

**MINUTES
CITY OF ST. CHARLES
HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION
WEDNESDAY, MARCH 16, 2022 – 7:00 P.M.**

Members Present: Pretz, Malay, Kessler, Smunt, Rice

Members Absent: Norris, Dickerson

Also Present: Russell Colby, Director of Community Development
Rachel Hitzemann, Planner
Cindy Kaleta, Administrative Assistant

1. Call to Order

Chairman Malay called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

2. Roll Call

Ms. Hitzemann called roll with five members present. There was a quorum.

3. Approval of Agenda

A motion was made by Ms. Rice and seconded by Mr. Pretz with a unanimous voice vote to approve the agenda.

4. Presentation of minutes of the March 2nd, 2022 Meeting

A motion was made by Mr. Kessler and seconded by Mr. Pretz with a unanimous voice vote to approve the Minutes of the March 2, 2022 Meeting.

5. Certificate of Appropriateness (COA) applications

a. 117 W Main St.

Mr. Billy Metzger, Business Owner, presented COA for new sign at Diamondaire located at 117 W Main Street.

A motion was made by Mr. Pretz and seconded by Ms. Rice with a unanimous voice vote to approve COA as presented for 117 W Main Street.

b. 50 S 1st St.

Ms. Karen Dodge representing Theriault/Booth Attorneys at Law presented COA for new sign at 501 S 1st Street.

A motion was made by Mr. Smunt and seconded by Mr. Kessler with a unanimous voice vote to approve COA as presented for 50 S 1st St.

c. 520 State Ave. (Fence)

Mr. Jim Ratliff, Homeowner, presented COA for new privacy fence at 520 State Ave.

Dr. Smunt advised the Commission does not like the shiny white PVC fences, would prefer a wood grain or wood toned color fence.

A motion was made by Dr. Smunt to approve COA using a wood grained PVC or wooden fence and seconded by Mr. Pretz with a unanimous voice vote to approve COA for 520 State Ave.

d. 520 State Ave (Porch)

Mr. Jim Ratliff, Homeowner, presented COA for new porch at 520 State Ave.

Commission discussed material color and style of porch.

A motion was made by Dr. Smunt to approve COA as presented on the slides of finished product on home shown and per verbal agreements in discussion and seconded by Mr. Pretz with a unanimous voice vote to approve COA for 520 State Ave.

6. Grant Applications

None.

7. Landmark Applications

None.

8. Preliminary Reviews- Open forum for questions or presentation of preliminary concepts to the Commission for feedback

a. 218 Indiana St.

Brad Saelens, Project Architect, presented updated concept plan for new build at 218 Indiana Street.

Dr. Smunt reviewed previous meeting discussions on the styling of home for the neighborhood. Commission doesn't believe the style of the building as presented fits the neighborhood.

Commission discussed moving to a more traditional look for the building, giving suggestions of other buildings in the area.

9. Other Commission Business

a. Recommendation to Plan Commission regarding Special Use for PUD & PUD Preliminary Plans for River East Lofts

Mr. Curt Hurst, Developer, discussed his plan for the property, advising the current zoning ordinance on property allowed for redevelopment of 2, 40,000 square foot 50-foot-tall buildings with retail. The Comprehensive Plan for St. Charles encourages the same.

Mr. Hurst presented the proposed development to Commission, explaining different aspects of the building.

Ms. Malay instructed that the Historical Commission is not approving or denying this project, they will make a recommendation to Planning & Development Committee. The Historic Commission will look at the impact on the Historic District, does the building fit in and compliment the neighborhood or does it have a negative impact. At this point the developer is able to build two 50-foot-tall buildings without a PUD, they are able to build something with

mass which the Commission will consider. With the PUD it gives the City ability to have more regulation on the architecture.

Commission addressed questions to Mr. Curt Hurst and Mr. Conrad Hurst concerning the PUD.

Dr. Smunt asked Mr. Hurst what were the main things they pulled from the Comprehensive Plan to guide them on this site.

