



PLANNING COMMISSION

Tuesday, December 12, 2023, at 6:00 PM

APPROVED MINUTES

Members Present: Chair Dan Cary
Vice Chair Jennifer Shoemaker
Commissioner Ginny Carlson
Commissioner David Rosengard
Commissioner Charles Castner

Members Absent: Commissioner Russ Low

Staff Present: City Planner Jacob Graichen
Associate Planner Jenny Dimsho
Community Development Admin Assistant Christina Sullivan
City Councilor Mark Gunderson

Others: Steve Toschi
Nate Carter
Brett Sonflieth
Casey Garrett
Scott Gettcher

CALL TO ORDER & FLAG SALUTE

TOPICS FROM THE FLOOR (Not on Public Hearing Agenda): Limited to five minutes per topic

Toschi, Steve. Toschi was called to speak. Toschi spoke on about a lot next to 325 Strand Street that he said the City Council might sell. He said the Council did not seem to have any plans for this lot. He said he spoke with the Planning Department about the lot and what could be built on the lot. He said it was a prime location right on the river. He said there was no development code to help regulate these in-fill lots that were around the city. He thought the Planning Commission should take on this opportunity as a proactive item to work on code for these in-fill lots in the downtown to avoid having any random developer build blight in the space. He said this should be in place before the City Council begins to sell these lots.

CONSENT AGENDA

A. **Planning Commission Minutes Dated November 14, 2023**

Motion: Upon Vice Chair Shoemaker's motion and Commissioner Carlson's second, the Planning Commission unanimously approved the Draft Minutes dated November 14, 2023. [AYES: Vice Chair Shoemaker, Commissioner Rosengard, Commissioner Carlson, Commissioner Castner; NAYS: None]

PUBLIC HEARING AGENDA (times are earliest start time)

B. **6:05 p.m. Historic Resource Review at 240 Strand Street – SOLARC Architecture**

Chair Dan Cary opened the Public Hearing at 6:07 p.m. There were no ex-parte contacts, conflicts of interests, or bias in this matter.

Vice Chair Shoemaker declared she was part of the Columbia County Museum Board and that she had been approached by the County on ideas for the restoration of this clock tower. She said she did not discuss specifics, but that they would like to see it as close to the original design as possible.

All the Commission felt Vice Chair Shoemaker was able to make a fair decision.

Associate Planner Jenny Dimsho shared the staff report dated December 4, 2023. She said this building was considered a locally designated landmark, so any alterations would go through a public hearing process.

She said the applicant's proposal included upgrades to the seismic improvements on the clocktower. They would like to strengthen the bell tower with structural elements that are all contained within the building envelope and would not be seen.

She also said they plan to restore the railing. She said currently there is a non-historic metal railing that would be replaced with a mixture of wood and composite material railing. She said the applicant would use wood for the rail and the composite material for the balusters. She said the look would resemble more what was historically there.

She said the applicant also plans to replace the ceiling and soffits with more modern materials. She said the applicant mentioned in their plan they would most likely use cement fiber panels. She also said they would be painted white to match.

She said the applicant discussed removing some non-historic sheet metal that is wrapped around the columns and replacing that with more modern materials and restoring the detail which was missing and/or covered up with sheet metal.

She mentioned the applicant was going to do some minor repairs to the fascia panels and would remove the steel angled edge.

Dimsho said the fire escape is attached to the windowsills of the courthouse and is rendered unusable because of the failed connections. She said the applicant plans to utilize the existing fire escape but mount into the basalt stone. There has been an egress study done that shows this fire escape is needed for the function of the courthouse, as it is not original. Dimsho did say there is a requirement that if the fire escape was ever removed, the original historic features (like the basalt stone) must be unharmed. She said it was much easier to repair mortar (as opposed to basalt stones) and the Planning Commission should consider if this is a better option.

Carter, Nate. Applicant. Carter is the architect for the project. He shared that the project was mostly a seismic upgrade to the belltower. He said the main reason they proposed modern materials is because they handle the weather elements of the area better and would last longer. He also said they are easily manipulated to bring back the profile of the original belltower look.

