

City of Salem Massachusetts Public Meeting Minutes

Board or Committee:	Design Review Board – Regular Meeting
Date and Time:	Wednesday, June 22, 2022, at 6:00 pm
Meeting Location:	Remote Participation via Zoom
DRB Members Present:	David Jaquith, Glenn Kennedy, Catherine Miller, Marc Perras, Helen Sides, J. Michael Sullivan, Chair Paul Durand
DRB Members Absent:	None
Others Present:	Kate Newhall-Smith
Recorder:	Colleen Brewster

Chair Paul Durand calls the meeting to order at 6:00PM. Roll call was taken.

Signs in the Urban Renewal Area

There are no sign applications to review.

Projects in the Urban Renewal Area

1. **252 Bridge Street and 32-34 Federal Street:** Design Consultation to Revise for Final Design Review – The Exchange Salem – Part 1: Redevelopment of 252 Bridge Street, the 'Crescent Lot' into a six-story mixed use building with approximately 7,325 square feet of commercial space, up to 120 residential units that will be offered at varying levels of affordability, creation of public spaces, and site improvements.

Attorney Kristin Kolick of Correnti & Darling, LLP, Ramie Schneider, Adam Stein, and Adam Giordano of WinnDevelopment, Steve Prestejohn and Brian O'Connor of Cube 3, Michael Blier and Ricardo Terra of Landworks Studio, were present to discuss the project.

Newhall-Smith provided an overview of what occurred at the June SRA meeting, stated that design revisions were made between the time of the Schematic Design approval and the filing for Final Design. The new design has no balconies and fewer step backs resulting in a more simple, flat building. While the SRA was not in favor of the proposed building design, members were generally comfortable with the site layout changes. Board members were not in favor of forwarding the proposal to the DRB as a Final Design proposal; members instead requested the DRB review the proposal and give feedback to the development team. The SRA members referred the project to the DRB as a 'design consultation' rather than Final Design review. The SRA requested two DRB meetings, this meeting in June and a second in July, before the SRA reviews the project again in August where members will consider a vote to refer the project back to the DRB for a Final Design review. She noted that July, the second of the two design consultation meetings, will be the DRB's first hybrid meeting since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. Chair Durand encouraged all Board members to be in person and requested advanced notice of who will not be present at the July meeting because an in-person quorum being required.

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Schneider stated that the project is being called The Exchange Salem. They last went before the DRB in October of 2021 for Schematic Design review, which they received approval from the SRA in November 2021. The team filed for Final Design review and went before the SRA on June 8th. She said that the SRA realized some revisions were good regarding the public realm and the site plan, but work is needed on the building massing and design.

Prestejohn presented the previously reviewed renderings and noted that the number of parking spaces increased from 57 to 60 and the exterior parking spaces were eliminated due to building height concerns and MBTA bus queuing blocking access to the spaces. The design team built in a mountable curb next to the garage entrance for people to use for move-ins and for trash pick-up. Prestejohn reviews the challenges associated with the building and site that was approved during Schematic Design Review: 1) construction costs, 2) limited viability of public spaces, 3) overall parking count, and 4) high lot coverage limiting ability to handle loading, storm water, flood resiliency, and utilities. National Grid also determined the ground floor placement of the electrical vault and generator was not viable. He reviewed their four design goals; 1) enhancing the waterfront experiences and visual connections to the waterfront, 2) strongly defining an accessible public space to enhance the city experience and strengthen the public realm, 3) reinforce the pedestrian connection to the MBTA, and 4) creating bold architecture that recognizes frontage on all directions, welcomes the public, and creates meaningful street edges.

Public Realm

Prestejohn stated that at the street level and courtyard there was a reduction in size of podium meaning less coverage of the site with a diagonal breezeway at the top of the monumental stair that frames the connection to the courthouses. Public space will be provided at both levels and various pedestrian connections were considered, including foot traffic that will go from the lower level of Bridge Street directly to the MBTA platform. At the street edge experience, they are proposing a drop-off area by widening the sidewalk, to slow down traffic on the slip ramp and create a less hostile vehicular experience. A path that leads around the lower-level pocket park as well as up the monumental stair and through the breezeway. They want to create deliberate public experiences at all the available footpaths.

