
MINUTES

BOARD: HISTORIC CONSERVATION COMMISSION, CITY OF BETHLEHEM

MEMBERS PRESENT: TODD CHAMBERS, CRAIG EVANS (VICE CHAIR), MICHAEL SIMONSON, DESIREE STRASSER

MEMBERS ABSENT: GARY LADER (CHAIR)

STAFF PRESENT: DARLENE HELLER (PLANNING DIRECTOR), JEFFREY LONG (HISTORIC OFFICER)

PRESS PRESENT: ED COURRIER (BETHLEHEM PRESS)

VISITORS PRESENT: J.J. FINES, FRANK FOX, MARK ORTWEIN, JOE RENTKO, THOMAS SCHLEGEL, ANTHONY SEITZ, SALVATORE VERRASTRO, CHRISTOPHER WORTON, NICHOLAS YOUSSEF, VICTOR YOUSSEF

MEETING DATE: SEPTEMBER 16, 2024

The regular meeting of the Historic Conservation Commission (HCC) was held on September 16, 2024, at the City of Bethlehem Town Hall Rotunda, 10 East Church Street, Bethlehem, PA. HCC Vice Chair Craig Evans called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

Agenda Item #1

Property Location: 330 East Fourth Street

Property Owner: Nicholas Youssef

Applicant: Nicholas Youssef

Building Description, Period, Style, and Defining Features: This structure, located at the corner of East Fourth Street and Polk Street, is a detached 2 ½-story, 3-bay, brick masonry and stucco dwelling with a front facing gable, small arched windows in the front gable, large roof dormers on the east and west with paired double-hung windows, built-in gutters, and a wide, yellow brick partially enclosed front porch. The main house dates from ca. 1890, includes 1-over-1 double-hung windows and is Classical Revival in style. An earlier wood-frame front porch was replaced ca. 1920 with a brick masonry porch that is Spanish Revival in style, with brick arches supported by masonry piers, a brick balustrade and a clay tile roof. The house has a low concrete wall on both street fronts but has lost the associated wrought iron fence over time. The detached, single-story, multi-bay, brick masonry garage with flat roof at the rear of the property is considered non-contributing to the Historic Conservation District because it was constructed after the district's period of significance (1895-1950) when South Bethlehem experienced dramatic development.

Proposed Alterations: The Applicant proposes to demolish the existing single-family dwelling to construct a 3 1/2-story mixed-use structure, with commercial space on the first floor and four 2-bedroom dwelling units above; Applicant is returning to HCC for additional review of requested supplemental information.

Guideline Citations:

- **Secretary of the Interior's Standards (SIS) 9.** -- New additions, exterior alterations, or related new construction will not destroy historic materials, features, and spatial relationships that characterize the property. The new work shall be differentiated from the old and will be compatible with the historic materials, features, size, scale and proportion, and massing to protect the integrity of the property and its environment.
- **Bethlehem Ordinance 1714.03 Purposes of Historic Conservation District** -- It is the purpose and intent of the City of Bethlehem to promote, protect, enhance and preserve historic resources and traditional community character for the educational, cultural, economic and general welfare of the public through the preservation, protection and regulation of buildings and areas of historic interest or importance within the City.

- **Historic Conservation Commission 'Design Guidelines'** -- Relevant sections concerning 'Demolition' (p. 19): HCC encourages "an evaluation of the significance of the building in the historic district ... and all attempts to reuse a historic building be exhausted prior to considering demolition"; HCC will not recommend approval for demolition unless "proposed demolition involves a non-significant building" or "the applicant has demonstrated that they have exhausted all other options and they will suffer undue economic hardship" and also concerning 'New Construction' (pp. 8-12): HCC encourages new construction that "(preserves) the cohesive ambiance of the Historic Conservation District with compatible, sympathetic, and contemporary construction, ... (matches) setbacks of adjacent buildings on a streetscape and (has) compatible siting, proportion, (size and) scale, form, materials, fenestration, roof configuration, details and finishes".

