

**RECONVENED MEETING OF THE
HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION
PORTSMOUTH, NEW HAMPSHIRE
1 JUNKINS AVENUE
City Council Chambers**

7:00 p.m.

December 13, 2006

MEMBERS PRESENT: Chairman John Rice, Vice-Chairman David Adams, Richard Katz, John Golumb, Ellen Fineberg; Planning Board Representative Jerry Hetjmanek; and Alternate Sandra Dika, and John Wyckoff

MEMBERS ABSENT:

ALSO PRESENT: Roger Clum, Assistant Building Inspector

I. OLD BUSINESS

A) Approval of minutes – November 8, 2006

It was moved, seconded, and passed to approve the minutes as presented.

B) Request for one year extension of approval received on December 19, 2005 for property located at 10 State Street - Pier II

Attorney McNeill spoke as representative for the applicant. He stated that they have a few more environmental matters to resolve as well as to remove the warehouse that sits on the site before going forward with reconstruction. He said they are requesting a one year extension of the approval.

Ms. Fineberg made a motion to grant the request for a one year extension of the approval. The motion was seconded by Mr. Hetjmanek. The motion passed by a unanimous vote.

C) Petition of **414 State Street Condominium Association, owner, and Timothy S. Wheelock, applicant**, for property located at **414 State Street**, wherein permission was requested to allow exterior renovations to an existing structure (repoint chimneys, install stainless steel chimney caps, apply chimney saver water protection to both chimneys) as per plans on file in the Planning Department. Said property is shown on Assessor Plan 116 as Lot 13-2 and lies within the Central Business B, Historic A, and Downtown Overlay Districts. *(This item was tabled at the December 6, 2006 meeting.)*

SPEAKING TO THE PETITION

No one was present to speak to the application.

DECISION OF THE BOARD

Ms. Fineberg made a motion to table the application to a time indefinite. The motion was seconded by Mr. Golumb. The motion passed by a unanimous vote.

II. WORK SESSIONS

D) Work Session requested by **Harbor Corp. LLC, owner**, for property located at **Russell St., Deer St., and Maplewood Ave.** wherein permission was requested to allow a new free standing structure (200 room hotel, conference facility, and parking garage). Said property is shown on Assessor Plan 118 as Lot 28, Plan 124 as Lot 12, and Plan 125 as Lot 21 and lies within the Central Business B, Historic A, and Downtown Overlay Districts.

Mr. Lee Griswold, representative of Harbor Corp. spoke to the application. He introduced the development team – Attorney Malcolm McNeill, Mr. Richard O’Dwyer of Icon Architecture in Boston, Mr. Don Peterson, project consultant, and Ms. Nancy Ludwig of Icon Architecture. Mr. Griswold stated that this was their sixth time before the Commission.

Attorney McNeill stated that their last time before the Commission was September 13, 2006 and there were many comments made at that meeting concerning the parking garage. He pointed out that the parking garage, when completed will become the property of the City of Portsmouth. He read a few phrases of the agreement with the City because he felt it was relevant to the Commission’s Scope of Review. Attorney McNeill stated, “the City will timely submit to Harbor Corp. the general specifications for a municipal parking garage for incorporation into the parking garage design. Harbor Corp. shall permit, design, engineer, and construct the parking garage as a public parking garage and meet in all respects design and specifications approved by the City prior to the commencement of construction.” Attorney McNeill continued, “that as soon as practical, after the execution of this agreement, the City, at its own election, may select an appropriate professional consultant to review and approve the detailed specifications for the design, engineering, and construction of the parking garage to be prepared as described in other areas of this agreement.” Attorney McNeill added that this agreement was signed in December of 2005. He said they have met on many occasions with City officials as well as members of the technical staff, administration, and the consultant that has been retained by the City to review the parking garage relating to its functionality, safety, and other components so that the City will know that upon its acquisition of the garage, that it will work, that it will be of a design and function that will be acceptable to

the City and that this is a garage that they wish to have and acquire. Attorney McNeill also reminded the Commission that the City Council passed a zoning amendment for this parcel of land that permits the height of the building to be 60 feet or less. He said they had originally proposed a height of 72 feet. He continued that the design that comes before them tonight is less than 60 feet and is in compliance with the revisions to the zoning ordinance passed in August of 2006.

