

City of Excelsior
Heritage Preservation Commission
Minutes
Tuesday, January 29, 2013

1. CALL TO ORDER/ROLL CALL

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

Commissioners Present: Bolles, Finch, Macpherson, Meyer, Roden, and Vice Chair Mueller

Commissioners Absent: None

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

2. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

a. Heritage Preservation Commission Meeting of December 18, 2012

It was moved by Commissioner Bolles, seconded by Commissioner Roden, 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 Mayor Gaylord had been sworn in and the annual Council appointments made at the January Council meetings. There was discussion regarding the Excelsior Brewery application to expand its permitted serving area outside the building, which it was determined did not change the parking requirements for the business since adequate onsite parking was still available after the expansion. No action was taken on the Excelsior Hotel project general and final plan PUD application. The upcoming force main project was also discussed. The Council made appointments to interview new advisory commission candidates to make recommendations to fill the annual openings. A change to the concert in the park program was discussed. The City Council also established a goal-setting session. The Council also made a decision to request comments from the HPC and Planning Commission on some new design details for the hotel project, and scheduled several meetings in February for further consideration of the hotel project and the HPC (Heritage Preservation Commission) appeal while also exploring TIF opportunities presented by the project.

5. NEW BUSINESS

a. Exterior Design Element Review for 10 Water Street as Requested by the City Council

Staunton stated that at its December meeting, the Council had requested that the HPC designate a member to participate in a design charrette to address some of the concerns with the design of the hotel building. Macpherson was selected and agreed to participate in the charrette, which led to further discussion at the Council regarding some of the changes that the applicant had agreed to make to the project design as a result of the design charrette. Staunton suggested that Macpherson describe what has happened as result of the charrette so as to fully update the Commission.

Macpherson stated that the design charrette was held on December 27, 2012 to discuss some of the design objections that were cited in the HPC's site alteration permit denial and to see whether some of the design issues could be addressed through a discussion of the options. Attending were the applicant and his architect, former Mayor Ruehl and Councilmember Caron in addition to Macpherson. The charrette did result in some beneficial changes to the design. As a result, the Council unanimously requested that the HPC provide advice and comment on the changes, as well as the Planning Commission. Macpherson requested that the Commission give the best advice it can relative to the proposed design changes to assist the Council in reaching a decision on the pending PUD application and HPC decision appeal.

Macpherson described the changes in the plans for the Commission. Regarding the setbacks, he noted that some of the setbacks had been eliminated, notably on the right bay on Water Street, which has also eliminated the proposed pergola and the façade has been extended to the roofline to provide a more distinct division. Two options were presented for the center bay on Water Street, one with a setback and one without. The parapet and railing have been extended upwards on the right bay for a more vertical orientation. The issue of adding balconies on Water Street was discussed but these were believed by the applicant to be important element for a hotel project and therefore were expanded in depth from the original proposal. The retail door is now shown on the Water Street elevation as had been previously requested by the HPC. The columns have been made more square rather than round to improve compatibility with other buildings. The extension of the right bay causes the fourth floor to recede more from certain vantage points on the Water Street side.

On the Lake Street side, the brick columns now continue above the cornice to the roofline, but setbacks remain on this elevation. One of the main issues with the fourth level was the window locations not lining up with the bays beneath. The window surrounds have been made more compatible in color tone but not material. The many small windows on this level have been mostly removed, and the location of the large windows has been changed

5. NEW BUSINESS

a. Exterior Design Element Review for 10 Water Street as Requested by the City Council – (Continued)

slightly, but they still do not correspond to the bays. The turret has been raised in height a couple of feet to make it appear more slender, and transoms have been added above the windows to attempt to make the design less busy.

Staunton clarified that, in discussing the specific design elements before the Commission, the Council was not asking for a vote or formal action. Caron and Staunton agreed to both take notes to try and capture as many of the individual Commissioner comments as possible and would harmonize their notes before they were presented to the Council.

