

**SPECIAL MEETING OF THE
HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION
PORTSMOUTH, NEW HAMPSHIRE
1 JUNKINS AVENUE
City Council Chambers**

7:00 p.m.

March 30, 2005

MEMBERS PRESENT: Chairman John Rice, Vice Chairman David Adams, City Council Representative, Joanne Grasso, Planning Board Representative, Ken Smith, Members, John Golumb, Rick Becksted, Ellen Fineberg and, Alternates. Richard Katz and Sandra Dika

MEMBERS ABSENT:

ALSO PRESENT: David Holden, Planning Director

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I. WORK SESSION

A) Work Session requested by Don Peterson, applicant and HarborCorp, LLC, owner for property located on Russell St., Deer St., and Maplewood Avenue (to review preliminary proposals to construct a 200 room hotel with 20,000 ± sq. ft. conference facility and 680 ± car parking garage). Said property is shown on Assessor Plans 119 as Lot 001, Plan 118, Lot 28, Plan 124, Lot 12 and Plan 125, Lots 20 and 21 and lies within the Central Business A and Historic A districts.

- Same development team as Sheraton in order to produce equal or better quality as before
- Don Peterson representing HarborCorp, LLC the developing entity
- Nancy Ludwick, Principal in charge for Icon Architecture
- Sherry Young, Vice President/General Manager of the Sheraton
- Richard O'Dwyer, Project Manager of Icon Architecture
- Michelle Walter, Project Architect of Icon Architecture

- Don Peterson gave an overview
- Goal is to solicit input from Board
- Very mindful of the responsibility to respect Portsmouth's history
- 200 room hotel envisioned and the specific plan presented before the Board was for a 215 room plan
- Conference Rooms, a Banquet Facility and Function Rooms of approximately 19,000 sq. feet and proposing some retail space on street level on Deer Street and Maplewood Avenue
- Some specific design challenges with elevation and street access into retail spaces
- Parking structure approx. 668 cars in current generation of plan but desire 700 if possible
- Goal is to present concepts to Board and demonstrate how the current plans fit within all zoning parameters and ordinances

- Two options presented: a traditional design option and transitional design option
- Two options due to the property being situated in both the historic and northern tear of downtown
- Need adequate space or facility to accommodate larger groups as well as complement the existing Sheraton hotel
- One significant element is an above road connector on Russell Street that connects the existing building to the new facility
- Plan is to generate business so that both facilities can act seamlessly together
- Certain elements in one facility will complement the other

- Nancy Ludwick went over the plans in greater detail
- Emphasized that the goal is to do as before only better; generate the same amount of success as prior
- Presented a gross massing model (3 dimensional); showing without any pitched roofs, a full built-out mass model to depict the bulk of the building
- Looking to the Board for direction in what way to proceed
- Presented a set of plans depicting the size of building needed in order to accomplish the program on the particular site
- A significant element of the new facility would be a parking garage with over 600 spaces on the corner of Maplewood and Deer
- Two entry points; level accessed off Maplewood, some public in one end and 85 spaces within the garage separately gated for condo spaces on the lower level and an entry on Deer Street, the primary entry
- Still working on how the garage will be ticketed or keyed; idea is to pay in advance in order to avoid an overflow of cars awaiting entry
- The garage will be a sloped floor garage design
- New Hotel will sit along Russell Street and turn the corner onto Deer Street
- The building has two major components, the hotel and the conference block
- In the new hotel they propose to do a slightly larger conference program; the reason is due to the current hotel not large enough to accommodate the larger groups and the possible idea of using both hotels for a larger group
- The key to the new facility is a main function ballroom consisting of approx. 11,000 sq. feet which would replicate the size of the space that was available at Yoken's
- It would be designed to be divided into four sections with tall ceilings; to accommodate a very diverse type of activities from large to small
- Would be furnished in ballroom fashion
- With the large conference area there will be a large service area; kitchen which would have a loading dock on one side and the trash would be taken out through the back
- The main entry would be a glazed lobby space visible as approaching Russell Street; Set building off of Russell Street to accommodate for a proper drop off; not too large, but wide enough for a couple of cars
- A reception area would be in the main lobby level with a major stair or escalator to the second level, more public level, that would meet with the above-road connector

- There will be a restaurant serving open grille fare and a lounge in the end of the building to utilize the waterfront views from the high elevation and drop off of Russell Street
- The upper level, second floor, very much connected to the first floor
- There will be another reception area from the 2nd floor of existing building with dual elevators on either side of reception
- 2nd floor will house the conference rooms, another lobby and admin area, and more hotel rooms as go up and turn into the hotel wing that will repeat on the third, fourth and fifth floors
- Demonstrated the t-shape of the hotel wings

- Don Peterson interjected about the site alteration of Russell Street being relocated 90 degrees to meet Deer to allow proper alignment of both of the access points to each of the buildings and, create more buildable space for the conference area

- Nancy Ludwick noted that this whole scheme was anticipated in the original construction of the Sheraton
- She noted that they had took time to look around Portsmouth and took photos of building's appearances
- Many of the same ideas were incorporated into the new facility design in order to match the scale of a particular building they saw on Market and Ceres (front façade of building on Market and rear on Ceres)
- The building in the picture had an open base retail on the base level and a band distinguishing that section of the building from the body above
- She noted the simple string coursing scale on the back of the building which faces the waterfront and that was the desired scale for the hotel wing on the new Russell Street building
- The over street connector idea is geared to have a historical look
- New facility will have light steeled frames and long extended sections to complement the waterfront