Mr. Steve Parkinson, Public Work Director for the City of Portsmouth, stated that the City has held a number of technical work sessions with the development team in regards to the design of the parking garage. He said that the City has engaged the professional services of Walker Parking Consultants of Boston, MA to provide their technical expertise on all aspects of the parking garage. He introduced Mr. Art Stadig, of Walker Parking Consultants.

Mr. Art Stadig stated that his firm is the oldest and largest firm in the nation specializing in parking design and consulting. He said they have been involved with this project for the past several years but they have become most active since September. He stated that they are primarily looking at functional design of the parking facility, how it operates, and the technical requirements to ensure that it lasts a long time and serves the needs of the community. He said they looked at the internal operation of the facility and found some areas for improvement and they were addressed by the team.

Attorney McNeill stated that they are required to deliver 657 parking spaces. He said that this has been a partnership of sorts to work with the City to develop a garage in a fashion that will satisfy their needs and the Scope of Review that they anticipate from the Commission.

Ms. Nancy Ludwig stated that she wanted to do three things - review the overall layout of the site, go through her synopsis of the last meeting, and then walk the Commission through the drawings and point out the modifications that they have made. She presented the three dimensional model that was shown at the last meeting. She felt this was the best way to read the building both in elevation and in plan. She pointed out that they have two components to the design - the hotel and the garage. The hotel's ground floor is filled with a ballroom, additional conference facilities, a restaurant, and pool and fitness facilities. The upper floors have a bank of conference rooms on the second floor and then three levels of hotel rooms, 204 rooms in all. She added that there are twenty one condominium units as well. Ms. Ludwig stated that the garage currently has 660 spaces. She said that was a drop from the 700 spaces they proposed at the last meeting. She reminded the Commission of some of the changes that have been made to date - the entry to the parking garage was stepped back to create a 24 foot high break through the building, tucking the drop off on Russell Street underneath the building, and making adjustments to the loading area. She mentioned that the main entrance to the garage remains on Deer Street. There is also a major entry on Maplewood Ave. that goes to the lower level of the garage. She said those spaces would most likely be reserved parking.

Ms. Ludwig pointed out a number of issues that were raised at the last meeting such as elevations, windows, glazing, materials, and the penthouse. She commented that they spent most of their time at the last meeting talking about the garage. She pointed out that there was a concern that the garage needed to be softer, more building like and less garage like. There was also concern about the glazing in the corner tower and that it should be broken into smaller pieces.

Ms. Ludwig presented the Commission with the new plans that addressed their prior design concerns. She said they have adjusted the opening to single windows and modified the dormer section. She added that they have also modified the top of the mansard by opening it up in certain sections to incorporate a more open railing. Ms. Ludwig said that they have gotten rid of the metal material and are now proposing a cementitious panel with trim that will have a more traditional look. It will be simple masonry with simple punched openings.

Ms. Ludwig also addressed the comments of the overhead bridge. She said that the Commission would like to see more of an arch. She felt that they accomplished that by increasing the height of the solid area around it, giving it the appearance that it has more of an arch. Ms. Ludwig pointed out that because the service drive exits onto Maplewood Avenue they could not use any kind of column or bracketing down to the ground. So the loss of the cantilever is why the parking count has gone down. Also after their discussion with Walker Parking Consultants, they are structuring from the outer wall to the inner wall and so there will be no columns. This has resulted in a deeper spandrel on the building. The bays have become slightly wider so there is a lot more masonry at the corner. This has allowed them to increase commercial space and reduce the open piece on Deer Street. She said she felt the design showed a strong definition of the base.

On the rear of the building, Ms. Ludwig said they will continue the straightforward and simple masonry massing.

Mr. Adams asked about the sloping floor plate. Ms. Ludwig pointed out the areas that were flat and the areas that were sloping.

Mr. Wyckoff asked about the streetscape on the corner of Deer Street and Maplewood Avenue. He questioned how they would place the trees that are shown in the drawings. He pointed out that the sidewalk is 6 feet and the awnings are projecting over the sidewalk, yet trees are placed on the sidewalk. Ms. Ludwig said they have not worked out the details for that area but she would like to have trees there.

Ms. Ludwig talked about the stair tower. She pointed out that they have broken up the glazing that runs the height of the building by placing paneling at the lower end. She also spoke about the ballroom where the roof top will have a roof top garden and space for some necessary equipment.

Chairman Rice thanked Ms. Ludwig on a very thorough presentation. He asked the Commission for their comments, beginning with page one of the plans.

Ms. Fineberg asked about the cornices on the arched openings. She felt they projected out too far. Ms. Ludwig said they should only project out about two feet. She said that they have two cornice configurations on the complex.

