capability to pursue the project. Sanders stated that economic issues are not within the purview of the HPC. James commented that he has a great deal of experience with development.

Commissioners asked about the plan alternatives that eliminated the turret or reduced the diameter of the turret, as requested at the last meeting. Weber stated that he had decided that the building needed this accent, so he did not explore other concepts. He noted that he made adjustments to the turret to flatten the top, but he thinks it is an important feature of the project and that the building demands something beyond what is in the City today.

Richards suggested going through the 10 review criteria again. Mueller stated that she thinks that the height and mass and scale are still the primary issues. These were also the main elements of the findings that called for denial of the prior application in 2010, and despite requests to the applicant to address it; the plan is still basically the same. Macpherson stated that, for him, the top floor is out of character with the City and the rest of the building, which makes the building look taller and since there is no bay break to relate it to the rest of the façade, it distracts from the other design elements of the building. Since no changes were made to the plans to address it as had been requested at the last meeting, he is not sure that any change in the 2010 findings is justified. Macpherson also disagreed with the architect's explanation that the top story will not be visible so it doesn't matter whether it relates to the building, as it will be visible from a number of locations in the City and to say otherwise is misleading. Basing a plan on compatibility with potential redevelopment of neighboring properties that will not necessarily happen is not a sound approach for the Commission to follow.

Mueller noted that compatibility with the adjacent apartment building is not an appropriate reference point, as it was built before the current Comprehensive Plan, and is not a part of the historic downtown that is the ordinance standard for comparison. She continues to be concerned about precedent. Despite requests for the developer to address it, the fourth story hasn't changed.

Meyer stated that, just because this is a large site, it does not mean this needs to be a massive building in appearance, and the design should be required to follow

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appropriate size, scale and massing for the district. Sanders agreed with Macpherson's comments on the incongruity of the fourth level. Roden stated that the standard that they are required to apply is that new construction should be compatible with the height, scale and massing of surrounding historic structures and that new construction should maintain the character of the historic district. The Water Street façade has not been addressed as requested to break up the massing, there are no pergolas on Water Street, and he is very uncomfortable with the incompatible appearance of the fourth floor.

Bolles stated he doesn't disagree with the concerns about the design of the fourth floor. He was also concerned about the Wyer Hill project at the time due to its massing. He does believe that the building type should factor in, and hotels tend to be more massive. Bolles pointed out that Stewart MacDonald is listed as part of the applicant's design team, and his firm has won awards for historic buildings and compatible new construction, including the second library project, which was very well-received by the City. He suggested that it might give some comfort to the Commission and provide a benefit to the project to see greater involvement by him. He asked whether his inclusion was a public relations matter or whether he was a key participant in the design. Bolles suggested holding a special meeting on November 13th or 14th at which MacDonald could be present to address Commissioner concerns with the design. The applicants did not respond to this request.

Bolles asked about the percentage of the fourth floor space to the gross footprint of the building, and suggested he would recommend it to be a condition of any approval to avoid setting future precedent for fourth stories on other buildings. Weber said it would be dangerous to establish a formula. The top level is 17% of the area of the building and 16.9% of the volume. Weber stated that the site conditions are unique and that alone should avoid setting precedent, especially in a PUD which allows a contract with the City for a trade of elements. 75-80 units is a normal number of hotel rooms, but this project needs fewer rooms because of its boutique character. The fourth level is an amenity and part of the ambiance he is trying to create. Bolles stated that this has the appearance of a mansard roof, and the City's ordinances discourage mansard roofs. Weber stated that this is really intended as slant siding. Bolles thought there were other ways to minimize the impact of the top level.

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Mueller stated that nothing has really changed since the Commission's earlier decision, since the plan is substantially the same and the alternatives suggested have not been pursued.

Macpherson stated that the City's process poorly serves both the applicant and the HPC and Council. There are important issues with a project like this that should be worked through without combining the general and final plan approval. Many aspects of the project are resolvable but it is not clear without more information how to resolve the height issue particularly with the fourth floor level and the massing that results from unbroken stretches of horizontal surfaces that seem incompatible with the historic district and the building itself. The turret is a relatively minor issue, but also can be addressed. At this point, there is no real justification for changing the Commission's earlier decision since the plan has not changed materially and potential alternatives have not been explored by the applicant as requested.

It was moved by Mueller, seconded by Meyer, to deny the Site Alteration Permit consistent with the findings made in 2010 for the reasons given. The motion was approved 5-1, with 1 abstention.

Sanders stated that she does not want the project to die, but the building does not meet the Commission's standards and they need more collaboration from the applicant to help it meet the criteria. The process should allow for this. She stated that the Commission would like to see a resubmittal that takes their earlier comments into account.

4. MISCELLANEOUS

None

5. ADJOURNMENT

It was moved by Finch, seconded by Mueller, to adjourn. Approved unanimously.
Adjourned at 9:11 p.m.

Tim Caron
Recording Secretary