Evaluation, Effect on Historic Conservation District, Recommendations: COA Application indicates intent to demolish existing single-family dwelling and detached garage to construct 3 ½-story mixed-use structure, with commercial space on entry level and four 2-bedroom dwelling units above along with on-site parking and dumpster enclosure. Applicant initially presented to HCC on July 15, 2024, with design that appears to be same as current proposal. At that time, Applicant was informed that Article 1714 of Bethlehem City Ordinance defines contributing structures within South Bethlehem Historic Conservation District (HCD) as buildings constructed during district's period of significance (1895-1950) when South Bethlehem experienced dramatic development. Because this dwelling was constructed ca. 1890, it is considered "contributing" to HCD and therefore significant. Upon review of provided supplemental items, HCC determined this structure exhibits high level of historical integrity and also completes end of full city block of similar 2 ½-story brick masonry single-family structures dating from roughly same time period, so its loss to demolition would be significant not only to existing streetscape but also to overall HCD. According to relevant Design Guidelines, HCC does not recommend approval for demolition of significant structures; rather, evaluation of building's significance within HCD is encouraged and confirmation is needed that all attempts to reuse historic building are exhausted prior to considering demolition. In anticipation, Applicant provided supplemental Structural Evaluation Report with accompanying photographs that illustrate existing poor interior conditions; however, no estimated costs for needed rehabilitation were provided and there was no accompanying property appraisal. During resulting discussion, all parties agreed that existing rear garage structure is non-contributing to HCD, so HCC could recommend its demolition; however, HCC expressed concern about approving demolition of main dwelling because Applicant did not satisfy requirement that all attempts to reuse contributing structure were exhausted prior to considering demolition nor did Applicant demonstrate all other options are exhausted and they will suffer undue economic hardship. HCC inquired if Applicant had explored retaining and rehabilitating exterior shell of existing structure while reconfiguring its interior. Applicant responded that retaining existing structure would result in single-family dwelling while City requires first floor commercial use. Mr. Simonson noted there no storefronts along this block, so City is willing to collaborate with Applicant to seek needed variance; HCC members also recalled various commercial tenants within HCD that do not need traditional storefronts. HCC concluded discussion by encouraging Applicant to study such scenarios in more detail before returning with resulting design solutions along with property appraisal and informed analysis to satisfy requirement of undue economic hardship.

Current COA Application includes what appears to be same design solution previously presented to HCC along with additional information. Sheet A-1 includes scale drawing of existing structure, as required by COA Application; also includes scale drawing of adjacent west "twin" structure at 326-328 East Fourth Street, as previously requested by HCC. On same drawing sheet, scale drawing of proposed design is depicted adjacent to existing neighboring structure, which helps to illustrate new structure within historical context. HCC's previous request to explore retaining and rehabilitating exterior shell of existing structure while reconfiguring its interior is not presented, so discussion is warranted. Applicant also provides Property Appraisal dated July 31, 2024, resulting in appraised value of approximately \$100,000 along with accompanying work proposal to rehabilitate existing structure totaling approximately \$375,000. As previously stated, rear garage is non-contributing to HCD, so HCC can recommend its demolition; however, discussion is warranted based upon new details and additional information provided by Applicant before HCC can recommend demolition of existing dwelling.

Should HCC recommend demolition after concluding Applicant will suffer undue economic hardship if required to reuse existing dwelling, proposed replacement must be assessed according to Secretary of

Interior's Standards concerning new construction as well as relevant Design Guidelines which encourage new construction that "(preserves) cohesive ambiance of ... District with compatible, sympathetic, and contemporary construction, ... (matches) setbacks of adjacent buildings on streetscape and (has) compatible siting, proportion, (size and) scale, form, materials, fenestration, roof configuration, details and finishes". Based upon Applicant's provided scale drawings, proposed new construction does not match setback of remaining structures along 300 block of East Fourth Street and is therefore inappropriate; appropriate design should set back front façade to align with façades of existing contributing structures, include single-story front porch and integrate low retaining wall with fence at public right-of-way that aligns with walls at adjacent properties to maintain current streetscape. Proposed design inappropriately lowers height of existing front lawn to be even with public right-of-way; appropriate design solution should retain existing elevated property height and site new construction to match elevated siting of adjacent properties.

Proposed new construction is 3 ½-stories high and measures approximately 35-feet wide x 56-feet deep, which is wider and significantly deeper than adjacent dwellings along East Fourth Street. Provided scale drawings indicate soffit height of proposed structure is approximately 28-feet and peak of hip roof is approximately 41-feet, confirming that size and scale of proposed structure is considerably larger than 2 ½-story historic structures along 300 block of East Fourth Street and is inappropriate. Hip roof of proposed structure is also uncommon feature within HCD, so more appropriate roof forms should be explored as part of subsequent design phase. Applicant also includes partial scale drawing of neighboring structure at 400 block of East Fourth Street. At first glance, Applicant's design proposal seems to relate proportionally to that structure. However, closer investigations reveal that neighboring corner property is empty lot that serves as parking for commercial tenant at 402 East Fourth Street. That structure and all remaining structures along 400 block of East Fourth Street are 3-story, mixed use masonry structures with corbeled parapets, flat roofs, commercial storefronts and no front yards, which represents very different aesthetic from row of 2 ½-story dwellings along 300 block of East Fourth Street with pitched roofs, no commercial storefronts, elevated front yards and common retaining wall. This comparison reinforces that current design proposal is inappropriate for this city block.

Provided scale drawings of proposed structure begin to address such design concerns as materials (brick, lap siding, asphalt roof shingles, awning) and fenestration (storefronts, 6-over-1 double-hung windows, Juliette balconies). Subsequent reviews with HCC should include product specifications and cut sheets as well as actual samples of proposed materials. Applicant is also strongly encouraged to review relevant Design Guidelines for recommendations of appropriate materials and finishes as well as details for appropriate storefronts and signage with HCD.