Chairman Rice stated that he personally felt the present plans were a vast improvement over the prior ones. Mr. Wyckoff agreed.

Mr. Adams stated that he felt that the sidewalk was very close to Green Street. Ms. Ludwig agreed that it was very close.

Ms. Dika asked about the height of the octagonal structure. Ms. Ludwig replied that she did not know but she would find out. Attorney McNeill added that the scale was accurate on the model. Chairman Rice asked what was at the top of the octagon. Ms. Ludwig replied that it was a condominium.

Mr. Golumb asked Ms. Ludwig where she got her inspiration for the octagonal structure. She replied that it was a form that came out of the site. She added that they tried to focus on the 360 degree view.

Ms. Fineberg asked about an area that looked like it was for outdoor seating. Ms. Ludwig replied that that was correct. She said that they wanted the building to read as a three dimensional form at the end of the building so they pushed the connecting wall back and propose to clad it in a wood like panel material. She said the deck might be an extension of the restaurant.

Chairman Rice asked the Commission to move on to the garage design, beginning with the Maplewood Avenue and Deer Street side. Mr. Wyckoff stated that he was pleased with the punched opening look. Chairman Rice said that they had said at a prior meeting that since the garage building was going to be big and long, that it had to create some interest of its own and he said that he felt the team had done that.

Ms. Fineberg asked how this garage compares in size to the High Hanover garage. Ms. Ludwig replied that the new garage was taller, however, the High Hanover garage was wider.

Chairman Rice said he thought the introduction of the black metallic balcony-like rail provided some interest.

Mr. Wyckoff stated that he hoped that some type of agreement could be made to widening the sidewalks at the Maplewood Avenue and Deer Street locations. Attorney McNeill replied that site review is still to come with the project. Ms. Fineberg added that the wider sidewalk in front of the Eagle building seems to work well.

Ms. Dika asked that when the City takes possession of the parking garage, does the zoning then change to municipal or does it stay as it is. Attorney McNeill replied that it stays as it is.

Ms. Dika asked about the height of the tower. She said that she finds the height above the railing awkward. Ms. Ludwig replied that it is merely the height of the door that they need to get into the structure and keep the stairwell enclosed. She asked if it was the roof shape that she found awkward. Ms. Dika thought that might be it. Mr. Adams said that it provides minimal roof height. Ms. Fineberg stated that she liked the shape of it. Ms. Ludwig added that the shape picks up on the arched shapes at other parts of the buildings.

Chairman Rice asked the Commission to move to the elevation of the view up Maplewood Avenue, entering the Historic District. He pointed out that this was an area of concern at prior meetings.

Ms. Fineberg asked about the first floor fencing. Ms. Ludwig replied that it was steel fencing that runs along the edge that keeps people from walking into the garage at those points. She said that behind that would be the pay gates. Pedestrian entry into the garage is on the far side of that.

Chairman Rice asked where the cars would be entering from. Ms. Ludwig replied that they would be entering under the archway. Chairman Rice asked about the two elements that are on both sides of the archway. He wondered if they would be used for signage. He felt they looked odd. Ms. Ludwig replied that they are called hanging rods.

Mr. Adams asked about the steel fencing and asked if it had to be used for ventilation. Ms. Ludwig replied not necessarily. She said they explored other options and could discuss possible changes. Mr. Peterson added that they had explored the option of glass but determined that that would get dirty. Ms. Fineberg said that she would like to see it have more texture. She felt it looked too industrial and repetitive. Ms. Dika agreed and said that she would like to see a more interesting treatment.

Mr. Peterson asked if the Commission was comfortable with the remainder of that elevation. Chairman Rice said, yes he thought they were comfortable with it

Chairman Rice asked the Commission to look at the Green Street elevation. He pointed out that this was the elevation with the sloping plates and was an issue that they had some trouble with before.

Ms. Ludwig stated that this elevation has some changes to it. She said in terms of its openness, they have added more decorative elements to the railing and a series of vertical elements.

Chairman Rice stated that the Commission would have to take into consideration what will be going in across the street at the Portsmouth Herald site. He added that it is dangerous to approve a building when you do not know what will be on that site.

Mr. Adams said that he thought the design was a handsome rendition of a garage with visual interest and texture. He said that he had very little to measure it against. He added that when getting to this elevation, he felt they had run out of context. Mr. Adams commented that he would not like to see large commercial buildings on the Portsmouth Herald site. He would much rather see pedestrian friendly streets and buildings of scale and uniformity.