Finch sought clarification that the Commission was not being asked to comment on its findings regarding the mass and scale of the building, its effect on surrounding buildings, or the adequacy of the drawings and information presented, but only on the design elements of the building. Staunton explained that the design elements that were discussed at the design charrette came out of the HPC's findings regarding the proposed building design. The Commission noted that its findings regarding the mass and scale of the building are unchanged and they wished to go on record as reiterating their position regarding the incompatibility of the mass and scale of the building with the historic downtown.

1. Stepbacks

Finch stated that the elimination of the pergola and the stepback elimination on the right bay of the Water Street elevation is an improvement. Macpherson clarified that the stepbacks on the Lake Street elevation remain.

Finch commented that on the Water Street side, elimination of the stepback on the right bay aids the compatibility of the design. He believes that stepbacks remain an issue where they remain.

Macpherson has a concern about the stepbacks. The minor change to eliminate one of the stepbacks on the most important elevation (Water Street) is positive, but others remain and stepbacks as a design feature do not really exist elsewhere in the district. He is not convinced that the remaining stepbacks in the design necessarily detract from the character of the district or other historic buildings. The tradeoff is that the stepbacks help with reducing the massing of the building, so he is less concerned with their use on the Lake Street side to break up the mass.

Macpherson asked whether the HPC ordinance discusses stepbacks. Caron clarified that the HPC ordinance does not mention stepbacks, but the City's Design Standards do mention their use, but these standards apply to all

5. NEW BUSINESS

- a. Exterior Design Element Review for 10 Water Street as Requested by the City Council – (Continued)

commercial areas in the City, so the HPC standard of compatibility is potentially a more restrictive standard for the downtown historic district.

Roden stated that he can accept the inset balconies on the revised right bay, but the middle bay on Water Street is still problematic. He felt the bay design should mimic the style of windows on the left bay and the main level should have three sets of windows like a typical storefront with a door in the center. He feels that the balconies and stepback in this bay are not compatible with Water Street. The center bay should appear to be a separate building, which would reduce the apparent size of the hotel from Water Street. He recognizes that the right bay could be a transitional element. He does not have a concern with the stepback on the Lake Street side.

Macpherson clarified that the reason for the blank wall with signage on Water Street is to contain a kitchen area, which is why no storefront window is shown in this location on the plans.

Mueller agreed that the stepback removal on Water Street was positive. The only advantage of the stepbacks is reduction of apparent mass, which would not be necessary if the building were not so large.

Meyer agreed with Roden's assessment of the Water Street façade and the compatibility of the left bay design. He felt it was positive that the Water Street stepback on the right bay has been eliminated. He would recommend eliminating the remaining stepbacks and working on making the center bay on Water Street more compatible.

Macpherson described an alternate center bay design which is covered under item 8. This option would eliminate the remaining Water Street stepback and create a single wall plane.

Meyer questioned why both recessed and projecting balconies would be placed on the same vertical wall plane.

Bolles stated that the changes are good and improve the building. He felt that some of these changes reflect elements that have been added to the Tonka Printing building and so are mimicked to some extent on Water Street.

2. 4th Floor Materials and Openings

Richards clarified that the proposed light color trim on the fourth level windows has been changed to more of a bronze or copper color.

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a. Exterior Design Element Review for 10 Water Street as Requested by the City Council – (Continued)

Macpherson noted that a pre-patinaed copper material is currently proposed for the siding on this level, and the window cladding will be in a complementary tone.

Finch stated that the changes to the upper level windows and doors begin to mitigate the long horizontal element but do not fully address the issue.

Macpherson agreed that the horizontal element and materials are still incompatible, but believes that the use of the pre-patinaed copper material is better than using raw copper.

Roden agreed and noted that this element will be prominent from the lake. While the Lake Street view is less important than the Water Street view, the character of the fourth level does not blend with the rest of the building or the district.

Mueller agreed, and commented that the removal of the 4th level would both decrease the massing and eliminate a poor design feature.

Meyer agreed that the long expanse does not relate well to the rest of the building in introducing a new material to a primarily brick structure.

Bolles stated that he is most troubled with this fourth level and the copper cladding. He believes that the City Code does not permit mansard roofs, and that is what this element is. Since this level is recessed, it is not as apparent, but he is concerned about the design of the fourth level.

