

Received March 17, 2008

The following are my comments relative to the March 10, 2008 meeting of the Historic District Revision Committee. Bill Stuebe

Need to Preserve The Historic Landmark District of Savannah is acknowledged to be one of the most beautiful cities of America if not the world. We who are citizens of Savannah and those that have been given the privilege to govern this treasure have an awesome responsibility to protect the integrity of this treasure for posterity. Individual property owners and developers can not be allowed to sacrifice this treasure for their own benefit. If this character is lost we become another anywhere USA. As Tom Barton said in his article in the SMN on May 13, 2007 "...city officials must be wise to anything that chips away at the Historic District's integrity. Because eventually, there goes the neighborhood. Then a hefty chunk of Savannah's economy goes bye-bye, too".

We now have an opportunity to devise stringent ordinances to protect the integrity of the city plan and its structures so that these attributes of Savannah's character are enhanced and are not compromised. Although it is impossible to legislate good taste, it is crucial that clearly defined regulations be established and thereafter that they be enforced. There is absolutely no reason to give variances or concessions to developers who want to develop in the Historic Landmark District (HLD). If they wish to build structures that do not comply with the ordinances they are free to develop elsewhere. Those that invest in property in the HLD must know that they are subject to strict interpretations of the relevant ordinances and should evaluate their investments accordingly.

Clearly many of the issues being raised by the Historic District Revisions Committee currently, are a result of egregious and wonton disrespect of the character of the HLD by developers. The buildings that have resulted have been characterized as "atrocities". This trend must not be allowed to continue.

Lot Coverage The Downtown Neighborhood Association believes that the provisions of Design Principle 4 of the current draft of the Downtown Master Plan are unnecessary and are incompatible with the best interests of the Historic Landmark District.

Design Principle 4 contains the following language: "To encourage compatible new development in zoning districts with 75% maximum lot coverage, consider allowing up to 100% lot coverage in exchange for reduced building height, as long as the resulting development is consistent with the Height Map"

If a property adjacent to an historic structure is developed with 100% lot coverage even at a reduced height, the light and air previously enjoyed to the rear of the historic property is lost by the intrusion of a solid wall along the property line separating the two properties. The historic pattern of land development in the Historic Landmark district incorporated a three or four story structure fronting the street with a two story subsidiary structure fronting the lane and an open garden between the two structures. This resulted in a reduced massing of the buildings. The ordinance should be drafted to provide for the incorporation of this principle with a maximum lot coverage of 75% in all new development except where 100% lot coverage is allowed such as BC1 Districts.

Recent new developments have allowed for the 25% open space to occur along the lane and to be used for parking. This has resulted in buildings built to the height map limit to cover 75% of the property and to therefore overpower the adjacent historic structures. The Columbia Place condominiums located on State Street adjacent to the Davenport House is a good example of the unhappy result emanating from this practice.

Visual Compatibility must again be taken into consideration in approving the height and mass of a project, as provided for in the existing Historic District Zoning Ordinance:

Section 8-3029 (k) Development Standards 6 a Height The Height of proposed structures shall be visually compatible with adjacent structures.

As a result, a reduction in height from that allowed by the Height Map of a portion or all of a proposed building would generally be required if the proposed structure is to properly address neighboring structures and be visually compatible with adjoining historic buildings immediately adjacent to the proposed structure and in adjacent wards.

Buildings that are not rated as historic should not be taken into consideration when evaluating visual compatibility. This is especially true with regard to new buildings that have been built in recent years and are over scale for their locations. The use of new large buildings as an argument to condone further overdevelopment has been used by spokesmen for developers who have attempted to justify their proposed over scale projects by relating them to nearby newer over scale buildings.

Concessions to the Ordinances Developers are apt to ask for far more than they need in designing a project knowing that they will have to cut back. By showing an apparent willingness to concede they end up with more than if they had originally designed the project to comply with the applicable ordinances. It is therefore necessary to clearly stipulate the ordinance and to not provide for concessions to those ordinances.

Lowering the overall height limit and then granting height concessions for the creation of “buildings of character” is an interesting concept but difficult to implement because of the temptation of developers to push the envelope for increased building size without offering the requisite concessions and the ability of Historic Board of Review members to appropriately evaluate the concessions being offered for increased building size.

Variability of Building Planes and Heights Historically, building heights often varied due to the practicalities of existing technologies. Buildings generally were not more than 5 stories in height before elevators made taller buildings practical. Also an owner may have only needed a two or three story building to accommodate his needs. Currently land prices have encouraged developers to push the envelope and build as large a building as they could get away with. This has resulted in a street scape of uniformly sized structures that no longer provide for the visual interest found in older assemblages of buildings. Restrictive ordinances are therefore needed to

obtain the variety of building planes and heights that are characteristic of the Historic Landmark District.

Fines for Violations The imposition of fines for not adhering to the appropriate ordinances is not sufficient to preclude improper development. The developer is apt to simply look at the fine as a cost of doing business. Furthermore the offending structure will remain after the fine is paid to the detriment of the character of the neighborhood. City officials must be instead given the authority to enforce the removal of offending structures.

Building Materials: Concessions should not be given for “higher quality materials” since quality is a subjective term. Materials should be specified in the ordinance and their use required in construction.

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