Discussion: Mark Ortwein, Joe Rentko, Nicholas Youssef and Victor Youssef represented proposal to demolish existing single-family dwelling and garage to construct 3 ½-story mixed-use structure, with commercial space on entry level and four 2-bedroom dwelling units above; Applicant is returning to HCC for additional review of requested supplemental information. Applicant called attention to new supporting documents as previously requested by HCC, noting that appraised value of property raises from \$100,000 to \$275,000 if all items of rehabilitation proposal (totaling \$375,000) are addressed; Applicant cited these figures to support case of undue economic hardship if required to retain and rehabilitate existing structure. Applicant also noted two nearby commercial storefronts: 321 East Fourth Street (Touchstone Theatre located across street from Applicant's property) and 324 East Fourth Street (Holy Infancy Gift Shop located midblock from Applicant's property); Mr. Long explained that series of structures across East Fourth Street historically had commercial storefronts with no elevated front porches while midblock storefront addition was constructed after HCD's period of significance, does not respect relevant design guidelines and would not be considered appropriate if assessed by HCC.

Applicant continued by referencing supplemental building photos, calling special attention to deterioration of exterior walls due to rainwater infiltration and undersized floor joists beneath entry level that are rotting in framing pockets; if required to utilize existing basement level for commercial tenant, existing slab must be replaced with new slab to accommodate required head height and new footings are needed to support various walls. Mr. Chambers requested further clarification; Applicant explained that existing basement level has insufficient head height for commercial tenant, so removing existing floor slab and digging lower for new slab is required. Mr. Simonson inquired about existing head height at basement level; Applicant responded that top of slab to underside of floor joists measures just under 6-feet. Mr. Chambers inquired if

Applicant would reconsider need for commercial tenant and focus on design proposal that only has multiple dwelling units, which might still allow for rehabilitation of existing structure with appropriate addition at rear. Applicant explained that property is zoned CB, which requires commercial tenant and street level; continued that any addition to existing historic structure would result in loss of several required parking spaces. Applicant continued that condition of exterior brick walls requires significant repointing and potentially re-engineering to support existing roof.

Mr. Simonson noted that provided site plan indicates proposed structure will extend to edge of property rather than setting back from public right-of-way in alignment with adjacent dwellings. Applicant explained that exterior walls of proposed structure would match footprint of existing retaining walls at both street-facing facades. Mr. Simonson continued that proposed siting requires study of sightlines due to corner situation at intersection of East Fourth Street and Polk Street. Applicant inquired why HCC would discuss details of proposed replacement structure while focus of meeting is proposed demolition. Mr. Chambers explained that HCC is not only concerned about demolition but also about general features of replacement design. Mr. Evans noted that HCC is concerned about integration of new design into existing streetscape; continued by acknowledging that adjacent city block has "more commercial feel" while this specific block is residential in character, so appropriately matching setback of remaining adjacent properties is important. Ms. Strasser agreed that Applicant's replacement structure should match setbacks of adjacent dwellings to appropriately emphasize cohesive character of this city block.

Mr. Simonson inquired when this structure was last inhabited. Applicant responded that structure was last inhabited approximately 7 years ago; continued that property was "hoarder home" and necessitated at least 7 dumpsters for removal of various detritus. Applicant confirmed that no pre-sale inspection was conducted; if so, Applicant contended it would have qualified as "derelict". Mr. Chambers empathized with Applicant but also thought that further study of design approach that retains but modifies existing structure is warranted; if demolished, replacement design should appropriately set back to align with adjacent properties. Mr. Simonson explained that zoning of property requires commercial tenant at entry level; continued that proposed hipped roof form is "problematic" and should be further explored. Applicant agreed to consider new design solution with flat roof and upper cornice or pitched roof; also agreed to collaborate with city's Zoning Officer to study sightlines to accommodate or receive relief before returning to HCC, if allowed to demolish existing structure. Mr. Evans recalled that Applicant's proposal was previously tabled, so HCC must either recommend or deny request for demolition; Mr. Long noted motion can include language that demolition permit will not be issued until all required planning reviews by various city departments are successfully completed.

Public Commentary: none

Motion: The Commission upon motion by Mr. Simonson and seconded by Ms. Strasser adopted the proposal that City Council issue a Certificate of Appropriateness for the proposed work as presented, with modifications described herein:

1. The proposal to demolish the existing single-family dwelling to construct a 3 1/2-story mixed-use structure, with commercial space on the first floor and four 2-bedroom dwelling units above, was presented by Mark Ortwein, Joe Rentko, Nicholas Youssef and Victor Youssef.
2. Appropriate demolition of the existing dwelling also includes removal of the existing rear garage structure.

Note: The City of Bethlehem will not issue an approved permit to demolish the existing dwelling and detached garage until all planning applications have been successfully reviewed and approved.

The motion for the proposed work was unanimously approved.

Agenda Item #2

Property Location: 1304 Spring Street

Property Owner: Diocese of Allentown

Applicant: Salvatore Verrastro

Building Description, Period, Style, and Defining Features: This residential structure is a detached 2 ½-story, 2-bay, wood-frame, single-family dwelling with a front facing gable with original slate roof shingles, projecting planar barge boards supported on wood brackets, wood shingle gable details, wood clapboard siding and a full front porch with hipped roof. Dating from ca. 1885, the house is Queen Anne in style.