He mentioned the plan for the ceiling was to replace the soffits around the main ceiling. He said the main ceiling itself was a tongue and groove wood that was in good condition and could be repaired. He said the soffits would need to be replaced because over time they have worn down and are sagging with major gaps in them. He said they would be replaced with more modern materials and would not be seen. It would be painted to match the other elements of the ceiling. He said the sheet metal around the columns would be removed, and if there was original material, they could investigate restoring that before replacing it. He mentioned they had looked inside the columns and what they could see, needed replacement.

He did say the balusters would be thick to would what the historic look is for this type of railing in appearance.

There was a discussion about the rail not meeting the Building Code and how safety would be met for workers with the height of the rail not a code appropriate level. Carter mentioned they would be placing a stanchion anchor into the middle of the floor, that would be small enough you would not see it from the ground level. It would be used for workers to tie-off, so they were safe when working on the tower.

Carter also spoke about the fire escape. He said they plan to use through bolts. He did say they could use a horizontal bracket that could allow them to bolt into the mortar instead of the stone if that was the recommendation. He said this would make the brackets larger. Carter mentioned it is a possibility that the fire escape may be removed altogether, and if that were the case, they would replace the windowsills as planned. They want proceed with a plan to keep the fire escape as currently, for occupancy, it was needed.

In Favor

No one spoke in favor of the application.

In Neutral

No one spoke in Neutral of the application.

In Opposition

No one spoke in opposition to the application.

Rebuttal

End of Oral Testimony

There were no requests to continue the hearing or leave the record open.

Close of Public Hearing & Record

Deliberations

Dimsho shared some conditions that should be considered as the Commission made its decision.

She said one of the conditions should be that all new materials proposed to be used should resemble the original design. She did say the applicant said the ceiling would be repaired and not replaced, and she felt this should be added as a condition of approval.

Vice Chair Shoemaker said she was not comfortable with the modern material being used. She said there were several applicants who had come before them in the past with historical reviews and the modern material was not accepted and she did not think they should in this instance either. She wanted to see more specific materials listed. She also questioned how different the price would be if using wood verses composite material.

Commissioner David Rosengard said he would like to see more information on how close the composite gets to the wood. He said when it is visible, the whole goal is to preserve the historic character.

There were a few too many questions that were unanswered, so the Planning Commission requested to re-open the hearing.

Chair Cary re-opened the hearing at 6:42 p.m.

Garrett, Casey. Garrett was called to speak. Garrett is a Columbia County Commissioner and was able to clarify some of the questions being asked. He said he had given some instructions to the architect

on what products to use. He said there are many projects he has done with historic restoration that have used composite materials. He said the composite material proposed was almost a solid wood material, it might be hollow inside, but would look, especially from the ground level, the same as wood. He mentioned they were using grant funds to pay for this restoration, along with another project and so they were looking for ways to stay within budget, but also meet the historic guidelines required. He said for longevity purposes they looked at more than just the materials, but also that there may not be a solid crew in the future who would maintain or upkeep these original materials the way they would need to be if using wood. He also mentioned they were looking into a powder coated metal that would last a longer amount of time and still meet the look of the period. He said he hoped they could offer some flexibility when it came to the materials for those reasons. He said the cost was similar for the products being used, because of the custom details needed to meet the historic criteria. He said even with modern materials it would look very close to the original historic design.

There was a discussion on portions of the building that could be repaired verses replaced.

In Favor

No one spoke in favor of the application.

In Neutral

No one spoke in Neutral of the application.

In Opposition

No one spoke in opposition to the application.

Rebuttal**End of Oral Testimony**

There were no requests to continue the hearing or leave the record open.

(Second) Close of Public Hearing & Record**Deliberations**

Vice Chair Shoemaker said she could appreciate all the work that has gone into the design, but she wanted to reiterate that when they were doing their deconstruction and they find that there are details that can be preserved, that they would take all the steps necessary to maintain the authenticity of the building.

There was a discussion about the condition of maintaining the integrity of the building and making sure all the repairs maintain the historic look to the building.

There was also a discussion about making sure the hardware for the fire escape was screwed into the mortar and not the basalt stone. The Commission agreed this is how they should move forward if the fire escape is to be kept.

