



SAVANNAH HISTORIC DISTRICT
BOARD OF REVIEW

Jerry Surrency Meeting Room
May 31, 2012 12:00 Noon
Meeting Minutes

MAY 31, 2012 HISTORIC DISTRICT BOARD OF REVIEW SPECIAL CALLED MEETING

HDRB Members Present: Linda Ramsay, Chair
Ned Gay, Vice Chair
Reed Engle
Dr. Nicholas Henry
Keith Howington
Brian Judson
Stephen Merriman, Jr.
Ebony Simpson
Robin Williams, Ph.D

HDRB Members Not Present: Sidney J. Johnson
Zena McClain, Esq.

MPC Staff Present: Tom Thomson, Executive Director
Sarah Ward, Historic Preservation Director
Mary E. Mitchell, Administrative Assistant

City of Savannah Staff Present: Peter Shonka, Assistant City Manager
Franzelle Pertilla, Deputy Assistant to the City Manager

I. CALL TO ORDER AND WELCOME

II. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

III. SIGN POSTING

IV. CONTINUED AGENDA

V. CONSENT AGENDA

VI. ITEM(S) REQUESTED TO BE REMOVED FROM THE FINAL AGENDA

VII. REGULAR AGENDA

VIII. REQUEST FOR EXTENSIONS

IX. APPROVED STAFF REVIEWS

X. WORK PERFORMED WITHOUT A CERTIFICATE OF APPROPRIATENESS

XI. REPORT ON ITEMS DEFERRED TO STAFF

XII. NOTICES, PROCLAMATIONS, and ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

XIII. OTHER BUSINESS

New Business

1. [MPC Petition of Northpoint Hospitality Group, Inc. for an Amendment to the Historic District Height Map](#)

The meeting was called to order by Chair Ramsay at 12:00 noon.

Ms. Ramsay explained that the Special Called Meeting is being held due to a request for an amendment to the Height District Map to extend the three (3) stories over Bay Street to River Street. Currently, two stories are allowed here. This is a public meeting.

Ms. Ward explained that she has supplied the Board with copies of the file documentation. The file is on the table for public review. Ms. Ward reminded everyone that the ultimate project that may result from the text amendment is in the Historic District. Because of this, it will be coming to the Historic Review Board for consideration. Consequently, the Board needs to be careful about getting into the specifics of any kinds of buildings. What is being proposed now is a text amendment to the Height Map. It is not being proposed to the Historic Board of Review, but to the Planning Commission. Therefore, their comments need to be directed to the Planning Commission to be forwarded to the Savannah City Council.

Ms. Ramsay stated that each Board member would be able to make a statement concerning their thoughts pertaining to the requested text amendment to the Height Map.

Board Discussion

Mr. Engle said the present Height Map was adopted in 1997 and amended in 2003 which allows compatible new construction to the height of two stories above River Street. Four feet have been added to this because of the new FEMA map. Therefore, what they are basically dealing with is any new construction that could be thirty (30) feet above River Street. He explained that the Height Map incorporated in the ordinance allows comparable new construction three (3) stories above Bay Street. However, Bay Street is thirty (30) to forty (40) feet above the level of River Street. Therefore, to shift from

two stories above River Street to three stories above Bay Street in reality means that they could see a building seventy (70) to eighty (80) feet tall along River Street. The applicant is requesting a text amendment asking for three stories above Bay Street criteria to be extended along River Street, substituted for the two stories above River Street.

Mr. Engle stated that he has severe problems with this request as he does not believe it is compatible. In the last four or five years, he believes they have approved two structures north of River Street and neither was above two stories tall; two stories plus the four feet that the Crab Shack had to deal with because of FEMA's adjustment due to the flood zone. As he is aware, the others are one story tall. Further, as he is aware, no other buildings have been constructed north of River Street since the Height Map has gone into effect. The buildings that are higher in this area predated the Height Map. The Marriott Hotel is close by, but it is not a part of the district. As Ms. Ward stated, they are not talking about design. It is interesting to see that it has been said that the power building is considered historic and this is something to be considered later, but he believes that they have established a precedent that anything over fifty (50) years old be determined to be historic. He asked staff what is the wording of the ordinance pertaining to visually compatibility.

Ms. Ward stated that it says "shall be visually compatible with contributing structures to which they are visually related."

Mr. Engle said, therefore, this would involve the Secretary's of Interior Standards on eligibility for any new structures adjacent to the power building. It took six (6) years to get the District Height Map approved and it has not been in effect two years.

