

11/10/21 LFPF's Statement to the Plan Commission Regarding the First Midwest Bank Development at the Corner of Bank Lane and Deerpath

Wednesday, November 10th, 2021 – 6:30 PM

Introduction

The Lake Forest Preservation Foundation is a non-profit organization with over 500 members, consisting largely of Lake Forest residents. For nearly 50 years, our mission has been to preserve the historic visual character of Lake Forest.

We submit this response to 241 Deerpath LLC's request for a special use permit for redevelopment of the Southwest Corner of Deerpath and Bank Lane. This proposed redevelopment is premised on the demolition of a historic, contributing structure – the CT Gunn building – designed by Stanley Anderson, whose individual work is significant in the history and development of Lake Forest. In addition, the “design” for the proposed replacement structure appears to be incomplete and preliminary. As reflected in the Staff Report, left entirely open is whether and to what extent the proposed new building “may incorporate a historic element remaining from the original building.” See Staff Report at 1.

The LFPF submits that Applicant's request for a Special Permit is premature, because the Plan Commission cannot complete the analysis required by the Comprehensive Plan and the City Code, unless or until the Historic Preservation Commission (the “HPC”) reviews and approves (1) the demolition of the CT Gunn building and (2) the design and height of any new structure.

More specifically, the applicant seeks approval of a Special Use Permit to allow a CBD Planned Development with a floor area ratio not to exceed 2.0, a bank drive through located in the below grade parking garage and payment in lieu of on-site parking for a limited number of parking spaces that cannot be accommodated on site. All of this may be mooted, of course, if the HPC rejects the plan of demolition or the design or height of any new structure. This is why City Code § 159.114 contemplates that any proposed building design receive an initial “conceptual” approval from the HPC. See Staff Report at 5.

This is critical to the process because, as reflected in the Staff Report, the following principles must guide the Plan Commission's decisions:

- “Market Square serves as a City center that establishes a strong positive identity and a sense of place for the City. All new development in the CBD should be compatible with its *historic* character.”
- “The B-4 Preservation Business District is designed to preserve the unique attributes of the *historic* retail, residential and office core of the City.”
- “These regulations are designed to preserve the community's quality of life and the ‘village’ character of the core area. In particular, these regulations are *intended to preserve the historic buildings* and the variety of building sizes, heights and architectural styles and detailing. In addition, the district is intended to ensure the continued commercial viability of the district by maintaining the use of quality building materials,

encouraging pedestrian traffic, providing generous green space and preserving and enhancing the social gathering spaces in the district.”

- “The purpose of the CBD Planned Development section of the Code, Section 159.114, is to allow some flexibility with respect to the provisions of the business zoning districts in order to achieve the goals of 1) maintaining a vital business district, 2) *preserving the historic character and significance of the district*, and 3) ensuring that development is consistent with available infrastructure.”

How can the Plan Commission issue a Special Permit consistent with these principles – regarding floor area ratios, a below grade bank drive through, and payments in lieu of on-site parking – without having even conceptual design approval (never mind demolition approval) from the HPC?

For these reasons and those set forth below, the LPPF suggests that the Plan Commission continue the hearing on this application until after the HPC provides at least conceptual approval of any plan. Only then would the Plan Commission be in a position to know whether and to what extent any Special Permit is required or appropriate.

Discussion

As indicated above, Applicant’s “design” is incomplete and preliminary, apparently serving as a placeholder for purposes of obtaining a Special Permit. Again, left open are such basic questions such as whether the proposed new building may incorporate a historic element remaining from the original building, which is nowhere reflected in the proposed plan. This would explain why the proposed structure fails to meet the required standards, which presumably would be fully addressed in a review by the HPC.

To begin, the Applicant is asking for a demolition of a recognized contributing historic building in the CBD historic district, the CT Gunn building designed in 1927 by Stanley Anderson. This is, of course, wholly at odds with the regulations which are intended to preserve the historic buildings in the CBD. As a result, plans for adaptive reuse of the historic CT Gunn building must be considered and reviewed as an alternative to demolition before any special use zoning issues are considered by the PC. And, as indicated, if demolition is denied by the HPC, building and site plans of this proposed development would significantly change.

