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## MINUTES

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**BOARD:** HISTORIC CONSERVATION COMMISSION, CITY OF BETHLEHEM

**MEMBERS PRESENT:** CRAIG EVANS (VICE CHAIR), ROGER HUDAK, GARY LADER (CHAIR), MICHAEL SIMONSON, DESIREE STRASSER

**MEMBERS ABSENT:** SETH CORNISH, KENNETH LOUSH

**STAFF PRESENT:** JEFFREY LONG

**PRESS PRESENT:** ED COURRIER (BETHLEHEM PRESS)

**VISITORS PRESENT:** TODD CHAMBERS, KASSIE HILGERT

**MEETING DATE:** DECEMBER 19, 2022

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The regular meeting of the Historic Conservation Commission (HCC) was held on December 19, 2022, at the City of Bethlehem Town Hall Rotunda, 10 East Church Street, Bethlehem, PA. HCC Chair Gary Lader called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

### **Agenda Item #1**

**Property Location:** 25 West Third Street

**Property Owner:** Kassie Hilgert, ArtsQuest

**Applicant:** Todd Chambers, MKSD Architects

**Building Description, Period, Style, and Defining Features:** Bethlehem City Council overruled HCC recommendation to deny approval for demolishing all six existing interconnected structures along Northampton Street between West Second Street and West Third Street that comprise the existing Banana Factory Arts & Education Center, so building descriptions are irrelevant.

**Proposed Alterations:** The Applicant is returning for review of proposed design revisions to a previously approved redevelopment project to construct a new 5-story cultural center at the site of the current Banana Factory Arts Center.

### **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.

**Evaluation, Effect on Historic Conservation District, Recommendations:** Applicant last presented to HCC on September 19, 2022, resulting in unanimous support of motion for proposal to construct new, semi-detached, 5-story, steel-frame structure with flat roof as well as mix of brick and metal-panel siding stretching along entire width of site facing West Third Street and connected to new, semi-detached, 1-story, brick masonry, ancillary structure with flat roof facing Northampton Street. Main structure measures approx. 200-feet wide x 130-feet deep x 78-feet high while secondary structure measures approx. 90-feet wide x 40-feet deep x 19.5-feet high. Immediately to rear (north) of both structures is plaza with green space, entrance into main structure and service entrance for secondary structure while northern half of site is

dedicated to parking. Overall architectural elements and details also received support within motion, including: brick façade at entry level and metal panel siding with vertical slits at upper floor levels along East Third Street; upper-most floor level recesses 12-feet from main façade along most portions of building facing West Third Street; entry level façade has integrated storefronts, including granite panel apron across entire façade; punched window openings at upper floor levels are contemporary in style, with flat aluminum frames with no sills or lintels but align vertically ... at least on front (south) façade; select windows have vertical fin detail; main structure also includes large expanses of glass curtainwall for façades at eastern end of main structure; select façade locations include murals painted onto removeable panels for occasional rotation of public art.

At that time, Applicant agreed to reconsider scale and proposed materials for rooftop canopy and potential use of fabric awnings at entry-level storefronts. HCC encouraged Applicant to further develop architectural details to reference contributing buildings approved for demolition. Applicant also agreed that subsequent COA Applications will include concepts for new exterior lighting and building signage.

Current COA Application includes 11 supplemental drawings sheets and associated narrative. Comparison of previous design proposal with current drawing set indicates design modifications are limited to rooftop canopy. Although encouraged by HCC to reconsider scale and proposed materials of canopy, only obvious modification is smaller canopy soffit depth, resulting in approx. 24-inch reduction in overall building height from 80-feet to approx. 78-feet. As reminder, previous assessment included commentary that “proposed rooftop terrace at east end of main building with expressed steel structure and arched canopy with multi-colored underside recalls terrace at ArtsQuest Center at SteelStacks located further east in South Bethlehem; however, that structure is beyond boundaries of Historic Conservation District and was not required to adhere to relevant design guidelines while current design is inappropriate due to visible perception from street level below”. Previous HCC motion did not address rooftop canopy, so discussion of current design proposal (as amended from original design) is warranted.