Proposed Alterations: The Applicant proposes to demolish the existing single-family dwelling to construct an approximately 4,100 square foot structure containing four dwelling units. This review is continued from the July 15, 2024, HCC meeting.

Guideline Citations:

- **Secretary of the Interior's Standards (SIS) 9.** -- see Agenda Item 1
- **Bethlehem Ordinance 1714.03 Purposes of Historic Conservation District** -- see Agenda Item 1
- **Historic Conservation Commission 'Design Guidelines'** -- see Agenda Item 1

Evaluation, Effect on Historic Conservation District, Recommendations: COA Application indicates intent to demolish existing single-family dwelling to construct approximately 4,100 square foot structure containing four dwelling units. This review represents continuation from July 15, 2024, HCC meeting.

Previous COA Application to demolish existing historic structure and replace with open lawn was presented to HCC during series of meetings in late 2012 through early 2013. Citing high level of historical integrity of this contributing structure as well as concerns of "demolition by neglect" and also supported by public comments about Applicant's lack of proper maintenance of this and other historic structures on overall property, HCC ultimately recommended that Bethlehem City Council deny Applicant's proposal. In February 2013, City Council voted to deny requested COA to demolish existing historic structure. In late 2019, Applicant returned to HCC with COA Application proposing to replace existing slate roof sheathing with GAF Slateline asphalt shingles. HCC unanimously supported Applicant's proposal to maintain existing historic structure by recommending that Bethlehem City Council approve Applicant's proposal. Council issued resulting COA to replace existing slate shingles with GAF Slateline asphalt roof shingles in early December 2019.

Applicant returned to HCC on July 15, 2024, with request to demolish existing single-family dwelling and replace with new residential structure comprised of four dwelling units. At that time, Applicant was informed that Article 1714 of Bethlehem City Ordinance defines contributing structures within Mount Airy Neighborhood District (MAND) as buildings constructed during district's period of significance (1895-1950) when West Bethlehem experienced dramatic development. Because this dwelling was constructed ca. 1885, it is considered "contributing" to MAND and therefore significant. In addition, this structure exhibits high level of historical integrity and is part of neighborhood block of similar 2 ½-story, single-family residential structures dating from roughly same period, so its loss to demolition would be significant to existing streetscape and also to overall District. During public commentary portion of meeting, it was also noted that Eugene Grace constructed many dwellings on his property to house various staff members and their families; this specific structure was intended for his gardener.

During discussion with Applicant, HCC expressed concerns about proposed demolition resulting in loss of historic structure that is part of streetscape of similar detached dwellings and also intrinsically connected to overall Eugene Grace property. Applicant's claim of undue economic hardship was questioned by HCC, considering \$300K is needed to rehabilitate existing structure while proposed replacement structure will cost approximately \$2MM. In response, HCC unanimously adopted proposal to table any decision about appropriateness of proposal to replace existing single-family dwelling with new multi-family structure and encouraged Applicant to explore design solutions that include rehabilitation of existing historic structure in combination with appropriate new addition; need for scale elevation drawing of current streetscape along Spring Street that also depict new design options was also requested.

Upon review of current COA Application and supporting documentation, Applicant's proposal has not changed from previous submittal, so discussion is warranted. According to relevant Design Guidelines, HCC does not recommend approval for demolition of significant structures; rather, evaluation of building's significance within MAND is encouraged and confirmation is needed that all attempts to reuse historic building are exhausted prior to considering demolition. In response, Applicant provided supplemental items to address contention about building's (lack of) significance within MAND. If HCC determines Applicant has

satisfied issue of building's significance and all attempts to reuse historic structure are exhausted, HCC may recommend demolition if Applicant will suffer resulting undue economic hardship. In anticipation, Applicant also provided supplemental Conditions Assessment Report with estimated costs for needed repairs along with current Property Appraisal Report.

Should HCC recommend demolition after concluding Applicant will suffer undue economic hardship if required to reuse existing historic structure, proposed replacement must be assessed according to Secretary of Interior's Standards concerning new construction as well as relevant Design Guidelines which encourage new construction that "(preserves) cohesive ambiance of ... District with compatible, sympathetic, and contemporary construction, ... (matches) setbacks of adjacent buildings on streetscape and (has) compatible siting, proportion, (size and) scale, form, materials, fenestration, roof configuration, details and finishes". In response, Applicant provided supplemental drawings that depict replacement design proposal. Based on these drawings, proposed new construction appropriately matches setback of adjacent structure at 1308 Spring Street (discounting respective front porches) and is appropriately raised above street level, resulting in series of steps from street below to access main entrance. Existing historic structure measures approximately 26-feet wide x 40-feet deep while adjacent structure measures approximately 18-feet wide x 58-feet deep; remaining block includes one dwelling at 1318 Spring Street that sits back significantly from public right-of-way (and does not contribute to immediate streetscape) and is completed by traditional American Four-Square dwelling at 1322 Spring Street that aligns with other historic structures and is similarly raised above street level. Proposed new construction measures approximately 48-feet wide x 59-feet deep, which is significantly wider than existing historic structures and is considered inappropriate but closely resembles depth of structure at 1308 Spring Street. Provided drawings indicate soffit height of proposed structure is approximately 23-feet and peak of double gable roof is approximately 31-feet, with overall height of central tower at approximately 43-feet. Requested scale drawing of existing streetscape that depicts adjacent historic structures is not provided, so ability to discern if size and scale of new design within context of neighboring historic structures is not possible.