Mr. Katz mentioned that there are design elements that he does not particularly like but he does not feel that it is his function to like them. He said it is his function to judge whether they are appropriate to the area, do they do any damage to the historic context of Portsmouth and Portsmouth's identity. He thought not. Mr. Katz said that he agreed with Mr. Adams about the lack of context. He felt that you have to go somewhere else to judge the project. He thought the project was true to its function and showed integrity.

Attorney McNeill asked Ms. Ludwig to explain why the slope exists and how the design came about. Ms. Ludwig replied that the slope exists because they are only two trays wide and if you are going to go from level to level, there is not enough dimension to get a ramp between levels and stagger them. So they have chosen a typical garage arrangement that has one side sloped to make the transition from level to level.

Attorney McNeill asked how the garage would function without the slopes. Mr. Stadig said it would not function without the slopes. He added there are certainly other ways to do it but that this is the best way. Ms. Ludwig interjected that this is not a steep slope; it is a 5% slope.

Chairman Rice stated that Mr. Katz brought up some valid points. He said that this is a design without precedence that is somewhat sloping. Ms. Fineberg asked if the current parking garage had sloping floors. Mr. Stadig replied yes but the slope is on the interior of the building and not exposed to the outside façade. Ms. Fineberg said that it is the same concept, it just doesn't show. Chairman Rice said that might be one element that they are struggling with. Another element is what happens on the Portsmouth Herald site.

Mr. Wyckoff commented that he is not struggling with the sloping façade. Mr. Hetjmanek added that he did not have a problem with it either. He felt it was the reality of the site and that the slope will be hidden some day. Mr. Hetjmanek pointed out that the design consultant said that this was the best way to deal with it. Chairman Rice said that that does not mean that they need to wrap their arms around the way it looks.

Attorney McNeill stated that they have discussed in length with the City the context, the height, and the functionality of the garage. They want to make the garage work and provide design features that are responsive to the Historic District Commission's needs. He said that the slanting floorscape is necessary for the totality of this context to make the garage work. He felt there needed to be a balance between function and form. Attorney

McNeill said that that is what they have tried to do throughout the time that they have had these discussions.

Ms. Dika asked if there was any way to disguise that from the eye. Ms. Ludwig replied that it has to be ramped. She said that they did show two elevations at a prior work session that fully enclosed it and the Commission did not like them. Mr. Adams mentioned that that was at a time when they were looking at the cantilever portion too. Chairman Rice pointed out that those issues are out on the table.

Mr. Wyckoff made a suggestion that maybe it is the white color that makes one notice the angles more. He wondered if brick would make it less noticeable. Ms. Ludwig said they had showed it brick covered but the Commission had preferred it exposed. Ms. Fineberg thought that it would make it look heavy.

Ms. Fineberg asked if they would be able to see the Green Street perspective. Mr. Golumb said that they saw that at the September work session. Ms. Ludwig showed the Commission the Green Street elevation.

Chairman Rice asked if anyone from the public wished to comment on the discussion.

Ms. Lisa DeStefano spoke to the project. She said that she was wearing many hats this evening. She was representing the future development of the Portsmouth Herald site. She asked if the punched openings had to be so regular or could they work some patterns to break up the façade. She said they were concerned about headlights from the parking structure shining back upon their building. She said that she is seeing the building fight the grade. Ms. DeStefano mentioned that she is pleased with the opening that is through the building. She said that she understands the need for the slope at the rear of the parking garage but she wondered if there was a way to connect a horizontal band forward on the sloped floor system so that they would start to see some regularity of the horizontal lines and allow the structure to do what it needs to do beyond. She said the horizontal bands might disguise the slope a bit. Ms. DeStefano also wondered if there would be a sidewalk through the opening of the building. She thought it looked like it was just wide enough for vehicles to penetrate. She felt that the opening was inviting and that there may be pedestrians walking through there. She thought it would be important to the future development of the northern tier.

Ms. DeStefano she said that she noticed on the Russell Street elevation, that the double wide bays were not centered over the arches. She wondered if they could be centered or could they add some detailing that masks the fact that they are not centered. She also added that they might consider a different material on the façade to help with the scale of the building.

Chairman Rice stated that he liked the proposal for the banding on the sloped tray.

Ms. Leah Caswell of the Portsmouth Advocates spoke next. She stated that even with the punched windows, she feels that it is still has a massive look. She said that she liked the September drawings better.