In addition, as a general matter, Deerpath is the gateway to our historic CBD and Market Square. Any proposed design should respect the English Village 125-year tradition of significant architects (Frost & Granger, Shaw, Anderson) and strive to be compatible with the existing historic buildings. The initial plans for the building are not compatible in height, mass, and style with the historic character of the CBD, Market Square and the iconic streetscape of Deerpath.

As for specific objections, this Application does not meet the following criteria for the City of LF’s **CBD**:

Planned Development criteria 159.114 (E):

- o (1)(e) The building and landscape concepts have received conceptual approval from the HPC or BRB.

§ The Plan Commission should remand this petition to the HPC for review first and not waste time reviewing a proposal that might have to be adjusted by adaptively reusing the CT Gunn building.

- o (2)(b) At least 25% of the site is retained as open space.

§ The Shaw and Anderson tradition for the English Village style is to create parklike open spaces around buildings. This development proposes a lot line to lot line building on the north, west, and south which is not in character with the CBD and minimizes air and light into the property and neighboring buildings.

LF's Special Uses 159.045 (E):

- o (2)(c) “the special use will not negatively affect the overall character of the area”

§ This proposed development ‘s style, height and mass are incompatible and out of character with the historic, Shaw and Anderson designed English Village style of Market Square, the CBD and Deerpath Road

- o (2) (d) “The exterior architectural appearance and functional plan of any proposed structure will not be incompatible with either the exterior architectural appearance functional plan of structures already constructed or in the course of construction in the immediate neighborhood or the character of the applicable district so as to cause a substantial depreciation in property values within the neighborhood . . .”

§ The proposed building will dominate the existing historic buildings with its incompatible style, height, and mass.

§ The demolition of the CT Gunn building, a recognized contributing historic structure to the CBD and Market Square Historic District, would have a negative impact on the character of the iconic Deerpath streetscape and the surrounding CBD.

Comprehensive Plan:

The Comprehensive Plan recommends that:

1. “New development should preserve the character of Market Square and the CBD. “All new development in the CBD should be compatible with its historic character”.

- This proposed development is not compatible and does not fit with the surrounding historic character of Deerpath, Market Square or the CBD in **style, scale, mass, and height**.
 - For over 125 years, since Frost and Granger designed City Hall to Shaw’s design of Market Square to Stanley Anderson’s English Village Deerpath block and Dan Bleck’s renovation of the First Midwest CT Gunn building, all have followed the residential design of Tudor English Village or Georgian styles which includes gabled roofs, 2-story Tudor stucco and timber, first floor retail, second floor residential, large setbacks and open space.
 - The Georgian style was utilized to give importance to the financial institution, First National Bank of LF (now Northern Trust). This was planned to be the dominant building on the Deerpath block.
 - The proposed building will make all original buildings on this block subordinate to its **height** of 4 stories (3 stories with roof top living space), **mass** of solid block brick building, and **style** of a converted loft warehouse.
2. “Redevelopment should strengthen the historical character of the CBD”
- This development deviates from the established English Village character that Shaw and Anderson planned.
 - It is in the style of a massive brick converted warehouse, not a Tudor or Georgian.
 - It detracts from the original buildings and becomes the dominate building on the historic block.
3. “Additional residential development in the CBD should be on the second floor above retail /office uses”.
- This development originally included plans for first floor residential which is not found anywhere in the CBD and is not in character with the English Village Shaw/Anderson concept.

Zoning:

“The B-4 Preservation District is designed to preserve the unique attributes of the historic retail, residential, and office core of the City . . . These regulations are designed to preserve the community’s quality of life and the village character of the core area. In particular, these regulations are intended to preserve the historic buildings and variety of building sizes, heights, and architectural styles and detailing “. . . and by “providing generous green space”.

- This proposed development plans for the demolition of a recognized historic, contributing, Stanley Anderson 1927 designed building. The Zoning specifically states that such building should be preserved. Adaptive reuse would preserve this building and allow for redevelopment of this site.
- The 5-foot setbacks planned for in this development do not allow for “generous green space” to encourage pedestrian access. The development should increase the setbacks all

around the building to allow for more landscaping, green space, pedestrian outdoor space, light, and air. The business on the east side of the adjacent building would suffer if the development was allowed to move closer to their doors.

CBD Planned Development:

The City Code 159.114 states the goals of “2) preserving the historic character and significance of the district” and “3) ensuring that development is consistent with available infrastructure”.

