

# CITY OF BETHLEHEM

## Inter-Departmental Correspondence

**SUBJECT:** 555 Main Street/Rubel Street II, L.P. Application

**FROM:** Michael G. Colón, City Council President

**TO:** Historical & Architectural Review Board

**DATE:** February 5, 2025

---

At 7:00 p.m. on Tuesday, February 4, 2025, the Bethlehem City Council held a regularly scheduled meeting, at which time it considered the issuance of a Certificate of Appropriateness relative to the proposed development of 555 Main Street (“the Woolworth Building”) located in Historic Bethlehem. Prior to the meeting, Council received a report from the Historical & Architectural Review Board (“HARB”) dated January 8, 2025,<sup>1</sup> recommending denial of the Certificate of Appropriateness. Representatives of the owner, Rubel Street II, L.P. appeared at the meeting and made a presentation to Council.

Pursuant to Article 1713.14 of the City of Bethlehem’s Codified Ordinances, Council:

In determining whether or not to certify to the appropriateness of the proposed erection, reconstruction, alteration, restoration, demolition or razing of all or a part of any building within the historic district, Council shall consider the same factors as the Board of Historical Architectural Review set forth in Section 1713.11 and the report of the Board. If Council approves the application, it shall issue a certificate of appropriateness authorizing the Building Inspector to issue a permit for the work covered. If Council disapproves, it shall do so in writing, and copies shall be given to the applicant and to the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission. *The disapproval shall indicate what changes in the plans and specifications would meet the conditions for protecting the distinctive historical character of the district.*

---

<sup>1</sup> A memorandum from HARB to Council is required by Article 1713.13 of the City of Bethlehem’s Codified Ordinances.

Upon review of HARB's January 8, 2025 memorandum, Council found that it provided no guidance with respect to what changes in plans and specifications would satisfy conditions for protecting the distinctive historical character of the district.<sup>2</sup> Accordingly, by unanimous vote, Council chose to return the matter to HARB for further proceedings at its discretion.

At a minimum, the proceedings should result in the issuance of a further report to Council setting forth recommendations for changes to the Applicant's plans and specifications that would, in the opinion of the Board, satisfy conditions for protecting the distinctive historical character of the district.

There being no timing requirements for consideration of applications under either Pennsylvania's Municipal Historic District Law or Article 1713, unless the rules and regulations of HARB should impose a timeline, HARB may schedule further proceedings at its discretion. Upon receipt of HARB's report, the matter will be relisted for consideration at a future regularly scheduled Council meeting.

MGC/sjs

cc: R. Leon  
B. Callahan  
C. Laird  
H. Kwiatak  
G. Crampsie Smith  
K. Wilhelm  
T. Miller  
S. Steward, Esq.

X:\Transfer\clients (server\08)\2022\Bethlehem City Council\023\Woolworth Building\1.5.25 Memo to HARB.doc

---

<sup>2</sup> Notably, Article 1713.13 does not expressly require such recommendations to be set forth in HARB's report. However, because Article 1713.14 requires Council to make recommendations attendant with the denial of a COA, and HARB is a recommending body with special expertise in matters of historical appropriateness, Council finds it necessary and appropriate to seek the advice of HARB in this regard with respect to any COA, particularly where denial is recommended.