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MINUTES  
HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION MEETING  
Heman Park Community Center  
975 Pennsylvania Avenue, University City, MO 63130  
6:30 pm; Thursday December 19, 2019

**Present:**

Donna Leach  
Bill Chilton  
Robert Klahr

**Absent:**

Donna Marin, Chair  
Sandy Jacobsen  
Christine Mackey-Ross  
Esley Hamilton

Adam Brown, Planner  
Clifford Cross, Director of Planning and Development  
Council Liaison, Tim Cusick

The Commission did not have a quorum at this meeting, so this was a working session with the applicants and the Commission. The meeting began at 6:50pm.

Mr. Cross chaired the meeting in the absence of the chair and a quorum. He explained that his recommendation would be two actions – one approving the demolition of the Delmar building, and the other the proposed construction of a new building. He introduced Tristar development who presented on the proposed demolition of the Delmar Harvard Building and construction of a new hotel.

The representatives of Tristar are Toby Headinghaus, Gray Design, Thomas Douglas of Tristar, and Michael Towerman of Tristar.,

Mr. Towerman gave a brief introduction to Tristar Development and described the kinds of projects Tristar had done in the past. They have an interest in historic buildings, including several other historic schools and historic tax credit projects.

Mr. Douglas described the cumbersome nature of historic tax credits, as well as the challenges to renovate the Delmar building for an economically viable use. He said Tristar therefore planned to demolish the Delmar building. They plan to convert the Harvard building into office space, with a handicap accessible ramp in the front. The plan is to keep the majority of the façade as-is.

The Delmar Building presents challenges that the Harvard building does not – it may not be economically feasible given some of the constraints of the building

Mr. Towerman described the parking which would be shared between the office and hotel. Part of the City's lot across Kingsland would be used for overflow. From a site planning perspective this is challenging. The buildings have been vacant for 7-8 years. This would be the only building in the Civic Complex that would bring tax revenue to the City (property taxes would increase due to the office and hotel uses) – hotel would pay about \$200,000 per year.

Mr. Douglas further described some of the Delmar building challenges including the size of the building and the large amount of the building used for hallways. There are low ceiling heights, a significant amount of the building is below grade, and significant settling has been observed. The building has aging mechanical systems. Past plumbing situations have caused leaks, and there are a number of unknowns with the building such as the potential for asbestos in tiles and lead in paint and caulk. The existing spaces pose significant challenges in terms of using the space.

Mr. Towerman described Tristar's exercise of selecting uses for the buildings. He said the Delmar building lays out nicely for an office. He said the two buildings being different uses would allow for shared parking. Restaurants have highest demand for parking. Colleen Durfee, a former Planner for University City, was retained to discuss this project through Lochmueller. The configuration of the Harvard Building would not allow many uses. He said retail is not a great use on Kingsland.

Mr. Towerman said that their goal is to own this for a very long time, and to create a successful project for the community and for themselves.

Mr. Douglas spoke to the proposed site plan. He described site access from the east on Kingsland. Tristar is proposing access at the existing lighted intersection. They have spoken to St. Louis County about a dedicated left turn lane. They are also proposing entrance from Mike King Drive. The plan calls for maintaining as much of the stone wall out front as possible. There are 67 parking spaces proposed.

Toby Headinghaus from Grey Design Group spoke to the proposed Tru Hotel by Hilton brand. He spoke to design cues Hilton requires such as angular walls, a variety of window types, and different materials. The hotel they have designed for the Delmar site is a very custom hotel. He said they didn't need to rely on over-the-top colors. The windows were simplified, would have projected cornice, and proposed brick from ground to roof, with careful masonry detailing. The brick selections will complement the buildings around them. The primary metals will be dark bronze, with a small amount of blue and yellow metal (for wayfinding). Tru has a basic food and beverage market component – it is a pedestrian oriented hotel. The building is proposed to be 62 feet above grade for a 5-story building, which matches buildings in the area.

Mr. Chilton asked about the height of the Delmar building compared to the buildings around the proposed hotel. The developers met with the University Heights trustees. They created a photo mock-up of what the residents of University Heights would see from their neighborhood, which they shared with the Commission.