1. These goals are accomplished by 159.114 (E)(1)(e) “The building and landscape concepts have received conceptual approval from the HPC or BRB”.
 - This development assumes the demolition of the historic CT Gunn building. It is imperative that this project first receive a review by the HPC before it goes any further. The developer should not assume demolition would be approved. This is a significant historic building and a contributing structure to the CBD and should be adaptively reused.
 - The Plan Commission should remand this petition to the HPC for review first and not waste time reviewing a proposal that might have to be adjusted by adaptively reusing the CT Gunn building.
2. At least 25% of the site is retained as open space”
 - The development needs to maintain greater setbacks on all sides to allow for more light and air, pedestrian friendly spaces, and significant landscaping.
 - The Shaw and Anderson tradition for the English Village style is to create parklike open spaces around buildings. This development proposes a lot line to lot line building on the west, south and north which is not in character with the CBD buildings.

Building Height:

- A variance from the height allowance of 35 feet should not be granted. The proposed height of 3 stories with 4th floor outdoor living space would cause this proposed building to dominate the historic streetscape. All historic buildings including the Northern Trust building would become subordinate to this development and lose their historic significance.
- The historic character of CBD is mostly 2 story buildings with gabled roofs, except the Northern Trust Georgian building which was designed to be the most important building on this block due to its use as a financial institution. The proposed building height and roof style is incompatible with the surrounding building.
- Roof top outdoor living space is completely out of character with the entire CBD and should be eliminated and replaced with a gabled roof that would be subordinate to the Georgian Northern Trust building.

Special Use permit:

1. City code 159.045 E. (2) c. states “the Special use will not negatively affect the overall character of the area or detract from the primary retail nature of the district;”

- This proposed development style, height and mass are incompatible and out of character with the historic, Shaw and Anderson designed English Village style of Market Square, the CBD and Deerpath Road.
- The proposed building style, mass, and height will detract and dominate the historic buildings on this block and reduce their significance.

2. City code 159.045 E. (2) d states “The exterior architectural appearance and functional plan of any proposed structure will not be incompatible with either the exterior structure architectural appearance functional plan of structures already constructed or in the course of construction in the immediate neighborhood or the character of the applicable district so as to cause a substantial depreciation in property values within the neighborhood;”

- The demolition of the CT Gunn building, a recognized contributing historic structure to the CBD and Market Square Historic District, would have a negative impact on the character of the iconic Deerpath streetscape and the surrounding CBD.
- The proposed building will dominate the existing historic buildings with its incompatible style, height, and mass.

Alternatives:

- LFPF encourages the developer to consider adaptive reuse of the historic CT Gunn building.
- Build a new addition on the existing parking lot and follow the 1929 Stanley Anderson plans for Bank Lane that continues the Frost & Granger, Shaw, and Anderson plan for an English Village.
- A 3-story Tudor styled, building with a gabled roof would be compatible with the surrounding historic block and CBD and allow redevelopment of the site into office, retail and residential use.

Conclusion:

- The LFPF is not against development of this property.
- We encourage development that brings vitality and economic growth to our community and CBD.

§ We applaud First Midwest for turning their unused parking lot into usable pedestrian-friendly and retail space.

- But this proposed development design ignores the 125-year-old established historic English Village character of this iconic block, the CBD, and Market Square and is incompatible in style, mass, and height.

- This location demands a higher standard for redevelopment that respects the historic character of the surrounding Deerpath and Bank Lane streetscape and Market Square.
- There are many design options available to this developer that achieves compatibility with the historic streetscape including:

§ Adaptively reusing the historic Stanley Anderson CT Gunn building.

§ Refer to Stanley Anderson's 1929 plan for Bank Lane which continues the tradition of the English Village and connects Market Square to the Deerpath Inn (see Paul Bergmann's book "The Architecture of Stanley D. Anderson page 46).

§ Designing a gabled roof to be compatible with the residential, English Village character of Market Square, the CBD, and Deerpath.

§ Reduce the height of the proposed building to be subordinate to the Northern Trust building and compatible with buildings on Deerpath.

§ Eliminate the roof top outdoor living space and balconies which are completely out of character with the entire CBD.

- It should be a warning sign that a development is not appropriate for a site when it is asking for so many variances from the City code.