Ms. Ramsay stated that she has been taking pictures of this proposed site from across the river to General McIntosh Boulevard. He asked Mr. Thomson, the Metropolitan Planning Commission (MPC) Executive Director, if it would be appropriate to show this.

Mr. Thomson advised the Board to focus on the proposed text amendment. He believed the proposed process to get the Board members' concerns is appropriate. He believes upon the completion of hearing the Board members' concern, they want to send their position or comment (which could go either way) to the MPC for their consideration.

Ms. Simpson stated that as the Review Board, they are always instructed to look at each project individually. She wants the Board to be careful about setting precedent as other persons could come before the MPC asking for text amendments or for other changes to the Height Map. She agrees with what Mr. Engle has said.

Mr. Howington stated that he agrees also. He knows that from a developer point of view, that they want to go higher on the General McIntosh side of the site. But from a historic preservation point, it should remain as is.

Mr. Judson stated he supports the sentiments of his colleagues. He does not see a reason to argue for adoption of the amendment to the text. However, in

terms of their purview and the role of this meeting, they are dealing with decisions that are going to be made by the MPC and City Council. Therefore, it was not clear to him why this meeting was called given that this Board is not the ultimate decision makers in this matter. He realizes that there are cases in the individual projects where this Board will ask for finding of fact and make a recommend for a variance. Mr. Judson asked if the Historic Review Board had been asked to do this ahead of time.

Ms. Ramsay answered that the Historic Review Board had not been asked to do this; but they felt that as the Historic Review Board, their voice needed to be heard by the MPC. However, they know the that Planning Commission would review this on a unique perspective. The Historic Review Board is fully aware that they will have to deal with whatever decisions the Planning Commission makes. If there is a consensus on the Board, they will send their recommendation to the MPC.

Mr. Gay said this Board's opinion should have some influence and should be forwarded to the Planning Commission.

Mr. Judson said he generally supports the comments that have been made by the members of the Historic Review Board. He does not see a compelling reason to support the change. His only other comment in terms of having walked the site a couple of days ago, is that this is a very sensitive site, but he was not commenting on the project, itself. They talk about a lot of times within the district about a building transitioning to its surroundings. The Marriott notwithstanding as it is outside of the district, but he believes that this would create the opposite visual affect. Mr. Judson said this is a very prominent spot and as they have evaluated other projects in terms of how they transition into the surrounding areas, he believes that in this spot in particular, they need to have some sensitivity as to how this would affect the change of the visual approach to the City from the east side.

Dr. Williams, too, agreed with the other Board members. He wanted to add that on the south side of General McIntosh Boulevard is the 18th century site of Fort Wayne which was there because of the approach the river. If a multi-story eighty foot tall hotel is built, the view out to the river would be lost. Therefore, they need to think about this. There is also the historic pattern of the taller warehouse buildings on south side of River Street and the smaller companions which shed along the river. A pattern that has been replicated by the modern sheds. Therefore, in his opinion besides the points that have already been made, they can add to this the issues of historic views and historic patterns of building relationships. Dr. Williams said he can see a part of this proposal proposes shorter retail which acknowledge views, but these views are only from River Street. He believes, however, they need to take into a count the views from Trustees Garden, the area beside the GA Power building and the surrounding areas. The extra height for the hotel part of this proposal indicated on the submitted plan would partially obscure this view.

Dr. Henry said he shares his colleagues concerns. Whatever the Board does needs to be done unanimously.

Mr. Thomson said the application is to the MPC. He believes that it is most appropriate for the MPC to first hear the staff's report and the applicant's position. He clarified that the Metropolitan Planning Commission makes a recommendation City Council who makes the final decision.

Mr. Merriman agreed with the members of the Historic Review Board. He does not see a need to change the Height Map. This Board's main purpose is to preserve the integrity of the Historic District.

Mr. Thomson stated that a court case was brought against the City for the wording that was added to the ordinance and the process of redoing the ordinance and everything. He read a lot of the minutes of City Council regarding the previous Height Map approval in 2000. A lot of good discussion was held. The property owners make cases for things, but in 2000 a lot of amendments were made to the Height Map. He explained that what he was saying is that the Height Map is established through a process that ultimately gets decided by City Council. When they were working on the revisions that ended in 2009, internally the staff had many discussions about the Height Map pertaining to whether or not it should be on the table. They decided that the ordinance changes were complicated enough and they decided to leave it alone.

