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CITY OF STAMFORD
HISTORIC PRESERVATION ADVISORY COMMISSION
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STAMFORD, CT 06904-2152

(FINAL) Minutes of the Historic Preservation Advisory Commission (HPAC)

Date: Regular meeting held: June 2, 2020
Location: Via Zoom
Present: Anne Goslin, David Woods, Barry Hersh, and Rebecca Shannonhouse.
Alternate: Dee Davis Oberwetter. Absent: Elena Kalman.

REGULAR MEETING

I. Call to Order.

The meeting was called to order 7:05 p.m. Anne Goslin is the Chair of the current meeting.

II. Approval of May 5, 2020 Meeting Minutes.

A motion was made to approve the minutes of the May 5, 2020 meeting. There were no changes to the minutes noted.

(The motion was moved by B. Hersh, and seconded by R. Shannonhouse, and carried unanimously)

III. New Business.

A. ZBA Applications #220-19 and #220-20 - 287-297 Washington Blvd.

Text Change, Special Permit and Site & Architecture Plans

Elena Kalman has recused herself for this presentation and is not in attendance.

Participants: Rick Redniss, Redniss & Mead; Joan Carty, Site & Civil Engineer; Ravi Ahuja, Architect & Owner.

Presented: A. Goslin introduced the project on Washington Blvd. near the intersection of Pulaski Street. She noted this is a Text Change, Special Permit and Site & Architectural Plans for two (2) contributing buildings within the South End National Register Historic District.

1. R. Redniss presented the project for the Owner. It is on the east side of Washington Blvd. across from Pulaski Street. A new road widening project on Washington Blvd. and Pulaski Street has changed some aspects of this plan. Rick noted No. 287 will be preserved and No. 297, on the left, will be demolished. No. 281 (a few doors down) is similar to No. 287 and was noted in the historic district application. They are seeking to model the improvements on the existing and No. 281. He said they tried to salvage parts of No. 297 but the requirements for in and out of the driveway has required it to be demolished.
2. They worked with the City engineers to get an agreement for the driveway. At first, they had separate in and out driveways, but the City wanted it to be a common driveway. It hits Washington Blvd. at the same location. [One (1) curb cut]. This is as far away from the intersection as they can get it. The result is No. 297 being a narrow building, and maintains the same setback as No 287. Setbacks from the church are narrow.



CITY OF STAMFORD
HISTORIC PRESERVATION ADVISORY COMMISSION

Page 2

3. The project is all affordable housing, supported by the City's Housing Development Fund. The funds are provided by BLT as a part of their BMR obligations for other projects. Anne Carty, who represents the Owner, said they are working on a model that is 100% ownership of the units. The units are mostly two (2) and three (3) bedroom. Joan also noted it will be a condominium association with a land trust owning the property. She said there will be a Historic Easement for the No. 287 building.
4. A Goslin asked about the Section 7.3 application and the Text Change request. Rick said they are seeking relief from the setback requirements. They need flexibility with the setbacks in the underlying zone (RMF). They also are using Section 7.3 for historic structures to allow the density and the parking behind the front historic structure. Section 7.3 gives them some flexibility for the setbacks and parking. He also noted they need to make a Text Change to Section 7.3 that relates to light and air. He indicated these changes are being proposed under the Omnibus Zoning Change by the Land Use Bureau that is making it's way through Zoning. They need to have that in the code now as a Text Change so they can proceed with the project.
5. Anne asked about the structural condition of No. 297. J. Carty noted it is very bad. Rick also noted they had tried to save it but could not work on the driveway access if it remains. The driveway is 20 ft. wide, as required by the City Traffic Department.
6. B. Hersh asked about the driveway location in relation to Pulaski Street. Rick noted the Traffic Engineer wants the driveway to be as far away from the intersection as possible. Rick showed the map of improvements at Pulaski Street. He also said Washington Blvd. will be widened. (Toward the west side.) Barry also asked how much parking will be provided. Rick said one (1) per unit is allowed. They are providing 1.5 per unit.
7. R. Shannonhouse asked about the historic significance of No. 287. Rick said there is nothing special about the ownership history. Architectural features were mentioned in the historic district application along with No. 281. He also noted that No. 297 is in very bad shape but No. 287 is in better shape, and is a part of the fabric of the South End. (Queen Anne style architecture.) That application was made in 1986. Rebecca also asked if there are some quality features on the building. It was noted there may be some interior moldings trims, etc. that can be saved. Elena Kalman is involved as a historic consultant. Dee Davis also asked about the historic details to be saved. It was clarified that there are two (2) and three (3) bedroom units throughout.
8. Anne asked what has been presented to Planning & Zoning. Rick noted they have both had a preliminary review and are generally supportive. No Public Hearing or Zoning Board application has been made to date.
9. Anne asked about the third story on the No. 297 replacement building and its size in relation to No. 287. Rick and Ravi noted it is about the same height as the peak of the roof on the church building next door. There is a deck at the 4th story and above the "bay" projection on the building. Barry asked if the design can have a turret rather than the bay? Rick and Ravi noted the bay is for the bedroom. Jon Cohen, a construction consultant to the team, added the No. 297 building needed to be all new. It is thinner than the old building to fit the site, and the structure was in bad shape. Sue Halpern, Vice President of the South End NRZ, asked about the height of the bay in relation to the convent. Does this block light and air to that building? Ravi noted the building is taller. Rick added it is one (1) story taller. They also noted that the back building is two (2) stories taller. They said the mid-point of the roof is at 49 ft. Rick also said that 40 ft. is allowed in the RM-F zone but can be modified under the Section 7.3 application. It was also noted this part of the structure is set way back from Washington Blvd. and is less visible.