Mr. Dick Dechard of the Portsmouth Advocates spoke to the project. He mentioned that they had a meeting with the design team that morning. He said they have not met as a group yet to formalize an opinion but he said that he respected the amount of time put into designing the building. He felt that the banding on the building was similar to the industrial buildings of the 1920's and 1930's.

Mr. Dan Rawling, also of Portsmouth Advocates summarized their thoughts at their meetings. He said their focus has been primarily on the garage. They were concerned with the scale of the building. He said that they liked the punched openings but maybe a blending of the two designs would create a better effect. He added that they also talked about the possibility of a projecting cornice at the top of the building. He shared with the Commission some pictures of buildings with historic precedence that showed cornices that scaled down the buildings. Mr. Rawling mentioned that he had some concerns about the stair tower. He felt the glass treatment worked better to identify it as a tower. He thought that this might be a good place to apply the public art funds. He thought that artwork could be showcased behind the glass. He also suggested that an artist could be hired. The stair tower is a significant detail to the building and could really give the building a sense of place.

Chairman Rice thought it was an excellent suggestion. He said that when Mr. Wyckoff was talking about widening the sidewalks, he envisioned an area that shows that it is a convention area. It would soften it up and give it some interest.

Mr. Wyckoff asked Mr. Bohenko if the project is required to spend money for the arts. Mr. Bohenko said that he could not give him an answer at the moment but he would get the answer for him.

Chairman Rice thanked everyone for their good comments. He felt that they should wrap up the meeting with a summary.

Chairman Rice said that he thought the biggest issue for the Commission was Green Street and how that face of the parking garage is handled. He said that there were some good suggestions on how they might soften that.

Ms. Fineberg said that the next time she would like to see some perspectives on the Green Street and Deer Street side.

Mr. Golomb asked Ms. Ludwig if it would be possible to have a 3D presentation at the next meeting. He said that he remembered a 3D presentation by another applicant and it was very helpful. Ms. Fineberg explained that it was a power point presentation that rotated the design for more clarity.

Mr. Wyckoff said that Ms. DeStefano's comment about a sidewalk through the opening was a good idea. Ms. Ludwig replied that they do need a sidewalk so they will work that through.

Mr. Golumb stated that pedestrian access will be important with the development of the northern tier. He wondered how to deal with the railroad. He said that he would hate to see the project stop here. He wondered where the dialog goes from here. Attorney McNeill replied that the element that came into play that provides the access to the railroad track was opposed by some city officials. He said that once they get beyond their property line, dealing with that crossing is a complex issue. When they have dealt with crossings before, they have worked with the City. In order to be successful in crossing the railroad, you need the assistance of the City. He felt it would be something to consider at an appropriate time. He said they would facilitate getting to that point but singularly, he did not believe that they could get across the tracks on their own.

Mr. Adams stated that he was much more comfortable with the latest design. He said that he was excited about what they have done with the scaling back of the metals. He asked about the bricks. Ms. Ludwig replied that they are standard bricks. Mr. Adams said that he was pleased with the floor to floor heights. As to the garage, he thought that reinforcing the cornice was a good idea. He was not so certain about the secondary cornice. Mr. Adams added that he appreciated the storefront texture of the first floor. He felt that the corner was wasted with the stair tower and that it could be so much more. He stated that he was comfortable with the openings and the sizes of the openings. The octagon is an uncharacteristic form and he found it more whimsical than architectural. He thought the complexity on the upper floor of it was not beneficial. But he felt they have done a good job overall.

Ms. Dika stated that she liked the finishing of the previous stair tower over the new design. She felt the top of the tower was more graceful in the new design. She would like to see more detailing of the fencing on the Maplewood Avenue side. She added she would like to see a way to disguise the Green Street ramping with some type of horizontal banding.

Ms. Fineberg stated that she would like the design team to take a look at rounded corners for the stair tower.

Mr. Adams said that he would like to see some development of the interior and exterior arched drive through.

Mr. Golumb stated that he appreciated the hard work of the design team. It was much improved from the last meeting.

Attorney McNeill stated that they would like to continue the process with a public hearing. He said that he felt they could incorporate these features. Chairman Rice replied that that would be their decision.

III. ADJOURNMENT

At 9:30 p.m., it was moved, seconded, and passed to adjourn the meeting.

Respectfully submitted,

Liz Good
HDC Secretary

These minutes were approved at the Historic District Commission Meeting on January 10, 2007.