Mr. Thomson brought this up because one of the components they looked at was a line of opportunity which was the line that runs along River Street to the river is two stories above River Street and then curves up to meet General McIntosh. He believes that the curve was a line of opportunity, not really focused on, because Savannah Electric was here and nobody thought they would go anywhere. He stated that the belief is, unless there is an esoteric context for the section that if this line is straightened out to the Marriott Hotel, that some context in the area would then become whatever the three above Bay Street. During the time in 2009 when they talked about it, they felt the line would be better if it was straight. Mr. Thomson stated that he does not know what the outcome will be, but just wanted to give the Board his respective on this particular component. They could still end up with two stories above River Street, along the river and then they will be different on the other side of River Street with the line extended.

Ms. Ramsay stated that they have heard from all of the Board members and it appears that the consensus is to go forward with Mr. Engle's letter and make a recommendation to MPC.

Dr. Williams was in agreement, but said the letter could be augmented.

Ms. Ward said the letter will be augmented and drafted for the chair to review and ensure that maintains the action taken by this Board. Upon Ms. Ramsay signing the letter, it will be forwarded to the Metropolitan Planning Commission.

Mr. Thomson said the Board needs to authorize the Chair to write the letter based upon the Board's input.

Mr. Merriman stated he believes Mr. Thomson stated earlier that the

Metropolitan Planning Commission would make their decision and then forward their recommendation to City Council who ultimately will make the final decision. He asked if the Historic Review Board should send a copy of the letter to City Council.

Mr. Thomson suggested that may be the Board might want to send a letter to City Council after MPC has its meeting.

Ms. Ward said the Historic Review Board will have their meeting prior to the next meeting of City Council.

Mr. Engle suggested that may be they need to send a copy of their letter to each member of City Council.

Dr. Henry agreed with Mr. Engle. He said at the appropriate time, a copy of this Board's letter need to be sent to each member of the MPC and City Council.

Mr. Judson said they need to do it step-by-step. Their letter should be sent to MPC to see what decisions they make. They can discuss this more at their meeting of June 13, 2012.

Ms. Ramsay informed the Board that they may go to the MPC meeting on June 5, 2012 and voice their concerns regarding the Historic District Height Map.

Board Action:

Historically, buildings along the north side of River Street were no more than two stories (except for the now lost Neal Blun warehouse on site of the Hyatt). The site in question has a historic role as a viewing corridor between the eastern end of the bluff north of Bay Street and the River. The historic Harbour Light was always visible from the river. Further east, the eighteenth century Fort Wayne (along the northern and eastern edge of the Trustees' Garden) maintained an open view to the river. Views should be considered a vital component of the historic district and a factor in the context of visual compatibility. - PASS

The Savannah Historic District Board of Review (HDBR) recommends that the Metropolitan Planning Commission reject any effort to alter, amend, or change the "2 above River Street" and "3

above Bay Street" portions of the existing Historic District Height Map. The HDBR believes the existing map best preserves the visual character of the riverfront between Bay Streets and the Savannah River.

Vote Results

Motion: Brian Judson

Second: Stephen Glenn Merriman, Jr.

Reed Engle	- Aye
Ned Gay	- Aye
Nicholas Henry	- Aye
Keith Howington	- Aye
Brian Judson	- Aye
Stephen Glenn Merriman, Jr.	- Aye
Linda Ramsay	- Aye
Ebony Simpson	- Aye
Robin Williams	- Aye

2. [Ideas Regarding How to Handle Agenda Items for the meeting of June 13, 2012](#)

Ms. Ramsay asked the Board for directions on how they wanted to handle their June 13, 2012 long agenda.

Mr. Judson said he would rather hear all the petitions at the scheduled meeting date because of having to arrange additional childcare.

Mr. Engle said after the Board has heard petitions for five (5) hours, he believes they need an hour break.

Mr. Thomson explained that the MPC had the opportunity at several of their meetings to divide their agenda into appropriate time sections. The MPC decided which items they would not be able to hear before 3:30 p.m. This Board could do similar, but if you get through prior to your second agenda time, you would have to wait. He did not believe that the Board would have a problem arranging their schedule in this manner. However, the Board need to keep in mind that they need to get the first part of their agenda completed faster.

It was the consensus that the Regular Agenda items would be divided as Part A and Part B with a scheduled time.

XIV. ADJOURNMENT

3. [Adjourned](#)

There being no further business to come before the Historic Review Board, Chair Ramsay adjourned the Special Called meeting at 1:00 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Sarah P. Ward
Historic Preservation Director

SPW:mem

The Chatham County - Savannah Metropolitan Planning Commission provides meeting summary minutes which are adopted by the respective Board. Verbatim transcripts of minutes are the responsibility of the interested party.