

Wilmington Design Review and Preservation Commission
February 15, 2023
6:30 pm

Commissioners Present: Peter von Glahn, Mike Freda, Toren Williams, Jay Macklin

Staff: Pat Maley, John Kurth (Land Use and Planning), Rose Tassone DiNardo, Law

Administrative Business: reading of procedures.

Motion to accept January DRPC minutes was made by Jay Macklin, seconded by Toren Williams and approved unanimously.

Permit Referral DR-1732: Rodney Square Revitalization Phase 2. Resolution 02-23.

Presentation with narrative and PowerPoint slides was made by Leonard Sophrin and Geoff Anderson and Andrew diSabatino. for the Phase 2 of Rodney Square.

Rodney Square was originally completed in 1921. The design was heavily influenced by the Beaux Arts school. Phase One of this refurbishment was completed in fall 2020, and it included new stairs on King Street, and a Splash fountain, among other elements.

Phase 2 consists of improvements to outer areas, as well as restoration of all existing masonry and stairs, piers and balustrades and fountains, and the refurbishing of DART shelters on 10th street.

The slide show contained and annotated scope of work including Hex pavers on 10th street and the replacing of granite set paving on 11th street.

The plan included expanding planting beds to improve planting and paving ratios, upgrades to street lights and 12 lanterns. The designers are working with DART to refurbish bus shelters on 10th and 11th streets.

The presentation included images of 1930 and 1950 postcards for reference of original designs. Those items included:

Larger planting zones than current

Many long continuous planting strips and breaks for pedestrian circulation.

The new plan will maintain 7 of existing oaks and add 3 new; Maintain 2 cheery trees; Clean masonry components. Complete scope of work is in the case file / application material.

The team referenced their phasing plan timeline which goes to the end of Sept 2023.

Planning staff showed a few additional slides; there was brief discussion embracing the plan, and no community comments.

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Peter vonGlahn read the prepared resolution; it was seconded by Toren Williams (with abstention by Mike Freda) and approved by the other commissioners.

DR-1733 317 N Market Street . New Construction

Presentation was made by Jessee Mainwaring from Digsau's and Sarah Lamb of BPG (accompanied by Alex Candice).

Their slide show was narrated by Jessee Mainwaring – the project will take over the northern end of the block with a multi-story, 61 unit building spread over 6 stories with a basement.

HE articulate that their first floor was Public/amenity spaces along Market and 4th with Levels 2 – 4 containing the Mostly 1 bedroom units (only 1 two bedroom unit on top oriented to 4th Street). The proposed building steps back from Market to Shipley 4 – 6

The team continued how they are expressed along Market Street, with the street scape drive by lower zone of storefronts. HE called it “Similar to Cooper saying that they think the variety of scales is important to add life to the block.” He noted how big a building could be stuck on the site based on the base zoning. (7 story).

It was noted that it is clearly a much larger building than anything down there. He showed slides of what could be imposed on the block due to zoning. He displayed elevations, window scale pulled from adjacent structures, and material shift from top to bottom of the building. It was noted that “They are still discussing materiality” and offsets to create shadow line.

Land Use and Planning staff presented their PowerPoint which showed the area prior to the demolitions in 2020 which cleared the upper 60 percent of the block, and showed the variety of light colored materials on the block (light red brick and serpentine stone) on buildings no higher than 3 stories.

Peter vonGlahn state his initial reaction was disappointment, and that he did not find the proposal appropriate for its setting. His comment was that the design showed no sympathy for the neighborhood and no sympathy for what was lost. He referred to it as rather as Looking at apartment building #32 from a design catalogue. He further noted that it does not have the sensitivity that the original Cooper design had (which had been value engineered to remove even the niceties that were in the first design).

He further commented that the colors were dark rather than the warm palette that is across Market and 4th Streets or which had been torn down.

The Cooper building was valued engineered so the originally approved good stuff was lost and what got built is a non-interesting building.

His feeling is that they need to do some work and what was presented at this meeting is not acceptable to fit in Market Street.