3. Bay Widths

Macpherson explained that in the current design, the middle bay on Water Street is slightly recessed, approximately 1 foot on the left and 4 feet on the right, with larger projecting balconies. On the Lake Street side, the verticality of the columns has been extended upward to better define the bays.

Finch stated that the design does not create “compatible” or “standard” bay widths as required by the Design Standards. The bays are more pronounced on the Water Street side, but have not really changed in width. It is harder to see the differences on the Lake Street side.

Macpherson asked about the City’s bay width requirements. He noted that the Lake Street side is a big expanse and broken up pretty well by the projecting center bay. On the Water Street side, the changes make it appear more like three separate buildings, which was the Commission’s preferred direction.

5. NEW BUSINESS

a. Exterior Design Element Review for 10 Water Street as Requested by the City Council – (Continued)

Staunton clarified that historic compatibility and continuing the building rhythm are the HPC ordinance standards, but the Design Standards are more specific.

Richards and Finch noted that the design standards provide the standard for bay width is 12-25 feet in the downtown district, with bays consisting either of a wide center bay with narrow flanking bays or bays of equal width and that the pattern of bays should be reflected in all floors. Macpherson stated that the 4th floor design doesn't meet this bay width standard.

Roden stated that on Lake Street, the bay windows help to break up the façade. He noted that Wayzata has many long horizontal buildings when viewed from the lake and his concern is that Excelsior avoid this, and the bay definition on Lake Street seems to avoid it. On the Water Street elevation, he believes that the bay definition seems okay.

Mueller stated that the Water Street elevation seems proportionate and is broken up into bays, but the Lake Street side still seems very long because the building is so big. She commented that she is not addressing the fourth floor, which is a separate issue.

Meyer noted that the pattern of doors on the left and right side of the Lake Street elevation are too similar and serve to make the façade look longer. This could be addressed by changing the details of doors and transoms on the third floor to be less horizontal and more like the variation on the second level to help define the bays.

Macpherson suggested that varying the type of doors and windows to break up the horizontal elements would be another option.

Bolles stated that he felt that the varying bay widths help to break up a long building and was a big improvement. He also stated that boulevard trees once planted along the street will tend to break up the horizontal elements as well.

4. Pergola

All agreed that elimination of the pergola was a positive change.

5. Balcony Elements on Water Street

Macpherson discussed the changes to the balconies, and the change in column style from rounded to a more squared style. He noted that very little of the balconies on Water Street will be visible from the Lake Street side.

5. NEW BUSINESS

a. Exterior Design Element Review for 10 Water Street as Requested by the City Council – (Continued)

Finch stated that the elimination of the pergola and the change in columns is positive, but he is still concerned about the compatibility of the balconies on Water Street.

Macpherson agreed, and stated that he has mixed feelings about balconies on Water Street. This is not his favorite part of the design, but just because such an element does not exist today doesn't mean it should be prohibited if it is a compatible element. He would encourage some diversity in design if compatible overall with the character of the downtown district. Compatibility means the design has to fit in, not that if an element doesn't exist today you can't do it. He is not sure if this element necessarily adds to or detracts from the character of the downtown.

Roden stated that he believes that since there are no historic balcony elements anywhere in the downtown, they shouldn't be allowed. He commented that the top level setback continues to be a compatibility problem and the open balconies are not compatible. He is not sure that the inset balconies are really compatible either, but he can see how they might be a compromise. He believes that the middle bay should be redesigned to look more like a traditional downtown building.

Mueller expressed concern about balconies on Water Street, but noted that the recessed ones are less obvious.

Meyer suggested use of a false balcony as an alternative, but doesn't believe balconies are compatible with Water Street, but if they will be allowed, he prefers the recessed balconies that are not as visible.

Bolles stated that the design has been improved with the elimination of the pergola and he believes that balconies are appropriate for a hotel use.

6. Horizontal Orientation

Finch stated that the vertical bay definition on Water Street has improved, but that the Design Standards requires that bay definition should be carried through all the floors. The design has been improved but still creates some horizontal elements.

