



**MISSION HILL TRIANGLE ARCHITECTURAL CONSERVATION DISTRICT COMMISSION
PUBLIC HEARING MINUTES**

Held virtually via Zoom

May 2, 2024

Commissioners Present: Patricia Tongue Edraos, Kirsten Hoffman, Katie Genovese

Commissioners Absent: Cindy Gura Walling, Ellen Moore

Staff Present: Murray Miller, Director of the Office of Historic Preservation; Joseph Cornish, Director of Design Review; Rachel Ericksen, Preservation Planner

A full recording of the hearing is available at:

<https://www.boston.gov/historic-district/mission-hill-triangle-architectural-conservation-district>

6:00 PM: Meeting started.

I. DESIGN REVIEW

APP # 24.0746 MHT

1615-1617 TREMONT STREET

Applicant: Joshua Sydney

Proposed Work: At the combined parcel of 1615-1617 Tremont Street: demolition of existing structure at 1617 Tremont Street; build new structure with full basement and four stories of new construction above grade. Repair and restore facade of 1615 Tremont Street; demo rear facade and connect to new 1617 Tremont street building with new contiguous floors at each level.

Project Representatives: Jason Jewhurst, Karen Greene, Joe Hanley, Doug Keller, Rabbi Hirschy Zarchi, and Joshua Sydney were the project representatives.

Documents Presented: Photos of existing conditions and plans of the proposed work.

Commissioner Genovese was in support of staff reading their staff comment.

Staff read the staff comment.

Discussion Topics: Commissioner Genovese expressed agreement with the staff comment. She said that concessions have been made but the scale has not substantially changed. She expressed concern that the architectural renderings maybe factually correct but that they



don't depict the reality of the visual impact and that they show things lining up with the roof line in a way that isn't actually how one would view it from the street. There are some renderings from down the block where you get a better sense of the scale - but the ones that have sort of dotted lines that visually don't line up with what the reality is when you are looking. She also stated that the scale is something that she doesn't feel comfortable with yet. Commissioner Edraos stated that she wanted to commend the team from what was first seen but that it's still massive and it just feels like something that's very massive being set into an area that, the characteristics of the triangle zone is that it's not massive and things are fairly small. She said that with your creativity you might be able to change some of the appearance to make it look less massive and try to shave it a little bit more so that there is more setback from the street particularly in the front. She wouldn't mind the side but it is the front that looms out there over Tremont street. She also stated that it still just feels awfully big and not related as well as it could be to the rest of the neighborhood. That it still looks very large but loved the change in exterior colors and the efforts made to have it fit in. Commissioner Hoffman had no comments. Commissioner Genovese was still concerned about the scale of the project and that it still feels too large and looming over the brownstones. Commissioner Genovese couldn't think of another example where a brownstone is directly abutting a four story building, that there are some larger builds in the district on corners but none that directly connect to the rowhouse. Commissioner Genovese was also concerned about some of the views that show that the roofline is one straight row inline with the existing brownstones but than in other views you can see that it is a substantially larger build with a substantially higher top - not factoring in the head house - well, well above the brownstones. Commissioner Genovese felt that the setbacks only take you so far and that when it comes to scale, this goes all the way out to the edge of the property and so large compared to the scale of everything around it and that the Commissioner continues to feel concerned about this. There was no comment at this time from Commissioner Hoffman.

Joe Hanley was then given the floor to discuss the drawings presented and work the applicant has done to respond to Commissioner and staff feedback. Jason Jewhurst gave more specific comments related to this topic as well as to the comments made by the Commissioners during this hearing.

Commissioner Edraos then commented on the height of the second floor and that it was one of the jarring things about the building and makes it look institutional and not residential and that she understands that it is an institutional building but something more can be done. She expressed that the building needs to be set further back from Tremont Street.

Commissioner Genovese then echoed what Commissioner Edraos was saying and said that part of the issue was with the footprint and because it takes up the whole lot it really



looms, especially when in combination with the visual elements such as the second floor. Public Comment was then opened.

Public Comment:

Sharon Durkan, City Councilor, District 8: Conveyed her support for the project and believes that the proponents have done the requested work to integrate the project into the historic district and that the overall height of the building is diminished by adding setbacks on the fourth floor and that the architectural elements have been reconfigured to better fit with the surrounding row houses and that the work shows a real commitment to fitting in with the neighborhood. She asked the Commission to vote in support of the Chabad Center.

Mitch Hilton, lives at 59 Iroquois Street, on Mission Hill: He discussed that he has been a resident of Mission Hill for over 50 years. He is a homeowner and a retired letter carrier and former BPS School teacher. He is a past president of Mission Hill Planning Commission, past president of Mission Hill Little League, founding member of Community Alliance of Mission Hill and currently a Board member of Mission Hill Neighborhood Housing service. And also proudly Jewish and past president of his congregation in Cambridge. He has tried to encourage conversation about the proposed center in Mission Hill and has been unsuccessful. He stated that he agrees with the staff comment. He says that he greatly respects Rabbi Zarch's work within the Jewish community and wishes that the proposal were a better fit, visually and architecturally, with that historic corner of my neighborhood where it is proposed. He concurs with the views of his neighbors in the Community Alliance of Mission Hill and Mission Hill Neighborhood Housing service and the staff of the ACDC. The changes made were an improvement but they do not address the issues that the staff of the conservation district raised.