**Discussion:** Kassie Hilgert and Todd Chambers represented proposal for design revisions to previously approved redevelopment project to construct new 5-story cultural center at site of current Banana Factory Arts Center. Applicant confirmed that current COA Application is limited to canopy at upper-most floor level; continued by explaining that proposed canopy is final main design element to be resolved due to its importance for on-going fundraising efforts. Applicant described process of investigating other options for rooftop canopy, with need to shelter entire roof deck to ensure extended use (inclement weather, hot sun, etc.) and considered more temporary canopy materials; however, quickly concluded that other options (beyond proposed permanent metal canopy) resulted in higher maintenance costs associated with fabric awnings and frequent maintenance of roof deck. As compromise, Applicant reduced height and profile of proposed canopy ... noting previous 30-inch soffit profile is reduced to 12-inches and overall height of canopy is reduced 24-inches ... for overall building height of 78-feet at tallest dimension; also called attention to exposed steel framing beneath canopy that is no longer incorporated into soffit detail, which allows for smaller soffit height.

Mr. Evans noted visual difference with curtainwall system at east end of building (pp. 6 and 7 of drawing set), where columns appear different in current proposal when compared with previous design. Applicant confirmed that columns have not changed since previous COA Application and visible difference is due to lesser-quality print resolution of newer drawing set. Ms. Strasser also noted visible difference with depiction of structural framing at upper-most floor level (pp. 8 and 9 of drawing set); Applicant confirmed framing elements have not changed since previous COA Application and visible difference is due to change in view of generated perspective drawing. Mr. Evans recalled previous HCC review of design proposal that included discussion to explore changing orientation of rooftop canopy ... opening toward north rather than toward east; Applicant could not recall that discussion item from previous HCC meeting and noted inability to reorientate swoop of canopy due to location of proposed stairwell that services upper-most floor level. Mr. Simonson inquire if proposed materials for rooftop canopy changed since previous HCC meeting with revision to overall building height and height of canopy soffit detail; Applicant confirmed current design proposal reflects no change in materials from previous design.

Mr. Evans requested clarification about HCC responsibilities concerning permanent building colors ... specifically relating to underside of proposed canopy. Mr. Lader explained relevant design guidelines do not address issue of color palettes, but HCC has previously offered suggestions about appropriate colors, when

prompted by Applicant; Mr. Long continued that HCC traditionally recommends Applicants to avoid neon colors and bright white while factory-applied (permanent) colors are typically identified by Applicants and then captured within resulting Certificate of Appropriateness so building inspector can cross-reference during construction.

Mr. Lader explained personal difficulty with assessing previous and current proposals when cross-referencing relevant design guidelines because of overall scale, noting that select details relate to design elements within Historic Conservation District ... even if more contemporary in style (windows, brick facades, storefronts, etc.); however, monumentality of proposed rooftop canopy has no relation to other contributing structures within District and encouraged Applicant to respect guidelines that define appropriate designs by relating to typical massing and details of overall District. Mr. Lader continued that current design is impressive and can personally envision variety of uses for proposed rooftop canopy; however, Applicant and fellow HCC members should also understand what current design would mean within greater context of overall District. Mr. Lader noted that initial perspective drawing within current drawing set depicts building as isolated structure with no surrounding context while remaining drawings include depiction of large-scale development across West Third Street that does not yet exist and may never be constructed; otherwise, provided drawings offer no understanding of size and scale of design proposal (especially of proposed canopy) and how it fits within overall Historic Conservation District. Mr. Lader continued by noting that two and one-half story Lehigh Pizza structure (building nearest to proposed design) would appear quite diminutive, if Applicant had integrated it into provided views. Applicant responded that previous submittals included indication of existing adjacent structures; however, Applicant did not include with current COA Application to avoid overburdening HCC with abundance of drawings if current focus is rooftop canopy. Mr. Evans clarified that proposed large-scale structure with expansive rooftop canopy “stretches HCC’s ability to apply guidelines” to current design proposal to ensure it properly integrates into overall historic district; continued that 24-inch reduction in overall height from previous design proposal is appreciated but remains insufficient. Mr. Hudak expressed personal appreciation of current design proposal, noting Applicant’s on-going responses to HCC commentary that have resulted in appropriate design approach. Mr. Lader cautioned HCC about supporting motion for something that does not satisfy relevant design guidelines; continued that subsequent Applicants could reference current design when approaching HCC with “even more extreme” design proposals. Mr. Lader continued that Historic Conservation District includes eclectic mix of structures reflecting various design periods (including newer, non-contributing structures) but encouraged HCC to base assessments of COA Applications on successful satisfaction of design guidelines as well as appropriate relationships to contributing structures within District.