Mr. Conrad Hurst responded they took the picture from the Comprehensive Plan for this site, which anticipated a large mixed-use building, maintain the open space experience, gateway elements and pedestrian connectivity. The plan may not have anticipated the opportunity to condense the building into a taller building. Mr. Hurst asked if the Commission thought they had deviated from the plan? Dr. Smunt responded no, the plan shows to vacate Riverside Ave, the proposed development does not vacate Riverside nor effecting the bike trail system. The proposed plan is handling in a different way but the proposed plan is handling in a better way.

Dr. Smunt followed up with question presented by residents of the neighborhood to the immediate east claiming the proposed building will block their view of the Fox River. Asked Mr. Hurst to address.

Mr. Hurst stated the views from the neighborhood are somewhat limited, not saying there are not river views and not saying this building won't impact them. In terms of the PUD we should focus on what the ordinance allows which is a 50-foot-high building and the last 9 feet that the PUD requests. The 9 feet above the 50-foot height is not going to impact anybody in the neighborhoods view. Most of the resident's views are impacted by the current building and trees in the neighborhood.

Mr. Kessler asked about the height concerns being addressed by the setbacks of the building.

Mr. Conrad Hurst responded he felt they did address on the fifth level by pulling back from the street level façade, trying to keep the visibility impact as minimal as they can. The height helps with minimizing the impact on the south side of the building with the step down to the green space where it is adjacent to a residential neighborhood, this is in a Central Business District so they have to take both zoning districts into account when asking if the building fits into the neighborhood.

Mr. Kessler asked, on the plaza area where the section of the street would be vacated, is that intended to be private to the residents of the building?

Mr. Conrad Hurst responded no, it will be open to the public.

Mr. Curt Hurst added, just to clarify to the south end where the artwork, landscaping and gateway monumentation would be publicly owned. Developer would cooperate with the City which wanted to have their influence on that area. North of the area would be privately owned but intended to be used by public.

Mr. Pretz asked if developer would state the three exceptions seeking with the PUD.

Mr. Conrad Hurst responded, 9-foot height variance, a gross floor area predicated on doing 1 building instead of 2, a density variance which will change the layout of rental units.

Mr. Pretz asked about utilities, HVAC, is that at the lowest level on the ground or on the roof?

Mr. Conrad Hurst responded they will be using V-tech units each unit will be contained inside of the individual apartments.

Mr. Pretz stated the reason he was asking this question is that if they stayed at the 50-foot level and put all of those systems on the roof would you still be able to put those systems up there?

Mr. Conrad Hurst responded yes, the reason they switched to the v-tech units is that the 5th level was to be used for the mechanicals, the backwall was solid and would have been unusable space other than for mechanicals. By getting these into the rooms freed up space.

Mr. Pretz added that at the 50-foot level they could have put the mechanicals on top of the building but would have added shielding and by the time they were done it would give the same appearance as a fifth floor.

Mr. Pretz questioned the façade of the building, is it a brick façade or is it panel? Mr. Pretz thought the style appears to be a prairie style building. Would they consider roman brick, which is long and narrow. On the 4th and 5th floor, the columns have urns, not on all the columns but strategically placed to keep the verticals going up but from the site lines it enhances the columns, is that something you could potentially take a look at?

Mr. Conrad Hurst confirmed it is brick. Inspiration was pulled from the Hotel Baker. Brick supplier identified a newer version of what the Hotel Baker uses. They are open to looking into the roman brick and urns on the building. Brick samples will be brought to the Planning and Development meeting.

Ms. Rice followed up on the variances, asking for additional information on the gross floor and density variances.

Mr. Conrad Hurst stated their buildings gross floor, as drawn, is just shy of 57,000 square feet. Current zoning ordinances would allow them to build 2 buildings with 40,000 square feet per building, allowing 80,000 square feet on the two parcels they own. They would be required to build two buildings with a party wall so it would look like one building. By combining into one building it allows them to condense into one site allowing them to have more open space. The density ordinance is geared towards the type of unit mix they want to have, it doesn't change the population factor, just the type of units they are renting. More one and two bedroom and less three bedroom units.

Mr. Curt Hurst explained that if doing the math from the land cash donation worksheets, if you have three bedrooms, which they could do 22 of based on the density, multiply by 3.09 you would have 67 residents. If you use the current plan with 43 units of 1 and 2 bedrooms, would be 65 residents.