Ms. Leach said she has a problem with the presentation of the building on Kingsland and the relationship to the buildings around it. There was discussion about demolition of the building versus what would replace it. Ms. Leach would like a structural engineers report and an EPA report before voting for demolition, and she and Mr. Chilton felt that they should take the new building proposed into consideration.

Mr. Towerman said that the architect of the existing building was a significant architect of schools. Mr. Chilton said the Delmar building was the first school building for University City, and that it is part of the Civic complex. He feels the Delmar building is more significant architecturally. The Harvard building is the “back” building of the district. Mr. Chilton felt that a newer building would fit better where the Harvard building is. He also noted that the height of the new building could potentially compete with City Hall. Mr. Klahr suggested that a massing drawing with the surrounding buildings would be helpful.

There was further discussion of the height. City Hall is significantly higher than the site where they are building. There was discussion on height of five versus four stories – a four-story building would not meet parking or setback requirements. The question of subterranean parking came up, but the developer said there was not enough acreage to allow for this. There was also the option of the developers building a parking deck over the lot across the street, but this would involve several other stakeholders. The developer also said they could demolish both buildings to get the height down. Mr. Towerman said they could share two-dozen examples of Tru Hotels around the country. Ms. Leach spoke to the windows and the uniformity of the windows. Mr. Klahr asked how the footprint of the new building compared to the existing building. The developers said it was not significantly larger – Mr. Klahr said getting the comparison of the building footprints would be helpful as well. Because the site is over an acre, they will have to satisfy MSD requirements. There was a discussion of how much of the wall would be removed on Kingsland. The developers said about 20-22 feet, which would be 10-15% of the wall – which Mr. Klahr characterized as an “immaterial” portion of the wall. That access is crucial to the success of the project.

Mr. Towerman discussed why they had selected the Tru Hotel brand. He said the brand would target younger customers and that the hotel would bring customers back to the west Loop area. The hotel targets people who want to do business during the day and have access to a walkable district at night. On the weekend clients would be related to Wash U students, The hotel feasibility consultant feels that this is the target customer, similar to the Moonrise.

The second reason was arrived at through the process of deductive reasoning. Given the other hotels in the areas, many of the other customers those brands target are spoken for in the area. Tristar is anxious to lock down the Tru brand because they are not sure there is another brand that would work. Also, the Tru brand is not full service, so clientele would use the Loop. Tru is also one of the more compact brands. Ms. Leach would like to see a better style of hotel in that location, and that is her biggest concern.

She discussed whether the proposed brick color is working with adjacent buildings. Ms. Leach suggested changing the darker brick areas as the larger areas versus the lighter ones. There was further discussion of other possible materials and configurations with the façade of the building. Glass is proposed to be low E clear glass and not tinted. Mr. Chilton also requested that they consider more green space.

Mr. Cross explained the process the developers would go through as part of the Planned Development process, including a full landscaping plan before final approval. He also mentioned that the code will be changing in 2020 to the 2018 IBC, but that developers who come in under the 2012 code.

Ms. Leach clarified that the existing wall around the site would remain.

There was discussion about who owns the wall on the southern edge of the parking lot, and it is assumed that it belongs to the library.

Mr. Cross summarized that he would get photos from the developers of other Tru Hotel elements. He also wanted to clarify that two actions would be addressed – one for the demolition of the building and one for the design. He will evaluate open dates and asked if the commission would consider an extra meeting in January to try and get this in front of the plan commission sooner. The developer's goal is to get the project started in the Summer. Mr. Klahr asked if there was anything else the developers should bring to demonstrate the impracticability leading to the demolition of the Delmar Building. The developers again explained that they explored all options for the Delmar building, but that none of them made economic sense. Ms. Leach asked for an engineer's report, and other evidence on record that would support the demolition of a historic building.

Ms. Leach asked for any extra material to be distributed through Cliff so the other members could hear what had been discussed. The developer also said they could share some renderings with different color schemes, as well as other cross sections with the other buildings around it.

Mr. Cross also discussed work session being productive and that this could be considered as a change in the code to create work sessions to work out details with applicants and for the commission to work through details. The developers noted that they like this process.

The meeting ended at 8:40pm.

Prepared by Adam Brown