Macpherson stated that his biggest issue is with the fourth floor. The design carries vertical definition through three floors but not the fourth floor. He believes that the changes in design elements generally improve the issue of horizontal orientation even with the retention of some setbacks.

5. NEW BUSINESS

a. Exterior Design Element Review for 10 Water Street as Requested by the City Council – (Continued)

Roden stated that the Water Street side is generally successful in breaking up the horizontal elements. The Lake Street side is still very long, and the fourth floor is still disconnected. He doesn't see a good design solution to breaking up the Lake Street horizontality; the building is just big and long.

Mueller agreed that the 4th floor is problematic and the building still appears too long.

Meyer stated that he believes that varying the design details on the right bay could help break up the horizontality, and he is still concerned with the fourth floor.

Bolles stated that he can live with 4th floor penthouse since it is recessed.

7. Turret

Finch commented that the Commission found that the turret element does not relate well to other elements of the building or other historic structures, and this has not fundamentally changed.

Macpherson stated that the turret element doesn't relate to other buildings because this type of rounded section or turret doesn't exist in the downtown, but that doesn't mean it couldn't be added if compatible. He believes eliminating the turret would make the building more attractive, but while the minor design changes help to improve the appearance of the turret they still do not help it relate to the downtown district.

Roden stated that making the turret narrower helps, but he would prefer to see a building design without a turret. He is generally okay with the turret on this building since the hotel building design won't really fit into the downtown.

Mueller never considered the turret a good addition to the building design, and would prefer to see it removed. She acknowledged that some kind of turret element might have been a feature of historic hotels.

Meyer stated that he would prefer to see an alternative concept to a turret that would relate better to the design of the building.

Bolles stated that he is comfortable with a turret, and pointed to the Froehling building as having a curved front, and to Haskell's as having a turret. He stated that a turret would be a common element to many former hotels on Lake Minnetonka.

5. NEW BUSINESS

- a. Exterior Design Element Review for 10 Water Street as Requested by the City Council – (Continued)

8. Stepback Alternate

Macpherson clarified that in the alternative drawing, the third floor would be flush with the center Water Street bay with recessed balconies similar to the right bay.

Finch considers eliminating the stepback in the alternative design a positive for the Water Street façade.

Macpherson suggested that the alternative design helps to address some of the issues that the Commission had struggled with, and he sees some advantages to keeping the stepback with columns extending upward into the railing. He thinks it seems more in keeping with the ordinance to eliminate the stepback, but there is probably room for allowing a stepback if desired. He feels that the stepback helps the bay look like a separate building, since it differentiates the center bay, but he would break up the long iron railing. From certain viewing positions, the stepback might make the bay look smaller.

Roden thinks that both alternative designs for the center bay are poor solutions, but adding more recessed balconies will leave open holes across the façade. If he had to choose, he would prefer the original design for that reason. He liked the cornice line detail at the second level.

Mueller stated that the stepback is too pronounced and she would prefer a flush design.

Meyer stated that he prefers the alternative drawing.

Bolles stated that he has mixed feelings, and there are advantages to both designs. He would leave it up to the architect.

Mueller asked the Commission members whether they believe that the building has achieved historic charm. Finch stated that this was not being asked by the Council. Macpherson stated that the Commission's concern about the apparent mass and scale of the structure relative to the remainder of the downtown district remains a key finding of the HPC that should be reiterated to the Council.

Meyer read a statement. He was concerned about the tone of derogatory statements made by the applicant at a recent Council meeting he had attended. He stated that he would like to see an ordinance enacted prescribing appropriate standards for dealing with any large scale projects

5. NEW BUSINESS

- a. Exterior Design Element Review for 10 Water Street as Requested by the City Council – (Continued)

enacted in the downtown district before PUD projects proliferate and adversely change the character of historic downtown Excelsior forever.