Provided drawings begin to address such design concerns as appropriate materials (lap siding, asphalt roof shingles) and appropriate fenestration (6-over-6 double-hung aluminum-clad wood windows, double-height window bays), as defined within relevant Design Guidelines. Subsequent reviews with HCC should include product specifications and cut sheets as well as actual samples of proposed materials. cursory review of provided floor plan drawings indicates separation wall between "Bedroom 1" and adjacent "Full Bath" for all four proposed dwelling units interrupts associated window openings, which is considered inappropriate and should be addressed during subsequent design phase.

Discussion: Salvatore Verrastro and Christopher Worton represented proposal to demolish existing single-family dwelling to construct approximately 4,100 square foot structure containing four dwelling units; Applicant is returning for continued review of proposal from July 15, 2024, HCC meeting. Applicant requested clarification about period of significance of MAND and confirmed that no new design proposal was submitted, with understanding that HCC's previous motion to table any decision about requested demolition was limited to significance of existing structure. Mr. Long noted that period of significance identified within Ordinance is "1895-1950" while accompanying Design Guidelines indicate "1900-1950", so there is minor discrepancy when comparing both documents. Applicant noted that existing dwelling was constructed ca. 1885, which precedes defining period of significance. Mr. Long confirmed that existing dwelling is first depicted on 1885 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map while architectural style and detailing also match similar Queen Anne structures dating from same era. Applicant continued by explaining recent research that "dispels notion that (existing) structure is historically significant" and referenced National Register nomination associated with creation of MAND; though depicted on accompanying map, this specific structure was not identified as "historically significant" within accompanying narrative ... meaning "although old, it is not significant". Applicant continued that page 3 of nomination packet lists 21 of 27 structures within boundaries of proposed historic district as "contributing"; this structure is not among those specifically identified. Applicant also summarized conversations with individuals involved with original nomination process who explained that outline of proposed historic district could not subdivide existing property parcels, so this specific structure is within boundaries of MAND because of location on property associated with contributing historic structure previously owned by Eugene Grace. In summary, Applicant requests HCC approval of proposed demolition before proceeding with design of replacement structure that respects relevant design guidelines.

Mr. Evans noted that, despite not being specifically identified within original National Register nomination, HCC is commissioned to assess COA Applications for all structures within boundaries of MAND. Applicant noted that similar nomination packet for South Bethlehem does not itemize specific structures within proposed boundaries as contributing while nomination packet for West Bethlehem purposefully cites select buildings as contributing. Mr. Chambers inquired if resulting Ordinance that created MAND includes specific timeframe for contributing structures. Applicant called attention to Paragraph 1714.10 Design Guidelines (pp. 14-15) which identifies "1895-1950" as focus of district. Mr. Chambers continued by inquiring if resulting Ordinance includes list of "contributing" structures. Mr. Long responded that resulting Ordinance includes no such list; continued by calling attention to Paragraph 1714.09.a.(1) concerning Demolition: "Any activity visible from the public way within the ... District requiring the issuance of a demolition permit by the Building Official in accordance with the City Building Code shall require the issuance of a Certificate of Appropriateness by City Council; except that demolition of accessory structures with footprints less than 100 (square) feet shall be exempt from the provisions of this Ordinance." Mr. Evans explained personal understanding that original nomination packet does not translate directly to resulting Ordinance; Mr. Simonson noted that map depicting proposed boundaries of MAND within nomination packet matches resulting map within approved Ordinance. Mr. Evans continued that HCC is being requested to assess proposal to demolish existing historic structure located on (former) Eugene Grace property and offered Thomas Jefferson's Monticello as analogy: main house of master and adjacent slave quarters represent very different architectures but are all integral to narrative of overall property; Applicant countered that those differences are less about architectural significance than differing narratives of original inhabitants.

Mr. Chambers inquired if Catholic Diocese of Allentown owns entire city block; Applicant responded that all but two structures on this block are owned by Diocese. Mr. Chambers continued by inquiring if Applicant is willing to explore proposed design at other area(s) of site; Applicant noted one empty lot adjacent to current structure in question but could not immediately discern if that lot could support similar new construction. Mr. Chambers encouraged Applicant to explore that option, which would ease HCC concerns about proposed demolition. Mr. Chambers continued, if Applicant is requesting HCC decision based upon undue economic hardship then additional justification is required. Mr. Simonson suggested before HCC finalizes any decision, COA Application should be reviewed by City's legal counsel to clarify if date of structure precedes timeframe identified within relevant Ordinance and disqualifies it as contributing to MAND. Mr. Evans noted decision to approve demolition was previously tabled, so HCC must either recommend or deny request for demolition; Mr. Long noted motion can include language that demolition permit will not be issued until all required reviews by various city departments are successfully completed. Mr. Simonson noted that HCC can extend decision to table if Applicant mutually agrees; in response, Applicant confirmed willingness to accept HCC's offer to extend decision to table. Applicant concluded by inquiring if legal counsel determines that existing structure is not contributing to MAND, must new construction be influenced by that structure; Mr. Evans responded that replacement structure must still satisfy Secretary of Interior Standards for new construction within historical context as well as supplemental HCC Design Guidelines for new construction.