- She rendered the conceptual ideas of the Russell St and Deer St elevations
- Started with the traditional design idea; noted the original Sheraton design used several different materials to represent certain themes (i.e. collection of buildings, series of pieces, off centering windows reveal in façade, simple string coursing, pitched roof with dormers as used on Sheraton)
- Desire is not to create a monolithic façade but more of a collection of buildings with larger openings and an arched main entry for more definition to the conference center and other facilities
- The current elevation for the parking garage has a drop off of 8 feet from Russell to Deer which created two options to accommodate retail spaces below for street level entry
- Proposed simple masonry façade with punched openings with a potential canopy, signage and lighting to create a liveliness to continue along Deer Street

- The transitional scheme depicts more formal bays on the elevation for more similarity between the elements of the combinations of spaces
- Using steele framed structures, masonry on front leaving it much more open and light and clearly different from the hotel building

- The more traditional design would be in keeping with the contemporary design of the existing building
- Ms. Fineberg inquired about the entry into the hotel on the transitional design and the roof why it had to be so prominent and if it could be toned down
- Nancy said the purpose was to make it easy for those giving directions as well as those following the directions
- Chairman Rice questioned the Board about the mass size of the new structure and how the Board felt about the massing
- Mr. Golumb asked for a clearer depiction of the building's façade that faces Maplewood
- Don Peterson stated that that entry isn't viewed by the public; not public access, only emergency access and service
- Ms. Dika wondered how cavernous the new structure and the existing would seem walking down the street
- Don Peterson noted that the closest distance is about 60 feet
- Vice Chair Adams remarked about the vast size of the project
- Don and Nancy noted that it is similar in size as Sheraton just different layout
- Mr. Becksted remarked about the new project approved for Market Sq. and that the traditional concept does tend to disguise the project's size
- Mr. Smith remarked that there were pieces of both design concepts that he liked
- He felt that the traditional design fit in more with the area, however, the parking garage on transitional design is more defined
- The feature of the roof element on the transitional design was a better fit along with the arched entries on the retail spaces
- He wanted more elements of the existing parking garage on Hanover Street to be tied into the proposed parking garage
- He noted the traditional design's main entrance pitched roof should be scaled down to make it not appear so large
- Nancy noted that would make it lower than the existing building (Sheraton)
- Mr. Becksted stated the mass appeared to be intimidating at first glance but that he liked the idea and was fairly in favor of it but that he would like the entrance not to be so emphasized
- Chairman Rice stated that the Hdc has had trouble with parking entrances that sit directly in the street
- She noted that the parking garage would also be for public parking
- Chairman Rice liked the transitional design

- Councilor Grasso liked the traditional design due to less windows in comparison to the other design and liked the cut and paste idea; take from one and add to the other
- Ms. Dika liked the traditional design on Russell and liked the traditional on Deer but didn't like the entrance of the parking garage on either design, traditional or transitional
- She recommended replicating the Gardner's arch building built back in the 1800's for the above-road connector
- Councilor Grasso asked about the height of the new garage in comparison to the existing garage on Hanover
- Nancy noted that the garage to the guard rail should stand about 60 ft tall
- Mr. Becksted asked that the above-road connector not replicate Logan's walkway; a Portsmouth feeling covered walkway
- Don Peterson noted that they want to keep it tasteful and respect the architecture in downtown Portsmouth, that it may be contemporary but should be a good balance
- Chairman Rice added that the new facility would be nice addition and asset to the city
- Ms. Fineberg expressed concerns about the dark feeling one would feel driving in between the buildings and requested a comparison of existing streets in Portsmouth similar to the idea of the new proposed layout
- She noted that the retail portion of the new facility would be cutoff from the rest of the life on that particular street; that those stores would be isolated; the current retail is located on the hill and there is too much dead space between the existing and the new stores
- She asked what type of retail could survive in an area so separated from the rest of the street
- The Board noted that the proposed facility promotes other changes on that street and in the northern tier of downtown (i.e. what would happen to the parade mall)
- Mr. Smith asked that they carry through the arched ways onto the store fronts for the retail spaces and to marry the roof line in order to create some compatibility between the buildings
- Vice Chair Adams commented that many of the streetscapes in downtown are smooth, transitional and that recessing the buildings may be too contradicting
- He felt that creating an end to a building in the current design to mesh together with existing hotel was too complicated looking; cut off
- Ms. Fineberg noted that there were buildings in downtown that have curved building ends to consider in the design of the corner spots
- Vice Chair Adams felt that the whole design didn't fit in with existing character of Portsmouth buildings; that it doesn't belong

- He asked for more traditional proportions of windows to walls; that people don't go under buildings to get into them
 - Nancy noted that the scale of the facility warrants this type of design
 - Vice Chair Adams was afraid of the uncomfortability people may have walking down the street due to the luminous overhang of the buildings on either side and the shadow it could produce
 - Mr. Smith advised them to look at the approval for the Hilton Garden Inn and noted that the current plan before them was spacious
 - He inquired if the drop off area would be two levels high, enough for the leaf peepers' buses to fit through when they come visit Portsmouth
 - He suggested the addition of more brick into the transitional design of the parking garage and to take a closer look at the stairwell walkways on the Hanover garage to incorporate similar design ideas into the proposed garage facility
 - Mr. Becksted noted that with this new development, Deer Street would be known as Sheraton Street and from that, there wouldn't be any pedestrian traffic
 - Mr. Katz noted that this design is a whole new set of circumstances and design challenges and would want the rear to mimic the front so it doesn't have a warehouse façade or look
 - Vice Chair David Adams and other fellow Board members recommended that the applicants schedule another special work session due to time constraints in regularly scheduled HDC meetings
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II. ADJOURNMENT

At 8:50 p.m., a motion was made to adjourn the meeting. The motion was approved with a 7-0 vote.

Respectfully submitted,

Christina V. Staples
HDC Secretary

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