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February 20, 2015

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Department of Planning and Urban Development
City of Portland
City Hall, 4th Floor
389 Congress Street
Portland, ME 04101

147 Congress Street

**Request for Placement on March 4, 2015 Historic Preservation Board Agenda
Workshop Session to Review Site Alternatives
Congress 127 Apartments, LLC**

Dear Deb and Rob,

We appreciated the opportunity to meet with the Historic Preservation Board members on January 7, 2015 to discuss the Applicant's proposed site improvements at 147 Congress Street. As we discussed with you, Rob, during our follow-up meeting with you on February 10, 2015, we have considered the input provided during the Historic Preservation Board (HPB) meeting and have developed various site alternatives that we would like to present to the HPB in a Workshop format during their upcoming meeting on March 4, 2015.

With the submittal of this letter/narrative and attached plans, we are hereby respectfully requesting that this matter be removed from the "Tabled" status and that the prior application materials submitted to the HPB in support of the January 7th presentation be incorporated by reference into this package. We will have the prior renderings and plans on hand during the March 4th workshop session with the HPB for reference during our discussions.

As you suggested, we have prepared a brief summary of each of the three enclosed concepts. We would like to present all three concepts to the HPB during the upcoming Workshop session, as each has certain features that address the comments we received during the last meeting with the HPB in January.

Using the input gathered from the HPB at the March 4th Workshop meeting, we will refine the preferred concept for submittal and formal review (and hopefully approval) by the HPB at their following meeting on March 18, 2015.

Other Approvals

As we have discussed, the project also must obtain a Level 1 Site Plan approval through the Planning Staff, as well as a Conditional Use Approval from the Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA). These applications have not yet formally been filed, as we had intended to get the HBP Approval as the logical first step in the permit review process.

As a result of the discussions at the prior meeting with the HPB, and based on the input received during our meeting with you, we will also be coordinating with other department representatives in the interim between our filing of these sketches and our return visit to the HPB.

As you suggested, we will be reaching out to Barbara Barhydt regarding the Planning staff review, and Ann Machado regarding the ZBA review. Our goal would be to gather initial input from the department representatives between now and the March 4th HPB workshop meeting, such that we can reach resolution on a preferred design at the HPB workshop and have a general comfort level that the plan will not encounter serious hurdles as part of the review by the other City departments.

Existing Site Conditions

As you may recall from the prior presentation to the HPB in January, there is an approximately 18' wide by 28' long gravel parking area located on the westerly side of the house. This existing parking area is located immediately off Congress Street and partially overlaps onto a portion of the adjacent property. This area currently provides a head-on parking area that is at least two vehicles wide and sometimes two-deep, thus providing 4 possible parking spaces immediately to the side of the house.

Based on a review of prior site photos and aerial photos, it appears that sometimes vehicles have even parked three-wide in this area. Vehicles park in front of an existing approximately 6' tall wooden fence that extends between the house and the abutting property.

As previously noted to the HPB, the rear of the site includes a wooden porch addition and stairway area that were added on to the original brick residence and are in poor condition. There is also a free standing shed that is in very poor condition.

Hardscape features in the yard include a concrete sidewalk that runs along the side and rear of the house. In addition, a stone and rubble wall extends along the area of the porch and stair addition and is approximately 12" to 15" high. A large brick wall extends across the entire rear property line. This brick wall is in relatively good condition and will remain.

Site photos also show the limited vegetation that is remaining in the rear of the site. The majority of the ground cover in the rear yard is hard packed exposed soil and loose rocks. A row of tall evergreens is located immediately to the rear of the fence described above. One mature evergreen tree is located in the northwesterly corner of the site, against the front of the large brick wall. A couple of smaller deciduous trees are located near the house. These two trees are relatively small in caliper (approximately 1" to 2") and appear to have been planted within the past few years.

Original Plan

As you recall, the Applicant's original plan proposed the elimination of the parking immediately off Congress Street adjacent to the side of the house and proposed parking for a total of six vehicles at the rear of the property. The existing approximately 18' by 28' gravel parking area was proposed to be converted to an approximately 10' to 12' wide driveway (constructed of brick pavers) with new lawn area flanking each side.

This layout provided parking for the existing house and accommodated the nearby condominium units on the corner of Congress and North Street that currently do not have off-street parking. Vehicles that once all had to back out directly onto Congress Street would now have the ability to turn around and exit the site looking forward.

This eliminated the parking that overlapped onto the adjacent property and added new greenspace to this area. Parking that was once highly visible from Congress Street was proposed to be relocated to the rear of the site and screened by a proposed 6' tall fence and gate. The gate would automatically close, thus keeping the rear area of the site fully screened from the view from Congress Street.

At the rear of the site, four parking spaces were proposed adjacent to the brick wall along the back property line. Two spaces were also proposed in the vicinity of the rubble retaining wall described above. Each space was sized at 9' wide by 18' long and had a 24' wide maneuvering area, in accordance with the Technical Standards for standard stall sizing cited in the Portland Ordinance.