Mr. Evans inquired about Applicant’s intentions for lighting of rooftop canopy; Applicant confirmed exterior lighting concept of overall project has not yet been designed. Mr. Evans continued that lighting of canopy underside is critical component of overall design and relevant guidelines might not align with Applicant’s vision; Applicant referenced similar canopy at other ArtsQuest location that has downlights (rather than uplights) ... mainly for safety concerns. Mr. Lader suggested canopy would be successful if more “human” in scale ... for example, 10-feet high rather than current proposal of 18-feet high; Applicant responded that lower canopy height would be less comfortable, noting large footprint of rooftop deck necessitates taller ceiling height. Mr. Lader continued by inquiring if canopy could initiate at height of tops of windows of upper-most floor level (rather than initiating at ceiling height), resulting in further reduction in overall canopy height; Applicant explained that reducing height of canopy would be disproportionate with remaining building, noting proportions of upper-most floor level relate to height of base (entry level) of building. Ms. Strasser inquired about faint dotted line visible on p. 10 of drawing set; Applicant clarified that dashed line represents overall height of previous design proposal ... at 80-feet overall height. Ms. Strasser continued by inquiring about differences of design proposal, as depicted on pp. 2 and 3 of provided drawing set; Applicant explained p. 3 depicts upper-most floor level that is now setback from exterior wall of lower façade (except for canopy), as previously requested and approved by HCC.

**Public Commentary:** none

**Motion:** The Commission upon motion by Mr. Hudak and seconded by Mr. Simonson adopted the proposal that City Council issue a Certificate of Appropriateness for the proposed work as presented and described as follows:

1. The proposal for design revisions to a previously approved redevelopment project to construct a new 5-story cultural center at the site of current Banana Factory Arts Center was presented by Kassie Hilgert and Todd Chambers.
2. Appropriate rooftop terrace with “swooping” canopy at east end of new main building includes following details:
  - a. metal canopy with expressed steel posts and cross-bracing extends to building perimeter
  - b. canopy initiates from top of upper-most floor level at 75-feet above public right-of-way before extending another 3-feet to measure 78-feet above public right-of-way at highest dimension
  - c. exposed canopy soffit measures 12-inches high; multi-colored underside of canopy is metal-panel siding
3. Applicant agreed that subsequent COA Applications will include concepts for new exterior lighting and building signage.

The motion for the proposed work was approved 4:1, with Mr. Evans, Mr. Hudak, Mr. Simonson and Ms. Strasser voting in favor of the motion while Mr. Lader did not support the motion.

**General Business:**

Mr. Long noted that subsequent meeting will take place on fourth Monday of month (Jan. 23, 2023) and will include election of commission officers.

Mr. Simonson noted that sample texts for administrative approval of COA Applications will be distributed for review in advance of subsequent HCC meeting, with potential for discussion under ‘General Business’ if meeting agenda allows.

Minutes from HCC meeting on November 21, 2022, were unanimously 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 6:45 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,



BY: \_\_\_\_\_

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