Alison Pultinas, Mission Hill Resident: Couldn't see in the plans where the building is more set back from the Tremont Street sidewalk. She hopes there will be some green space there and a deeper setback. Would be a wonderful way to show respect for 1615, because 1615 is very much overwhelmed by this building. And that if the building could be set back from where 1615 meets the sidewalk it would be such a positive for the historic district. The addition at 1613 is potentially a development site and new construction could move it back. She sees new construction at 1617 as an opportunity to improve the block by moving back from the property line.

Kevin O'Sullivan with City Councilor Erin Murphy's office: Councilor Murphy wants to reiterate her support as stated in the March 7th 2024 letter. She was also made aware of the revised plans and those bolster Councilor Murphy's support as well as continued respect



for the revisions that have been made by the proponent. Councilor Murphy continues to strongly support Chabad.

Jesse Purvis, Director of Policy for City Council President Ruthzee Louijeunet: Would like to go on record in support of the project. The Counselor feels that they have made concessions and have done a good job in updating the project to meet the guidelines and recommendations.

Rabbi Hirschy Zarchi: Stated that he was there to request a vote this evening to approve the project. He reminded the Commission about the dozen or so people who commented in favor of the project and that some had left Mission Hill because there was no Jewish community. He discussed how the project is almost to a point where it is not feasible to build. He asked that the Commission vote on this tonight and hopefully in favor. Mentioned Commissioner Edraos was in favor of the project and wished another Commission would join her. Mentioned that he felt that this was an unfair and disrespectful process. Urged the Commissioners to vote in favor of the project.

Commissioner Edraos asked to speak and corrected that she did not say that she would vote for it at the previous meeting.

Martin Weinborn, Mission Hill Resident: President of the local community alliance. He said that the group explicitly welcomed the Chabad house to the neighborhood and would be pleased to see more Jewish residents in the neighborhood and voted against it because of dimensional concerns primarily. Said that the setback helps but that he agrees with the staff and Commissioner's impression that the massing is still not right for the historical neighborhood. Agreed that the second floor looks too high. An alternative would be to remove the fourth floor.

Joshua Sydney wanted to correct the record and stated that Commissioner Edraos wanted to support the project but that she didn't want to go against her fellow Commissioners.

Commissioner Edraos disagreed.

Staff Note: 1 written public comment in favor of the project since the March hearing and one letter that offered design suggestions.

Public Comment was closed.

Commissioner Genovese was asked if she was open to further discussion with the applicant. She stated that she wasn't sure what else there was to share and that she can't



base decisions on what happens outside of the triangle and that her focus is on the rules and needs of the architectural triangle.

Joe Hanley asked for a clarification of what she meant by neighborhood.

Commissioner Genovese said needs of the architectural triangle and that she was basing her thought process on the needs of the historic district and what is appropriate for the historic district and that she is not commenting on use in any way.

Joe Hanley said that the client has been compromising for three years, willing to compromise and work with staff on the design.

Commissioner Hoffman stated that she has seen progress on the project but it sounds like there is more work to be done before it is something that she would vote to approve. She said that there were great suggestions from the community and she understands that there is a lot of support for the project but it's also important that it fit into the neighborhood and that she has heard comments about streetscape, landscaping and massing and would agree with staff that the proponents work with staff on the details of the project. From her perspective there is more work to be done.

Rabbi Hirschy Zarchi stated that he is a member of the applicant team. Said they would not be chopping off a floor. Asked for a vote tonight.

Commissioner Edras stated that someone from the neighborhood made the comment to chop off a floor, not any Commissioners.

Commissioner P. Tongue Edraos made the motion to Deny the Application without Prejudice stating that the team continue to work with staff to see what further modifications can be made, that this be done with an understanding that timing is important, and that it needs to be set back, making it appear much less massive. Commissioner K. Hoffman seconded the motion. All Commissioners voted in favor of the motion. The vote was 3-0 (Y: KG, PE, KH) (N:None) (Abs: None).

II. RATIFICATION OF MEETING MINUTES

Commissioner P. Edraos motioned to approve. Commissioner K. Genovese seconded the motion. The vote was 3-0 (Y: KG, PE, KH) (N: None) (Abs: None).

III. STAFF UPDATES



Adjourn – 7:30 PM

Commissioner P. Edraos motioned to adjourn. Commissioner K. Genovese seconded the motion. The vote was 3-0 (Y: KG, PE, KH) (N: None) (Abs: None).

DRAFT