The wooden addition which included the porch and stairs was to be torn down. Windows that had been converted to doorways to access the wooden addition would be converted back to their original style, such that the rear of the existing brick building would be restored. The shed would be torn down and that area would be converted to greenspace. A new patio and steps was also proposed.

As we noted during our presentation to the HPB, the attributes to this design included:

- the removal of the highly visible parking from the frontage of the site
- the addition of new greenspace to the side of the residence
- conversion of an existing expanse of gravel to a defined brick paver driveway
- the screening of the view of the rear of the site with a new fence and gate
- the reduction in the potential for vehicles backing into Congress Street
- a reduction in demand for on-street parking in the Munjoy Hill neighborhood
- the removal of a non-historic wooden addition and shed in poor condition

HPB Feedback

Based on the discussions at the HPB meeting in January, there were several Board members who recognized the plan attributes cited above, and were generally in support of the benefits provided by the proposed elimination of the parking that was so prominent on the site.

However, there were some Board members that raised concerns about the extent of area at the rear of the site that would be affected by the proposed changes. They asked that reconsideration be given to the amount and extent of parking proposed at the rear of the site.

There was also a discussion about the view of the existing brick wall along the rear property line and whether a 6' high fence and gate would provide too much screening and would limit the view of this feature. The Board seemed somewhat mixed on whether a fence and gate would be a preferred feature, or whether a greater view of the brick wall was more desirable.

Alternative Concepts

Based on the feedback obtained during the January 7th meeting with the HPB, and our discussions with you during our recent meeting on February 10th, the applicant has prepared the enclosed alternative concepts for further review and discussion at the upcoming workshop session with the HPB. Each concept has its own features and reflects changes made to address the comments offered by the HBP members, however there also are common elements that occur in each plan, as described below.

Common Elements

The following paragraphs highlight the elements that are common to all of the enclosed updated concepts.

Removal of Existing Gravel Pad

Since the HPB seemed generally supportive to this program feature, each concept proposes the removal of the existing gravel pad and relocation of the existing parking on the site to a less prominent spot. As in the original proposal, each concept includes the removal of the existing gravel pad immediately off Congress Street and proposes the construction of a new brick paver driveway along the side of the house. The new 10' to 12' wide driveway will have greenspace on each side. This will soften the view of the property from Congress Street and will provide better definition of the access into the property. The use of brick pavers will tie into the existing brick sidewalk along the site frontage and will coordinate with the brick structure itself.

Reduction in number of proposed spaces

It is important to note that all of the enclosed concepts reflect a reduction in the number of requested spaces from 6 (as previously proposed) down to 5 spaces. This reduction in the number of proposed parking spaces down to 5 has been made in direct response to comments received at the HPB meeting and reflects a significant change on the part of the applicant's overall program to provide parking for his properties.

Reduction in overall impervious area

It is our understanding from some of the comments received at the HPB meeting, that given the recent designation of the site as an Individual Historic Landmark, there may be some latitude to reduce the parking sizes from the original 9' wide by 18' long (which was based on the full size space cited in the Ordinance). The enclosed plans reflect a downsizing of each space to 8' wide by 15' long, which is the compact space size cited in the Ordinance. Each concept maintains a 24' wide maneuvering area, to allow vehicles to circulate within the site.

As we have discussed with you, we would respectfully request that the Historic Preservation Program staff provide support for this reduction in parking space size as we continue with the review of this project through the other municipal departments. Each of the enclosed concepts incorporates these dimensions.

Removal of wooden addition and shed

In addition, as discussed at the January HPB meeting, each concept also reflects the removal of the wooden addition (the enclosed porch, decks and stairs) that had been constructed when the building had been used as a rooming house. The rear windows that had been converted to doors (to provide access the wooden addition) will be restored to be compatible with the original windows along the rear of the residence.

In addition, although not all of the enclosed concepts require removal of the existing shed at the rear of the property, the applicant is proposing to demolish this shed which is in poor repair.

All parking will remain private

During the January HPB meeting, there was some discussion regarding the distinction between public parking and private residential parking. All parking proposed as part of this plan is, and shall remain private. There will be no public parking allowed and no parking will be allowed for customers or employees of the store located at the corner.

The existing residence will have an area to park two vehicles, with the remaining spaces being allocated to the individual homeowners within the three-unit condominium located nearby. The legal right to use these specific spaces will be addressed by the establishment of easements for the individual owners of the condominiums.

In order to maintain the residential setting, the applicant proposes to not stripe individual spaces but rather to identify the locations by more pedestrian scale amenities such as small decorative bollards or other similar elements.

Descriptions of Each Alternative

SK-12

This Conceptual Plan was prepared based on the discussion by HPB members regarding the view of the existing approximately 9' high brick wall at the rear of the site. The original plan presented in January had proposed parking in front of this wall, along with a full 6' high fence and gate to screen the view of the rear of the site from Congress Street. This concept creates a focal point with the existing wall and offers an approximately 24' wide unobstructed view of the wall.