Public Commentary: none

Motion: The Commission upon motion by Mr. Simonson and seconded by Mr. Chambers unanimously adopted the proposal to table any decision about the appropriateness of a proposal to demolish an existing single-family dwelling and replace it with a new four-unit apartment building until the COA Application is reviewed by the City's legal counsel to discern if the existing dwelling is a contributing structure to the Mount Airy Neighborhood District. The Applicant was in mutual agreement to table any decision by the Commission, pending a review by the City's legal counsel.

Agenda Item #3

Property Location: 14-36 West Third Street

Property Owner: Patriot Ventures, LLC

Applicant: High Hotels, LTD

Building Description, Period, Style, and Defining Features: 14 West Third Street is a 3-story, 2-bay brick masonry structure with flat roof that dates from ca. 1890 while 16-18 West Third Street is a similar three-story, four-bay brick masonry structure with flat roof that dates from ca. 1905. Both are late Italianate

in style and comprise the central portion of what was originally an entire block of structures along West Third Street constructed between 1885 and 1910, each with business locations at the entry level and residential units in the upper two levels. Several of these structures were designed by famed Bethlehem architect A.W. Leh; however, the architect of these specific buildings cannot be confirmed without further investigation. 14 West Third Street is attached to a non-contributing contemporary 6-story commercial structure to the east while 16-18 West Third Street lost its neighbor to the west and is now an end structure. Original entry-level storefronts of both structures have been manipulated over time and now include recessed entrances and contemporary storefront windows with oversized frames and simple aprons. Both structures have similar cornices and glazed transoms above the storefronts, with mid-twentieth century glass blocks installed at 14 West Third Street and early (if not original) leaded glass installed at 16-18 West Third Street. Brick pilasters at 14 West Third Street frame the facade and lead to an upper decorative cornice. The second-floor level has two very large, 14-over-1 double-hung windows topped with segmental brick arches while the third-floor level has three, 8-over-1 double-hung windows topped by jack arches that support the upper decorative cornice. The simpler brick façade at 16-18 West Third Street includes four, 2-over-2 double-hung windows with flat masonry lintels at each floor level and terminates in a decorative upper cornice with stepped parapet. The end wall was not constructed as an independent façade, so removal of the adjacent building compromised its integrity and necessitated installation of wood-frame shoring as lateral bracing, which is visible along the west façade.

Proposed Alterations: The Applicant proposes revisions to an 8-story building previously approved in June of 2021. Façade revisions include window size and placement, addition of rooftop dining space, structural canopy at lobby entrance and other material changes.

Guideline Citations:

- **Secretary of the Interior’s Standards (SIS) 9.** -- see Agenda Item 1
- **Bethlehem Ordinance 1714.03 Purposes of Historic Conservation District** -- see Agenda Item 1
- **Historic Conservation District Design Guidelines** -- relevant sections concerning ‘New Construction’ (pp. 8-12): HCC encourages new construction that “(preserves) the cohesive ambiance of the Historic Conservation District with compatible, sympathetic, and contemporary construction, ... (matches) setbacks of adjacent buildings on a streetscape and (has) compatible siting, proportion, (size and) scale, form, materials, roof configuration, details and finishes”; also should address such concerns as shape and massing, rhythm and patterns, window and door openings, materials and textures, architectural details as well as streetscapes.

Evaluation, Effect on Historic Conservation District, Recommendations: COA Application indicates intent to revise various architectural details associated with previous design solution that was presented to HCC during series of meetings in 2020 and 2021, and ultimately resulted in HCC motion recommending that Bethlehem City Council deny proposal to demolish two existing historical structures and replace with 88-feet high mixed-use building during April 19, 2021, meeting. HCC’s motion was overruled by City Council on June 1, 2021, and Applicant was subsequently granted COA in support of proposed development project.

Current COA Application represents first time this project returns to HCC since mid-2021 and involves new Owner (Patriot Ventures, LLC) as well as new Applicant (High Hotels, Ltd.). Provided supplemental materials are labeled “Conceptual Design”, so resulting assessment is general in nature as well. Direct comparison of previous proposal with current conceptual design is challenging due to small scale of provided drawings; however, cursory review indicates that new proposal inappropriately exceeds overall dimensions of previous design by extending to 96-feet high, which is 8-feet higher than “88-feet high mixed-use development” that was approved by City’s Council’s decision to overrule HCC’s denial. Upper-most floor levels facing West Third Street were previously set back from main façade in deference to similar setback at adjacent corner structure while current design solution does not seem to respect that feature, so discussion is warranted. Similarly, floor levels above entry level facing Greenway set back at certain points while original design had no such setbacks but also included series of vertical bays, so discussion is warranted. Original design proposal had taller end section facing convergence of West Third Street and Greenway while current design has series of rooftop elements that match new height of taller end section along with usable rooftop area with trellis system and glass railing system in between, so discussion of