**CITY OF STAMFORD
HISTORIC PRESERVATION ADVISORY COMMISSION**

Page 3

10. Elizabeth McCauley asked about the height again noting the convent building next door has enjoyed light and air and a view. D. Woods asked about the height of the first floor. Ravi said it is 14 ft. clear. He further noted the height is set by the size of garbage trucks and access to the garbage location. David asked if they can revise the location of the garbage pickup so they can reduce that height, or can they use a different system with roll out dumpsters. Ravi said they can look at a private hauler for the garbage. David noted the height should probably be closer to 10 ft. If they bring that height down, it may also allow the No. 297 building to have better proportions and scale with the existing No. 287 building. Ravi and Rick said they can look at that. David also asked Ravi to look at the scale of the “bay” on the No. 297 building. He said it looks out of scale, too wide and flat, in relation to the remaining façade. Barry also noted it can be more in scale with the original turret or replicate the old turret. Ravi agreed to look at it and make revisions.

Motion

Anne asked to formulate a motion. Barry noted the motion should be the following.

1. Allow the side yard modifications and the Text Change to Section 7.3 that the team will request from Planning & Zoning.
2. Request changes to the design of the new building to lower the height and bring the design more into scale with the existing building at No. 287, and try to revise the bay window to make more of a turret shape similar to the original.
3. Support affordable home ownership as is proposed.
4. Express concern for the loss of a complimentary structure.
5. Support the aim to make the new building fit into the other historic structures of the South End.

It was agreed that Anne Goslin will formulate the language in the motion and will distribute for HPAC review

(The motion was moved by B. Hersh, and seconded by R. Shannonhouse, and carried unanimously.)

The following resolution was formulated by Anne Goslin after the meeting

1. The Commission regrets the removal of a contributing resource in a National Register Historic District (297 Washington Blvd.) but acknowledges the need in order to save the adjacent property and provide affordable housing in the district.
2. The Commission supports the modifications to the Zoning code and the density provided by Section 7.3 to rehabilitate 287 Washington Blvd. and redevelop the remaining site area for additional density.
3. Two reconsiderations are requested regarding the scale and design of the proposed new building at 297 Washington as follows:
 - a. The height of the first floor and, therefore, the height of the driveway opening should more closely match that of 287 Washington Blvd. We recommend it be lowered if service trucks can enter at a lower height or services can occur another way.
 - b. We suggest an alternate design so the roofline, especially of the proposed turret, more closely aligns and echoes the roofline of 287 Washington Blvd. with its more delicate turret and the houses south of 287 Washington Blvd.



**CITY OF STAMFORD
HISTORIC PRESERVATION ADVISORY COMMISSION**

Page 4

IV. Old Business.

A. South End Updates.

Participants: Ralph Blessing, Land Use Bureau Chief, City of Stamford

Presented: A. Goslin provided a brief update of the progress since the last meeting.