The proposed fence and gate have been eliminated. The majority of the parking has been located behind the building. Four spaces are proposed to the rear of the building, with one parallel space located on the westerly side of the site. The limit of pavement has been shifted away from the wall, to allow an approximately 6' minimum width of greenspace along the entire extent of the existing brick wall at the rear of the site. This provides an additional buffer for the existing evergreen tree located at the northwesterly corner of the site, immediately in front of the existing 9' high brick wall.

A new, generally crescent shaped, greenspace has been added behind the building, in the vicinity of the existing angled sidewalk behind the building. This new greenspace area encompasses the two existing deciduous trees that remain on the site. The two existing trees will be accented by additional plantings in this area.

The proposed parking spaces to the rear of the building have been shifted slightly to the west to provide a link between the rear of the house and the additional greenspace at the rear of the site.

SK-13

This concept was prepared to provide a larger greenspace immediately to the rear of the house and provide a greater separation between the house and the parking. All of the parking has been shifted to the rear of the site, allowing for an open central core area adjacent to the rear exit of the house. The area that is currently encumbered by the wooden addition (i.e. the porch, deck stairs and ramp) and the shed would all become a new greenspace which connects to the rear of the site.

There would be a continuous green strip (approximately 4' minimum width) along the face of the existing brick wall along the rear of the site. As the plan shows, the existing evergreen tree in the northwesterly corner of the parcel is proposed to remain.

In addition, there is a landscaped island that encompasses the two small deciduous trees located near the angled sidewalk to the rear of the house. This is similar to SK-12, but the island is more rectangular.

No fence and gate are proposed with this concept, it is envisioned that low growth plantings in the proposed island area, coupled with the preservation of two of the existing cedars (in the location of the existing fence) will offer buffering of the majority of the parking spaces at the rear of the site.

The installation of low growth plantings would soften the view of the rear of the site and allow a view of the upper portions of the existing wall at the rear of the property.

SK-14

SK-14 was established to provide a logical separation between parking associated with the house and the condominiums. This plan integrates an L-shaped configuration similar to the original plan that was presented. Three spaces are proposed to face the existing wall at the rear of the site, while the two spaces nearest the house would be used by the homeowners.

This type of layout consolidates the maneuvering area to the extent practicable, thus providing for a larger greenspace area to the rear of the house and a larger block of greenspace in the northeasterly corner of the site. The block of greenspace in the northeasterly corner of the site (to the rear of the building and in the area of the shed) provides a sizeable area for use as a garden or other outdoor living activities.

The island by the angled sidewalk still retains the two existing deciduous trees behind the house. But, since the parking and maneuvering areas are consolidated to provide additional greenspace to the rear of the site, the island is slightly longer and narrower than those shown on the other concepts.

The three proposed parking spaces that face the existing brick wall are set approximately 5.5' (min.) from the wall and allow for a continuous greenspace corridor along the rear of the site. As with the other concepts, the existing evergreen in the northwest corner of the site is proposed to remain.

Summary of Concepts

As the enclosed conceptual sketches show, we have offered a variety of layouts, all of which contain certain key aspects that we believe are vital to the program success. Each of the enclosed alternatives respond to various comments that we have received thus far throughout the process.

It is important to note that with any of these Concepts, the Applicant's provisions to improve the site (by eliminating the prominent parking immediately adjacent to Congress Street, construction of a brick paver driveway and lawn area in place of the existing gravel pad, and removal of the wooden building addition and shed, along with

the associated building renovations and landscaping enhancements) all have a financial aspect that affects the overall feasibility of the project.

The ability to offer off-street parking to his condominium owners is a very important part of the program. The value added to his condominium units by including accommodations for off-street parking helps to defray some of the cost of doing these site improvements. In addition, there is an overall benefit to the neighbors and residents in the area who compete for available parking on the street.

Next Steps

We look forward to the opportunity to further discuss these alternatives with the HPB and will seek to identify the preferred alternative that is mutually acceptable to address the project needs during the March 4, 2015 HPB workshop session.

With the selection of a preferred alternative, we would then return to the HPB with a formal design and request for approval during their March 18, 2015 meeting, such that we may proceed with the review process through the other municipal departments.

Application Materials

In addition to this cover letter, we have included 15 copies of the following items in support of this Workshop Request:

- SK-12
- SK-13
- SK-14
- Detail Sheet

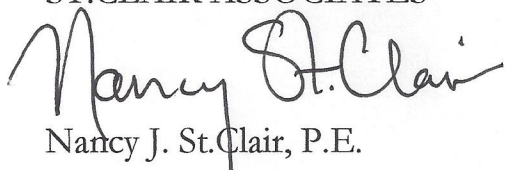
Closure

We look forward to working with you and other staff members in the City, along with the Historic Preservation Board to complete the local review process. We appreciate the opportunity to present the enclosed Sketches to the HPB in a workshop format during their upcoming meeting on March 4th, 2015.

In the interim, please contact me if you have any questions, or require any additional information. We look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

ST. CLAIR ASSOCIATES

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Nancy St. Clair". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the typed name.

Nancy J. St. Clair, P.E.

Vice President

NJS:njs

c: Congress 127 Apartments, LLC

Project Team