these new details is also warranted. New single-story curvilinear canopy extends out from proposed structure facing convergence West Third Street and Greenway, which also warrants discussion. Previous design proposal mitigated overall width along West Third Street by integrating series of vertical divisions through use of pilasters between storefronts and also by including lower cornices above storefronts that varied in heights and depths to give impression of smaller-scale building segments; current design does not seem to include such details to help mitigate overall width of 204-feet and 6-inches along West Third Street and overall width of 224-feet along Greenway.

Aluminum storefronts with canvas awnings at entry level along West Third Street and facing Greenway are appropriate in concept, pending subsequent submittal of larger scale drawings indicating relevant dimensions along with material samples and associated specifications; appropriate storefront panels should be center set while appropriate glazing is clear and not tinted, colored or reflective. Applicant is encouraged to reference relevant Design Guidelines for appropriate storefront details ... including apron below, transom above, sign band with cornice, etc. Proposed brick masonry facades with precast sills and lintels are appropriate, pending subsequent submittal of larger scale drawings indicating all relevant dimensions along with material samples and associated specifications; appropriate sills and lintels should extend in each direction beyond window openings. Proposed window types and certain proposed window locations are not typical of windows found within Historic Conservation District (HCD), so they are inappropriate based upon relevant Design Guidelines; appropriate windows have placement, size, scale, divisions, functionality, etc. typical of windows found elsewhere within HCD ... preferably inspired by details of two existing historic structures scheduled for demolition. Provided drawings do not indicate proposed material of windows, so discussion is warranted; appropriate glazing is clear and not tinted, colored or reflective. Appropriate placements of entry-level storefronts should align with bays of windows above. Provided drawings make it difficult to discern at façade facing West Third Street, so clarification is warranted; drawings indicate that placements of storefronts facing Greenway are inappropriate because they do not align with bays of windows above.

Provided drawings depict series of precast “bands” and cornice mouldings; more details along with material samples and scale drawings are needed before appropriateness can be determined. Provided drawings also propose Exterior Insulation Finish System (EIFS) as cladding for select façade elements; relevant Design Guidelines identify EIFS as inappropriate within HCD, so alternative yet appropriate façade cladding system is required for subsequent project submittals.

Provided drawings imply exterior building signage; indications of exterior illumination are not discernable. Applicant is encouraged to reference relevant Design Guidelines for appropriate signage and appropriate lighting fixtures before returning to HCC with scale drawings that include all relevant dimensions along with materials samples and written specifications for proposed signage and illumination for consideration.

Discussion: J.J. Fines, Frank Fox, Thomas Schlegel and Anthony Seitz represented proposed revisions to 8-story building previously approved in June of 2021; façade revisions include window size and placement, addition of rooftop dining space, structural canopy at lobby entrance and other material changes. Applicant began by summarizing proposed 141-room ‘Tempo by Hilton’ hotel with entry-level restaurant and bar, rooftop bar, meeting spaces and fitness center. In collaboration with High Hotels, Ltd. (Lancaster, PA), Applicant defined needed land as five parcels that include two abandoned structures and existing paved parking lot, with intention to consolidate into one parcel once land deal closes. Applicant has 35 years of experience owning, operating and developing select service hotels, including Springhill Suites in nearby Center Valley. Tempo by Hilton brand was introduced in 2022, with four existing locations and approximately 60 signed up across USA. Mr. Evans inquired about needed parking for so many hotel guests; Applicant noted that talks are in motion with Bethlehem Parking Authority to lease spaces in nearby parking garage, with plans to establish pedestrian path between garage and new hotel. Mr. Chambers noted that online brand of Tempo by Hilton has specific aesthetic that is not reflected in current design proposal. Applicant clarified that façade of this design proposal is specific to South Bethlehem by integrating typical design features found throughout HCD while interior features, finishes and amenities will reflect corporate aesthetic found elsewhere at Tempo by Hilton hotels. Mr. Evans inquired if comparable project in Lancaster was also assessed by historical architectural review process; Applicant confirmed that project was indeed assessed by similar historical review board, resulting in rehabilitation of existing historic

structure with contemporary addition to accommodate more hotel rooms and rooftop bar along with new physical connector to nearby Lancaster Convention Center.

