

Hine Project To Proceed for Zoning Consideration

Although a number of design issues remain to be resolved, after a series of three meetings with the Historic Preservation Review Board (April 28, June 30 and August 4) StantonEastbanc gained sufficient conceptual approval of its Hine School redevelopment plans to be able to proceed with the filing of a Planned Unit Development with the Zoning Commission this fall. The August 4 meeting focused on the northern section of the site, including the reopened C Street and the proposed plaza.

After listening to over an hour of testimony from community members and organizations, the Board provided specific comments to StantonEastbanc on a number of issues raised in the staff report and by the community. (A listing of design issues that still need to be studied from all three meetings is posted on the CHRS website.)

C Street Plaza: The size of the plaza (and by extension, the number of tents that could be accommodated on the weekend) was a major topic of concern for community members who testified. While there was disagreement about the number of tents “required” to be accommodated, there was widespread support for the flea market and its place in the site. The Capitol Hill Restoration Society (CHRS) did not address this issue because it is not a historic preservation issue (although obviously the number of tents will affect the size and possibly shape of the plaza, which does impact conceptual approval). This is an issue that should be handled by other bodies and processes than HPRB. However, recognizing the concern that many expressed that conceptual approval of the plaza by the HPRB now would limit the possibility for future changes, CHRS asked that the Board note that approval now should not be construed as limiting discussions on this issue before other bodies. The Board included in its vote that “proviso” and also requested the staff help arrange a meeting with the Office of Deputy Mayor for Planning and Economic Development, developers, community members, Councilmember Wells office, and others to discuss the issue of the number of vendor tents as it is outside the Board’s purview to make that decision.

One of the features proposed for the plaza was a series of three “pools and fountains.” While not recommending elimination of those features, Board members did express some concerns about that part of the proposal, particularly the way it would appear in the winter when the water is turned off. In its letter to the Board (available on the CHRS website, www.chrs.org), CHRS requested that the developers consider including seating in the plaza other than that provided by the Cafes so that people would not feel they had to spend money to be able to linger in this public space and also if the developers could explore the possibility of using larger caliper trees along Seventh Street as well as along C Street to provide more “presence” given the tall buildings. Also on the wish list was the desire that this plaza be identified in a particular way with Capitol Hill rather than simply being an attractive, yet perhaps generic, space. This is an opportunity to highlight some aspect of the community’s history (perhaps the four schools that have stood on the site or all the schoolchildren who attended those schools) in an imaginative way.

North Residential Building: While the height of the building remains at four stories in the middle section and three stories at the end sections facing Seventh and Eighth streets, the architect revised the design

of the middle section from a largely horizontal appearance to five vertical sections with retail on the ground level and residential above. That change combined with a deep slate cornice makes the building fit better with the Capitol Hill vernacular. Both CHRS and the HP staff report suggested the need for a stronger entrance element to the apartments on the eastern end of the building. Given the four-story height of the building and its visibility along the alley that runs between 7th and 8th streets, CHRS and the 8th Street neighbors asked that the rear façade be made more “friendly” and less severe. The Board concurred with that recommendation.

Plaza Residential Building: The architect also made substantial revisions to the appearance of this five-story building, with inspiration coming from the decoratively restrained post-and-beam architecture of the early 20th century. Executed in Roman brick that will be lighter in color on the upper floors and highlighted by deep-set elongated windows and shallow balconies, the building will form the southern boundary of the plaza, with retail on the ground floor and residential above.

Both CHRS and HPRB recommended that the entrance area be re-studied as it seemed insignificant in its relationship to both the plaza and the large apartment building façade. However, board members were not in agreement in their comments about the present design of the façade, being evenly divided between those who felt the C Street/plaza façade was “complex without being overdone” and those who thought it was “not there yet and less than delightful.” In its comments, CHRS noted that the current configuration of windows and balconies felt strained and was perhaps too busy while the facades facing 7th Street and C Street seem not to be related except by the materials (and both will be very noticeable at the same time because of the angle of the plaza).

In the end, the height of the project did not change appreciably from the height of the buildings first discussed in March. There were some modest setbacks and other design changes that should help to reduce apparent height at some locations but overall, the project remains larger than the surrounding historic district in terms of height and mass. At some point the project will return to the HPRB for consideration of the unresolved design issues and for any requirements stipulated by the Zoning Commission. Gary Peterson, chair of CHRS’s Zoning Committee, will be the contact person for CHRS on zoning review matters.