Motion: Upon Commissioner Carlson's motion and Vice Chair Shoemaker's second, the Planning Commission unanimously approved the Historic Resource Review as recommended by staff with the new additional conditions as discussed [AYES: Vice Chair Shoemaker, Commissioner Carlson, Commissioner Castner, Commissioner Rosengard; NAYS: None]

Motion: Upon Commissioner Carlson's motion and Commissioner Castner's second, the Planning Commission unanimously approved the Chair to sign the Findings. [AYES: Vice Chair Shoemaker, Commissioner Carlson, Commissioner Castner, Commissioner Rosengard; NAYS: None]

DISCUSSION ITEMS**C. Architectural Review at 230/240 Strand Street – SOLARC Architecture**

Dimsho said that Columbia County submitted a building permit and Site Design Review for a new elevator to be installed on the courthouse annex building.

The shaft of the elevator would be placed in the alley between the Columbia County annex and the Historic Courthouse. She said the elevator will service both buildings, but there were no exterior modifications to the historic courthouse.

The alley would be converted to pedestrian access to walk to the elevator. It will be ADA accessible with a new sidewalk and appropriate railings. They proposed to convert the driveway into an ADA parallel parking space..

She said the new entrance is an aluminum door and window system. The guidelines support historic entries and windows, but the courthouse annex building is not a traditional historic building. She said they just recently approved the same type of door on the back side of courthouse annex, so it this entry system is consistent with this building.

She mentioned there were no visible mechanical structures that are shown on the plan, and it would be a requirement that they would need to be screened if there were any visible.

Motion: Upon Commissioner Carlson's motion and Vice Chair Shoemaker's second, the Planning Commission unanimously agreed the proposed plan complies with the Architectural Standards. [AYES: Vice Chair Shoemaker, Commissioner Carlson, Commissioner Castner, Commissioner Rosengard; NAYS: None]

D. Planning Department Semi-Annual Report

Graichen and Dimsho discussed the Semi-Annual Report which was given to the City Council at their November 15 meeting.

E. Planning Commission Stipends

City Planner Jacob Graichen mentioned the City was in a budget crisis. He explained that in the past, when there had been a financial crisis, they decided to cut back in all areas they could. So, they took the stipend for the Planning Commission and reduced it to help offset some expense.

Graichen asked the Commission if it was to come up if the Planning Commission was receptive to a reduction in payment if needed.

The Commission discussed that when there is a budget crisis it should be all departments and Commissions that share in this. The Commission agreed to postpone or reduce their stipend if needed. They also discussed the Council's compensation and how it was reduced in the Great Recession related budget crisis.

PLANNING DIRECTOR DECISIONS (previously e-mailed to the Commission)

- F. Temporary Use Permit at 305 S Columbia River Hwy – Breslin Properties, LLC
- G. Site Design Review (Minor) at Sand Island – City of St. Helens
- H. Extension of Time at northern termini of N 8th, 9th, & 10th Street – North 8th Street, LLC

There was no discussion on the Planning Director Decisions.

PLANNING DEPARTMENT ACTIVITY REPORT**I. Planning Department Activity Report – November**

There was no discussion on the Planning Department Activity Report.

PROACTIVE ITEMS

J. Architectural Standards

There was no discussion on the Proactive Items

FOR YOUR INFORMATION ITEMS

Commissioner Carlson asked about the parks and why no one was maintaining them anymore. She hoped to see them taken care of this next Summer. Dimsho explained that the sprinkler system in Columbia View Park was on hold because it was scheduled to be in construction. Commissioner Carlson said she hoped to see things not get as crispy as they did this past year and that we should be better stewards of our parks.

There was a small discussion about the Joint Planning Commission and City Council meeting and the agenda items.

Vice Chair Shoemaker mentioned there was a lot of discussion on social media about the different entities in the City and how they were being silenced. She mentioned there were some who implied that the Planning Commission and their opinions and voice had been squelched. She said it was implied that they were not allowed to speak their opinion openly and that was not true. She said they were not being silenced and wanted to publicly state that.

Commissioner Carlson asked about trees. She said it was concerning to her that so many developments take down mature trees and then replace them with smaller versions of street trees. She said it did not make sense to cut down all the mature trees and replace them with smaller street trees. Graichen said there could be more aggressive rules about trees, but currently there are limited rules about it.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business before the Planning Commission, the meeting was adjourned at 8:19 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Christina Sullivan

Community Development Administrative Assistant