Applicant continued by describing proposed structure as traditional tri-partite design, with base (storefronts at street level), body (hotel rooms) and cap (cornice, with rooftop bar above); includes brick masonry exterior walls, with rhythm of windows defined by delineation of hotel rooms above. Applicant explained that piers will set off storefronts, admitting not readily visible in current façade drawings. Two upper-level façade segments that include hotel rooms set back along West Third Street; entry-level storefront façade facing Greenway follows existing lot line while upper-level facade sets back in series of vertical segments to accommodate natural light for hotel rooms. Applicant noted that storefronts along West Third Street align with windows of hotel rooms above while storefronts along Greenway do not relate to windows of hotel rooms above because of this difference. Applicant justified need to extend height above previously approved 88-foot height to accommodate proposed rooftop bar, which necessitates extending two stair towers up to 96-feet to accommodate required emergency egress; corner tower element is also raised to 96-feet as screen for rooftop mechanical systems. Applicant noted that setbacks along both long façades provide shadow lines to help mitigate overall building width, while horizontal accent bands, lintels and sills of cast stone delineate select floor levels and terminate in upper cornice. Proposed porte cochère (carport) located at western end of site is intended as main drop-off location for passenger vehicles; includes large-format masonry units and wrapped with metal panel system while ceiling also has metal panels. Applicant continued that EIFS proposed at upper-most floor level will be properly finished and offers good insulation value; continued by noting these façade segments cannot be seen from public right-of-way and requested HCC to reconsider guidelines that consider EIFS inappropriate. Applicant admitted that current windows are intended to maximize hotel standards but admitted they are currently very conceptual and agreed to provide greater detail for subsequent HCC review.

Mr. Evans recognized that current Owner and Applicant are different from entities associated with previous HCC reviews but called attention to past discussions about salvaging and reusing select elements of existing buildings scheduled for demolition; if not possible, existing structures should at least serve to define or delineate new design proposal by paying homage to them because of their significance to commercial community in this section of South Bethlehem. Mr. Chambers requested clarification about need for HCC to approve demolition; Mr. Long clarified that City Council previously overruled HCC recommendation to deny demolition, so current discussion is limited to assessment of replacement structure. Mr. Simonson inquired if rooftop elements are set back from main building façade; Applicant confirmed that both stair towers are set back from main façade approximately 10 feet, with bar/restaurant set back even more but with trellis extending out to edge of main façade. Mr. Chambers explained that HCC is more amenable to taller structures if upper floor levels are set back to mitigate overall building height; Mr. Evans continued by encouraging Applicant to review projects included in COA Application as inspiration to understand how they all set back to mitigate overall height, while also incorporating changes in materials, colors, etc. Mr. Chambers continued with desire for upper-level floors to have more and narrower setbacks, noting smaller-scale recesses every 30-linear feet are more successful than fewer recesses at every 50-linear feet. Applicant clarified about required ratios of differing hotel room types, explaining much work was needed to create as much interest in design of façade; continued that upper-level setbacks below rooftop terrace are not possible due to design requirements of hotel rooms. Mr. Chambers encouraged Applicant to differentiate portions of façade by using differing brick colors or other appropriate façade materials.

Mr. Chambers continued with concern that current design envisions entry-level kitchen and support services along more than half of West Third Street façade ... especially linear 33-feet of façade dedicated to receiving/trash and mechanical with remaining entry level dedicated to hotel lobby, resulting in overall façade that is not active for passersby but relegated only to hotel guests. Also concern about delivery location along West Third Street is concerns. Mr. Chambers also noted that end tower element is very narrow element without any real massing and suggested returning wall across roof would help; continued by encouraging Applicant to revise window proportions, with potential for two vertical mullions (rather than one) to relate with more historical window proportions. Mr. Chambers inquired if HVAC unit louvers will be visible; Applicant confirmed that proposed HVAC system will result in visible louvers. In response, Mr. Chambers noted that HCC will need to see proposed locations to ensure appropriate location pattern rather than random placement; also encouraged Applicant to consider integration into intentional architectural detail rather than series of multiple hoods or louvers. Mr. Chambers expressed support of EIFS for rooftop

elements as façade material as long as subsequent submittals include defined joints and other details. Mr. Chambers noted that canopy of proposed porte cochère appears to be glass in provided rendering; Applicant responded that canopy elements are solid.

Mr. Simonson concluded by inquiring if Applicant seeks HCC motion in approval of select details. Applicant confirmed that intention of tonight's discussion was desire for constructive feedback; expressed appreciation to Historic Officer and also to commission members for helpful comments. In closing, Applicant agreed to return to HCC with updated COA Application and associated design proposal that addresses various suggestions and concerns.

Public Commentary: Darlene Heller, City Planning Director, expressed support on behalf of her department and is pleased to see this project moving forward; continued by noting she stayed at Lancaster hotel location and personally appreciated that experience. Ms. Heller stated her department feels comfortable and confident collaborating with this development team and explained having another hotel in South Bethlehem is very welcome advantageous; as this project moves forward, improvements at nearby Greenway should occur simultaneously. Ms. Heller concluded by expressing appreciation to HCC members for their ongoing dedication to this and other COA Applications, acknowledging many proposed projects can be challenging to assess and prove to be quite detailed.

Motion: With all parties in agreement, HCC offered no motion for City Council consideration.

General Business:

Minutes from HCC meeting on August 19, 2024, were approved by those attending that meeting, and with abstention by those not previously in attendance.

There was no further business; HCC meeting was adjourned at approximately 8:15 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,



BY:

Jeffrey Long
Historic Officer
South Bethlehem Historic Conservation District
Mt. Airy Historic District