1. A. Goslin mentioned BLT, the City and the preservation community have not met to discuss the demolition applications for the Garden and Henry Street houses and the Blickensderfer Building, as suggested by Brad Scheide of Preservation CT.
2. Ralph indicated the City is supporting the preliminary BLT application that intends to save the main historical part of the Blickensderfer Building and demolish the back portion. He said BLT is moving forward with a plan. They will need a zone change for the main part of the building, as it will no longer be "manufacturing" use. He added there is contamination on the site as is the case with many sites in the South End. He said it is still possible the City and SHPO will allow the demolition of 79 Garden Street and 130 Henry Street in order to save the Blickensderfer Building on Atlantic Street. Ralph further said BLT has not shown very much so far. He thinks this is because they do not know what SHPO is proposing or what their intentions are. David noted he believes SHPO is currently pursuing a CEPA action that will save the houses and the back newer portion of Blickensderfer Building.
3. D. Woods asked if the City is still pursuing changes to the street and sidewalks on Garden Street, as presented at the last meeting. He also asked if the Traffic Department has had a discussion with the State Historic Office and if they are discussing street and landscape standards that are more appropriate for historic districts. He said no. He believes they have not considered an alternative plan and are moving ahead with the current design. Ralph said he is happy to talk to Mr. Travers (Traffic Engineering Bureau Chief) again. David noted at the last meeting, HPAC was asking for a more sensitive approach to the historic character of Garden Street and wants to save all the structures including the back (newer) portion of Blickensderfer Building. HPAC does not see the need to widen the street and thus demolish historic structures.
4. Anne noted HPAC wants to be more involved as the project and design move ahead. She added City Zoning should support that. Ralph agreed and said Zoning wishes to have HPAC's support for the project. Ralph raised the possibility there may be a site available on Henry Street to save, or move, one of the two houses as the improvements to Henry Street are made. He will look at this option more closely.

(The item was Tabled without further decision. Review of status will be on going)

B. Master Plan Change.

Participants: Ralph Blessing, Land Use Bureau Chief, City of Stamford; David Woods, PhD, FAICP, Deputy Director of Planning, City of Stamford.

Presented: A. Goslin introduced the agenda item saying the Master Plan changes were approved at a Planning Board meeting. It was passed.



CITY OF STAMFORD
HISTORIC PRESERVATION ADVISORY COMMISSION

Page 5

1. D. Woods asked if there can be some explanation of the changes as it seems to be very confusing to him and the Commission. Ralph provided the explanation. He confirmed the Master Plan changes discussed at the last meeting were approved. He pointed out that properties were generally reduced in density. There are properties near the train station that have increased density. They added a Category 16 area, near the rail lines, that is closer to Downtown density. They were seeking changes and recommendations that were identified in the South End study of two years ago.
2. The reductions were with properties in "Category 9" (the NRHD buildings) - now will be Category 4 and Category 6. The boundaries were noted for the Commission. David Woods (City of Stamford) went through his PowerPoint presentation about the Master Plan Categories. David encouraged HPAC to refer to these documents with any detailed questions.

(The item was Tabled without further decision. Review of status will be on going)

C. 122 & 126 Henry Street - Below Market Rate (BMR) Housing.

Participants: Ralph Blessing, Land Use Bureau Chief, City of Stamford

1. A. Goslin provided an overview of 122 & 126 Henry Street BMR Housing. Anne spoke to Vineeta Mathur, Associate Planner, Zoning Board, regarding the condition of the houses that are to be rehabilitated by way of Zoning Board Certificate for Application #218-04. Vineeta said she will be in touch with BLT, the owners. The Certificate of Occupancy for other buildings in the South End are contingent on the houses' rehabilitation for BMR housing.
2. Anne noted the houses have been sitting vacant and without windows and other open areas leaving them exposed to the elements. Work was started and was stalled. Ralph added BLT is required to have these units rehabilitated before Harbor Point P1 and P2 are completed as approved by the Zoning Board. He added they are BMR projects with funds from other projects. Ralph does not know the status of the project.

(The item was Tabled without further decision. Review of status will be on going)

D. 340 Washington Blvd. Demolition.

Participants: Ralph Blessing, Land Use Bureau Chief, City of Stamford

1. A. Goslin provided an overview of the 340 Washington Blvd. demolition. She said she looked into the timing of the notice to HPAC and the demolition of 340 Washington Blvd. Ralph confirmed the demolition waiting period following notice is 20 days. Ralph informed her a newspaper notice was published (prior to the date of HPAC's notice); the demolition took place 20 days (required period) after the published notice.
2. Ralph said he did contact the Building Department and there was a 20 day delay after the demolition request, and there was no objection in that period. Anne questioned that, indicating HPAC may not have been notified properly. There was no comment from Ralph except to say the process sometimes does not work as well as they want.