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Toren Williams the Commission architect stated that the scale is what hit him first – he considers the scale overwhelming. He stated that he knows the corner, and what they are proposing is dominant and will take away from the district. It is not the direction he would like to go in – the scale is what “grabs him” as TOO BIG. It will stand out and he would like them to pay attention to details, such as the color of brick, etc. HE said that he loves development but this (particular project) is massive and the scale is not warranted.

Jay Macklin stated she I agreed with Peter and do not feel any sympathy in the design. AS the Commission’s historian she feels it is overwhelming. She further commented that she likes LOMA as a soho type area (she lives on the 200 block of Market Street and knows that area intimately). She closed by saying “This is overwhelming.”

Mike Freda stated he was just listening to the comments.

Peter vonGlahn PhD asked, “Do we really need this use of the land in Lower Market Street?” He continued that “It may not be DRPC’ s job but somebody needs to ask the question.”

HE further expressed concerns about 61 apartments with no parking provided, asking “What will the residents do for parking? this will saturate the area – 2 other new buildings have been built within just a few blocks of this proposed site in the recent years.”

Sarah Lamb told the Commission “thank you for the comments.” She continued that regarding the Issue of massing – I knew we would have comments .

Certainly, design solutions.

Peter vonGlahn asked – Sarah, you have appeared before us for years - -why not look at this and ask these questions before you bring it to us? You know what we are doing...”

He closed that statement saying “There is no way I am going to approve this tonight.”

Toren expressed concern over the scale and aesthetic.

Sarah returned to the parling issue saying “You do have a parking garage in this neighborhood.” She elaborated with comments on what they had tried to do here, and the Scale up from 4th Street, and how they are making attempts to meeting ... this while meeting the proforma.

She noted “Scale up on 4th Street, scale down on Market Street.”

She expressed that she does not think it’s FAIR that other buildings were torn down and taller buildings built (and now BPG is getting chastised for same/similar proposals).

She said that regarding the Design– they can go back to the drawing board, and they will continue to work on other precedents.

PVG asks the what the boundaries of the Market Street City Historic District are and Pat Maley defined the present boundaries - Front(MLK) to 10th, Shipley to King.

Discussion gets edgy as it covered the Purpose of the commission is to maintain the ambiance of the district, and rebuffs such as “does not mean we have to look alike” and “but this does not look like it fits in the neighborhood.” Toren Williams backed Peter vonGlahn up on the strength of his comments saying, “We need things to blend, to flow – Something complimentary.’ He further expressed that he understood the dollar and cents have to work, but architecturally this DOESN’T WORK in scale and aesthetics.’

He further expressed that, “We want it to be natural, be organic. I don’t want to see “WHOA”

I want to see nice. This scale is massive, the aesthetic doesn’t match. It’s just foreign.

What was sent in is MASSIVE – scale it down – give homage to the neighborhood.

Toren stressed - REDESIGN and do the due-diligence.

Mike Freda noted that as a develop the s understand the proforma. He sees the development as an improvement – and that adding housing is a huge positive. His only concern is the parking.

Toren William also stated that he loves development – but asked if it allowed a 20 story building would we allow that ? He understands this is prime real estate – and stressed that is why the Commission is here to protect it.

Jay Macklin noted that the small businesses are struggling with lack of parking already – 60 units would stress the area (She lives in the 200 block of Market Street and has her business there).

Sarah Lamb stated, “they can rent parking from the garages nearby.” The discussion got louder and expanded., with Sarah going into detail about how there will be a loading spot nearby, and “how the massing studies show that they have the right to build X so we were trying to be sensitive.”

Sarah concluded that “We appreciate everybody’s feedback – we know we have to go back to the drawing board.”

Pat Maley – explained the difference between table versus reject for this case.

Peter von Glahn stated that the Commission should not accept due to inappropriate design.

Toren Williams agreed, adding that the scale aesthetics were not appropriate for that corner.

Reject because scale and aesthetics are not appropriate for the site.

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Peter von Glahn read the resolution For DR - # 1733

That DRPC Does NOT approve due to scale and aesthetic being inappropriate. It was seconded by Toren Williams, and there were no objections or abstentions.

TOREN AND Peter is interest.

Sarah Lamb stated that they would want to do one more round of redesign and then and maybe then go to subcommittee as they had with the Cooper project.

Jay Macklin moved to adjourn. It was seconded by Mike Freda and approved unanimously.