Ms. Rice followed up stating she does appreciate the open space, the connectivity, the river front area and bike parking is needed downtown, likes how tiered down building toward the residential area. North end is a little harsh.

Mr. Conrad Hurst responded in a structural perspective that is the stair core, it goes all the way to the fifth floor which is what is lending to the flatter elevation. Economics are getting difficult after pulling five units from the building to get the tiered effect on the south side of building. It would be difficult economically to remove the stair core and tier that northern elevation. There

will be other architectural details on the north side, added sills to all the windows and awnings. There will also be lighting. Columns will go to the fourth floor.

Ms. Malay asked if developer has met with the property owners around the site? In the end the gross floor area has been backed off by about 20,000 square feet.

Mr. Curt Hurst replied, no, other than at the city meetings.

Mr. Conrad Hurst added they thought the concept review process was a more efficient way to get the feedback from the neighborhood. Public notice went to all residents within 250 feet, allows a meeting to get everyone in one room to get feedback. Start running into issues to create a building as attractive as this one, with as many features, when you just force yourself into the box of the current zoning.

Dr. Smunt asked developer to address parking being a major concern of the neighborhood to the east based on their experience during festivals and parades. They get inundated with visitors from out of town and are concerned this development will have a greater impact. There are also concerns about claims of loss of one space and claims the proposed development will create an additional load for more parking, up to 100 spaces.

Mr. Conrad Hurst responded the initial plan had more parking to which the concern was not enough green space. Parking spaces were pulled to allow for more green space still within zoning ordinances, they are not requesting a variance for parking but it's in their best interest to maintain parking. Developments like this give the City the resources needed to solve these problems.

Mr. Curt Hurst addressed the tax increment on this building. They are currently paying \$13,000 tax on this property. Working with the tax assessor on what they think the taxes will be on this property after will be about \$5,500 per unit or over \$200,000 for the building resulting in new revenue for the city in which they can use to address parking.

Dr. Smunt continued asking that all the parking for residents will be on the property.

Mr. Conrad Hurst responded that yes that is their intention and they are in the zoning ordinance.

Mr. Pretz asked if there is parking inside the building.

Mr. Curt Hurst advised that yes, there is parking inside the building. They are finalizing the count but there will be 24 plus or minus on the inside. Once they finalize the structural items they will have a better count. Parking outside currently has 12 spaces, they have increased it to 24 spaces. There was originally more but it was cut back to allow for more green space.

Mr. Colby noted that the project is located in Downtown Special Service area and it qualifies for parking exemption. As long as there is parking within a certain distance additional parking does not need to be provided in order to meet the code requirements. It is required that where there is existing parking it not be eliminated. On this site there is 30 something spaces in the parking lot that will be part of the building site, also spaces along 2nd Ave. that are currently public spaces. What is being proposed is there will be a reduction in the number of spaces in the private parking lot but an increase in the number of street spaces along 2nd Ave. With the street vacation that's been requested those spaces will be privately owned spaces. Total spaces will be equal to the number of spaces that were there previously. Complies with the parking exemption standards.

Mr. Pretz spoke on the improved style of the most recent submission for the new building. Mr. Pretz stated he thought the prairie style has a better blend with the area.

Mr. Pretz would prefer to stay at the 50-foot height but stated the stepped approach the recessed fifth floor is an improvement. Prefers to look at a finished 5th floor than utilities. Mr. Pretz gave the Mr. Hurst a picture of building.

Mr. Pretz asked street traffic and parking as relates to neighborhood, questioned if possibly making Indiana a one-way street could alleviate traffic and open up parking.

Mr. Kessler agreed design has improved. In the Comprehensive Plan looked like a parking garage was shown where PollyAnna currently sits. Is parking garage a possibility by PollyAnna?

Mr. Hurst advised they own the lot to the north of PollyAnna and has been in discussion with the City of St. Charles about a land swap to create a parcel for a potential parking structure in that location.

Mr. Colby discussed the property current zoning CBD-1 and what could be built. Total site square footage is 21,000. On each parcel could construct 40,000 square feet for a total of 80,000 gross floor area. Building height currently allowed is 50 feet, calculated from different frontages. What is being proposed 59 feet 7 inches measured from the higher side of the property. Commercial use can be part of the overall square footage.