**CITY OF STAMFORD
HISTORIC PRESERVATION ADVISORY COMMISSION**

Page 6

3. Anne asked how to avoid these issues in the future. She also asked if anyone on the Commission looks at the Advocate every day to check the notices. David said he reads the Advocate, but does not always notice the demolition notifications. He added this notice was probably issued during the Coronavirus quarantine. The mail has been delayed, and it could have been delivered to his office when the office was closed for the quarantine. He said he cannot be sure when it is delivered. He added under normal circumstances the demolition notices are received at the office and circulated.
4. David also said this building has been under consideration for demolition for many years and there had been a number of efforts to save it or move it, or find a buyer, by Renee Kahn and others. Anne noted the Governor put a stay on such actions during the quarantine period. David said he does not know if that is correct. She said there needs to be a better way so these do not slip through the cracks.
5. Ralph said the Building Department is testing a "New Only" application process, and there may be a way to put a flag into the demolition request to notify a property may be a historic structure. They do want to speed up the process. Judy Norinsky added we all get hard copy of the notices. She asked if they can be emailed? Ralph said they are working on that. He noted electronic distribution should help.
6. There was some additional discussion about the corner of Pulaski Street and Washington Blvd. and the proposal by Charter for changes to the plans already approved by the Commission. Ralph gave an update. He said there are changes being proposed for Pulaski Street by Charter. Anne asked if they will be returning to HPAC. Ralph said they need to see more details for landscaping, and design for the parking garage. There needs to be more work. He added the loading dock on Pulaski Street is gone. Anne further asked if HPAC can review that next month. Ralph will get back to the Commission.
7. Elizabeth McCauley asked what the height of the garage will be at Pulaski Street and Washington Blvd. Ralph said he was not sure but thinks it is two (2) parking stories. Sue Halpern asked if there will be a structure at the Pulaski Street and Washington Blvd. intersection. Ralph said, yes; he believes the parking structure of a story or two will come over to Pulaski Street, but will have some setbacks for a landscape buffer. He added that Pulaski Street is being widened as per City plans.

(The item was Tabled without further decision. Review of status will be on going)

E. Review requests by Stamford Land Use Bureau.

1. Modifications to ZB application #217-16 - 340 & 400-440 Washington Blvd.

This application was delivered just prior to the meeting. The Commission agreed to review it, although it is for new construction, at the July meeting.

2. ZB Application #220-28 - Walter Wheeler Drive.

Also delivered just prior to the meeting, Vineeta asked for the discussion to be Tabled for now.

3. ZB Application #220-29 - 5-9 Woodland Avenue.

Also delivered just prior to the meeting, Vineeta asked for the discussion to be Tabled for now.

4. ZB Application #220-30 - 5-9 Woodland Avenue.

Also delivered just prior to the meeting, Vineeta asked for the discussion to be Tabled for now.



**CITY OF STAMFORD
HISTORIC PRESERVATION ADVISORY COMMISSION**

Page 7

F. Additional or New Items - Streetscape Plans.

1. R. Shannonhouse said she contacted DSSD about the streetscape manual that is in progress. She said progress on streetscape standards has stalled, but a planting manual is in progress with the City. She asked if HPAC should review this?
2. Ralph gave an update, saying there are new streetscape tree planting requirements as a part of changes proposed to the Zoning Code. This came out of the Zoning changes initiated by his office. As a part of the Zoning changes a planting plan standard is being developed. DSSD is working with a landscape professional.
3. Ralph further noted the Downtown District is a "Special Review District", so a planting plan will automatically go before DSSD. The landscape standards will generally apply to new developments. They are working on minimum standards for the sidewalks and planting.
4. Rebecca thanked Ralph for adding the background. She asked if the standards for Downtown will also impact the remainder for the City. Ralph said yes, the standards are meant to be used throughout the City as it is rolled out. He added Zoning can impose that requirement for new developments. The standard may also be useful for the South End.

All generally agreed they would like to review what is drafted. Ralph offered to forward the current draft.

(The item was Tabled without further decision. Review of status will be on going)

V. Adjournment.

A. Goslin adjourned the meeting at 9:30 p.m. (There was no further discussion)

Drafted by David W. Woods, AIA - June 23, 2020
Secretary, Historic Preservation Advisory Commission

Meetings are normally held on the first Tuesday of the month starting at 7:00 p.m. The next meeting is scheduled for July 7, 2020 via Zoom. *(This meeting may be combined with the August 4, 2020 meeting for a single summer meeting in August.)*