Macpherson commented that the Council needs to address a key process question that arose in connection with this application. The project came to the HPC prematurely for a Site Alteration Permit, and should have been supported by a complete set of detailed design documents when it came forward for review. He suggested that there should be a forum for the HPC to make comments on the design at the concept and general plan stages of review, but that a Site Alteration Permit application should come at the final plan stage and should be based on a very specific set of detailed plans showing all materials, colors and design elements, and any subsequent changes to any of those design details should come back to the Commission for further review. Macpherson abstained from the original vote on the project because he thought that the submitted level of information was not adequate. The City needs to know with more specificity what is being approved in such a significant project.

Mueller inquired about the status of the appeal from the HPC denial of the Site Alteration Permit. Staunton stated that the Council has various options that he has outlined in three memos, including denying the appeal because the changes did not make the building compatible, remanding to the HPC for further action on the revised plan, or taking the plan changes into account in deciding to overturn the HPC action. The Council decided to seek input from the HPC on the design changes before deciding the appeal.

Richards noted that the 45 day time limit in the HPC ordinance for taking action on a Site Alteration Permit is a challenge in bigger projects like a PUD. While the October 8th Site Alteration Permit application was submitted and determined to be complete, the applicant took another month or so until the PUD general and final application was complete.

Macpherson suggested that consideration of a Site Alteration Permit should be at the final design approval stage, but the HPC should have involvement throughout the PUD review process to raise concerns as early as possible. Combining general and final plan review as was done in this case has turned out not to be a very manageable process for the City, including the HPC.

6. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

- a. Exploring Grant Funds for Oak Hill Cemetery

The Commission was uncertain of the status of this item in light of Commissioner Sanders' resignation.

6. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

a. Exploring Grant Funds for Oak Hill Cemetery – (Continued)

Commissioner Finch moved, seconded by Commissioner Macpherson, that items 6(a) and (c) be continued to the next meeting, while staff contacts Sanders to determine the current status of those items and what still needs to be done. Approved unanimously.

Caron reported that the current CLG grant application cycle was in progress, and the preapplication deadline may have passed.

Commissioner Finch moved, seconded by Commissioner Macpherson, to authorize Sanders and Caron to pursue a grant if possible for further professional investigation of the Excelsior High School building with help from staff and other Commission members, as needed. Approved unanimously.

b. Excelsior Downtown Historic District Boundaries

The Commission reviewed the various district maps and identified the specific areas of difference in the maps.

Caron explained the current need to take some formal action to define which district boundary is to be used going forward. The areas of difference included the Episcopal Church area, the BP Station, Teen Clinic and Bella Salon area, the Congregational Church and School Administration Building and area across 3rd Street, and the George Street properties near Mason Motors.

Staff was asked to clarify the existing maps by adding color coding, provide the criteria used to evaluate a local historic district, and redistribute the summary table previously prepared by Caron identifying the basis for the historical survey recommendation and any other considerations from the individual property survey sheets.

It was moved by Commissioner Roden, seconded by Commissioner Macpherson, to continue discussion of this item to the next meeting. Approved unanimously.

c. Possibility of Historically Designating Portions of Excelsior Elementary School

This item was discussed in conjunction with Item 6(a).

7. COMMUNICATIONS AND REPORTS

a. Designate Liaison for Planning Commission Meeting – February 5, 2013

Macpherson agreed to be the liaison for the February 5th Planning Commission meeting.

7. COMMUNICATIONS AND REPORTS

b. Site Alteration Permits Administratively Approved

Braaten reported that he had met with Bart Baker regarding the non-compliant awning at Capers on January 9th with Commissioners Meyer and Macpherson, and Baker had stated that he was going to consult with his awning supplier.

Braaten stated that he would follow up on the outcome. Macpherson stated that, at a minimum, the awning size should be changed to conform to the current storefront.

Commissioners inquired about the steak house project at the former Ming Wok location and the current status of any permit for exterior alterations, noting that any changes from the previously approved plan would require further review.

c. Next Meeting – Tuesday, February 26, 2013

Information only.

8. ADJOURNMENT

It was moved by Commissioner Macpherson, seconded by Commissioner Finch, to adjourn. Approved unanimously. Adjourned at 9:30 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Tim Caron
Recording Secretary