Dr. Smunt reviewed the 2013 Comprehensive Plan prior to meeting. Looked at the goals of the Comprehensive Plan. Buffer on the south side, orientation of building is the stair stepping towards the south side gateway entrance which handles the key gateway issue, following guidelines in the Comprehensive Plan. Parking off street and on 2nd Ave. more needs to be done on parking for the neighborhood to the east. Site is considered a catalyst site in the Comprehensive Plan and should include gateway feature such as gathering space, this plan does accommodate. If this was residential zoning, we would have a different dialog as zoning is completely different. The proposal falls well into the intent of the Comprehensive Plan and I support it. No designated landmarks directly to the east.

Ms. Rice stated development of the site is inevitable. Appreciate it will be a gateway to the downtown area. It is quite different than what is there today. According to the Comprehensive Plan and what the city will allow the site will be developed.

Ms. Malay stated the new plan is much improved. The buildings owned to the north is a good example of the prairie era. I understand where the neighbors are coming from, it will be a big change, but as stated, it is zoned for this use and matches the comprehensive plan. I agree we need to look at parking. With the fact that we could have two structures that are 50 feet tall versus one that is tiered back.

Mr. Greg Taylor, Resident, asked the Historic Commission to recommend denial of the project due to the adverse effects this project will have on property values within the Central Historic District. Municipal Code 17.32 states one of the five purposes is to protect and increase the value of property within the Historic areas within the city of St. Charles. The River East project will have the opposite effect of protecting and increasing property values in the Central Historic District. The additional load of parking associated with a 43-unit building will make an already difficult parking situation, dreadful. Currently whenever there is an event downtown our neighborhood lots are filled. Where are all the cars associated with a 43-unit apartment building

going to find parking. If this proposed building was not in CBD-1 zoning the development required parking spaces would need between 105 and 135 parking spaces. This project provides negative 1 to the current inventory of parking spaces. Current parking spaces are being used now, every weekend.

What is not mentioned in the application, redevelopment of the site could vary based on the city's ability to address transportation, page 91 paragraph Q. Parking is included in transportation. The city should continue to provide parking and carefully monitor the demand to ensure current and future needs are met before it's developed, page 89 of Comprehensive Plan. Project will result large flow of traffic into our streets seeking parking which will negatively affect our property values.

Size of the River East Lofts will dwarf the nearby homes to the east. I found a shadow study on the website; the proposed building casts a shadow so large you don't see where it ends. The study was done on July 20 at 9:00 a.m. when the sun is highest in the sky. Mr. Taylor shared a picture with the Commission of the westward view from his home. The westward view from his dining room will be 100% void of sky and just a brick wall.

Massive scale, the shadows cast by this building, the view of a brick wall for many of the property owners, will erode property values. The reduced ability to enter and leave giving away property to private developer will inconvenience many residents.

Ms. Martha Gass, Resident, read letter submitted to the Historic Commission.

Thank you for taking the time to read why the River East Lofts will negatively affect our historic neighborhood.

I ask that you recommend to the City Council denial of a Certificate of Appropriateness.

Chapter 8 of our Comprehensive Plan discusses the downtown area. One of the downtown subarea goals is "Preservation and enhancement of the Downtown's historic architectural character." Some of the subarea objectives are: "Provide a high level of physical and visual access to the Fox River from all portions of Downtown", and "Require new development to meet high standards of site and building design that are compatible with the historic character". It also specifically addresses Image & Character. "Downtown is made up of several blocks of varying types of development forms and uses. Within these blocks, however, there is a clear hierarchy of "corridors" that provide the most character-defining experience. The value of traditional downtowns like St Charles' are most often derived from their intimate scale and focus on the pedestrian." The River East Lofts does not meet these goals or objectives. It does not preserve or enhance downtown's historic architectural character – it's located adjacent to an old neighborhood with houses over 100 years old and presents as a monolithic structure not at all compatible with the neighborhood. The scale is far from intimate. And instead of providing a high level of physical and visual access to the Fox River, it will prevent views of the river from east Illinois Ave and from the neighborhoods to its east, and instead present these areas with a view of brick.

It continues regarding the Historic District. "The City of St. Charles has adopted Historic Preservation Ordinances to foster awareness of the City's rich history including its historic sites and buildings. The City's Historic Preservation Commission is responsible for ensuring modifications and renovations, along with new development and construction, are consistent with the standards established for the historic district. The City's history is important in maintaining its cultural fabric and identity. This value is recognized by the City's residents and the City should ensure that this rich and unique history is not lost but rather complemented and enhanced with new downtown investment and development."

This Commission is charged with “preserving the distinctive historic architectural areas and structures that are significant to the City’s history.”

The project does not meet the General Architectural and Aesthetic Guidelines in that it is NOT “compatible with surrounding structures” in the Height and Scale criteria for the certificate. Nor does it meet the criteria for New Structures: “New structures in an historic district shall be compatible with, but need not be the same as, the architectural styles and general designs and layouts of the surrounding structures.”

Height – The building is not compatible with surrounding structures. It towers over them by more than three stories. One building immediately east is two stories, but the other buildings immediately east are 1.5 stories, as are most of the buildings in the adjacent blocks.

Scale – The building is not compatible with the surrounding structures. Its mass at more than 57,750sf is more than 20 times the 2852 sf of the very largest building nearest it. The other buildings nearby range from 1760 to 1828sf. It dwarfs all neighboring properties. In fact, River East Lofts are 4.8 times larger than the combined 12,033sf of the entire building stock in the block east of the Chamber building. The renderings do not provide a good perspective for how out of scale it is with the neighborhood. The first two renderings are from points high over the trees, thus hiding the scale. The third rendering obscures the view of my block with trees and does not show the Indiana/Ohio block. The fourth and fifth do not address it. I asked Rachel Hitzemann this on March 11/14: “ Would you request a simulated view of what a person would see while standing in the middle of 2nd Ave at Riverside Ave looking northerly up the middle of 2nd Ave that includes the current housing stock on the easterly side of the view and the entirety of the building on the westerly side of that view, and include the large silver maple tree that is in the easterly parkway between Indiana and Illinois Ave.?” Perhaps this view will have been provided us by the time of the meeting on March 16.

The River East Lofts are grossly not compatible to their surroundings in the Central Historic District. They would be more compatible if they were scaled back to two to three stories, and tapered on the south end. But as the project is proposed, it should be denied a Certificate of Appropriateness.

Ms. Gass discussed current zoning that would allow two fifty-foot buildings on the two lots. The density is based on the square footage of the buildings, not the entire square footage of the buildings. Current zoning the footprint of that space is 21,400 square feet. The two buildings zoning would allow 21 dwelling units limit split between the 2 buildings, 10 units in one and 11 in the other. Ten 4,000 square foot units.

PUD application lists height at 50 feet 9 inches. The zero point on the northeast corner of the lot. Bring this up because the Chronicle did state they had scaled down the height of the building but they have not. Nine feet is significant to the people east of the building.

Ms. Gass submitted a shadow study she had done on March 12 to the city. The shadow study submitted by developer does not show the full impact throughout the year.

Mr. Jim Ratliff, Resident, spoke to say he likes every aspect of the proposal and feels it is a well thought out project. He and his wife hope it will be approved by the city and feels it will increase property values of anything near the project.

Mr. Al Watts, Preservation Partners of the Fox Valley asked if the current building will be demolished?

Mr. Curt Hurst responded that yes, it will be demolished.

Recommendation to the Plan Commission:

Dr. Smunt recommends the Plan Commission recognize the developers have closely followed the recommendation of the Comprehensive Plan in regards to the gateway into the downtown, have quality architectural design that will enhance property values, the historic resources of the city will not have a negative impact. Parking will need to be addressed by the Plan Commission. Motion 2nd by Mr. Kessler.

Smunt, Kessler, Rice and Malay voted in favor of the motion.

Mr. Pretz abstained, not against, but not settled on the fifth floor.

10. Public Comment

11. Additional Business and Observations from Commissioners or Staff

12. Meeting Announcements: Historic Preservation Commission meeting Wednesday, April 6th, 2022 at 7:00 P.M.

13. Adjournment

With no further business to discuss, the meeting adjourned at 9:23 p.m.