O'Connor stated that at the view from North Street bridge, the angled massing moved away from the road and is now straighter with less bend. The end tower is in place but is more in line with the road rather than the site, and the façade facing the water has a cleaner volumetric structure with fewer vertical angles. From the Washington Street intersection, the cut-in massing is now a layered massing, and the form length has increased creating a stronger and rhythmic linear arcade along the street edge. The massing pulls forward and backward along that line for some delineation. From the water, the levels of the monumental stair changed to meet the new form, the overhanging deck and podium is now a large open linear public plaza creating both the stair and overhang. The overlook plaza, stair and ramp no longer end abruptly, and the stair and ramp that follow the same path with the public space above. The lower pathway wraps around to the MBTA garage and platform. From the breezeway at the

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top of the stairs there will be an immediate view to the courthouses and the Washington Street intersection as well as a direct view to the water and north Salem.

Landscape

Blier stated that the strategy was to create a continuous urban landscape connecting Bridge Street with the MBTA with tangible and longer connections. Salem has a series of long connections, and this new strategy adds to that network with a continuous move from Bridge to a more public space at the bottom level to anchor the project, and active social spaces at each level. The salvaged granite slabs will be repurposed from their previous use at the railroad and the ecology will be built upon along the riverbank. The continuous landscape now moves through the building and anchors it, activates the spaces, and makes them warm and inviting with interesting materials and local plantings. They've created a gateway and connection to Washington Street that settles the building to its context.

Miller noted that the ramp was previously split between a stair and ramp and asked if the ramp was widened. Mr. Blier replied that the placement of the shared use walkway is more convenient, and the width remains at 14-feet. Miller asked if the lower sidewalk was partially covered by the building above. Prestejohn replied yes. Miller asked if the vehicular traffic entrance for the garage has changed. Prestejohn replied no. Miller stated that the salvaged granite reuse is good, and she hopes some are large enough for pedestrians to sit upon, and the bottom of the steps still pinch and seem narrow. Jaquith agreed and suggested they straighten the end and direct it towards North Salem. Prestejohn replied that the bottom of stair can pivot, and the lower-level paving is being treated as park and one area would also be a loading zone.

Miller asked if grass was being placed on the higher level. Blier replied that part of the retail area is proposed as artificial turf for outdoor yoga. Miller noted that she is not in favor of the use of turf and suggested a rubber playground material or an inlaid deck made of wood that's warm and inviting. Blier noted that they want to reinforce the vibrancy of the retail. Miller stated that good circulation is proposed, and the site work looks great.

Perras agreed with the concerns with pinching down the bottom of the stair, noted that the low slope means the ramp is a sloped walk and asked how someone leaving the retail spaces that is in a wheelchair would access it. Prestejohn replied that they would need to travel back to the top of the sloped walk at the edge. Perras noted that the lack of space to include a slip back ramp and suggested clear direction on elevator access. He asked about the use of the Bridge Street drop-off area. Prestejohn replied that no move-in will be allowed, only mail and retail deliveries and resident drop-off and pick up. Schneider added that the USPS and feedback from city staff discussion informed the design, which will also slow traffic on the slip ramp. Allowing food deliveries, mail package delivery will also make this entry feel more residential and work as a front door to the building. No trash collection will be allowed at this location.

Kennedy noted that the SRA sent this back to the DRB to discuss that the entire building design that has changed, not to discuss the landscape, the monumental stair, and a

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drop-off area. He believed the board is missing the purpose of this review. Chair Durand agreed and noted the façade design concerns need to be addressed. Kennedy questioned the challenges faced by the developer and design team and why did the building change from the ground up. He asked if more units were proposed and what factors drove such significant changes. O'Connor replied that the changes occurred for several key reasons; the site layout changed due to drainage and stormwater accommodations, service access concerns, where they wanted the stairs to lead within the public realm, and construction challenges. Sullivan stated that the overall architectural characteristics and the playfulness are gone, and the building now lacks interest. The aesthetic change to remove the interesting elements could be reinvested with other changes that have to do with stormwater. The changes made are night and day between the Schematic Design and the current project.

Kennedy asked if finances changed the building and noted that while he personally doesn't mind the new building, he doesn't like it on this parcel since it's become more monumental above, takes over more space than the previous building, is higher than the building across the street and protrudes significantly on either end. Schneider replied that since their 2021 pricing a \$10M budget increase occurred, and they needed to react accordingly by creating a building they could afford to construct. It's a different building because they had to rethink the geometry and building massing. While they can't afford the previous building, there are some enhancements to the new design that can be incorporated. There is still work to be done, they can't go to the last design, but they need something in the middle. Kennedy noted that the massing makes the building feel more visually prominent no matter the color. O'Connor stated that they want to hear these visceral gut reactions to new building.

Perras stated that the DRB was pleased with the previous building, and he prefers the narrow building rather than the blockier version that was further from the intersection. The previous had a playfulness between the upper and lower tiers and the balconies created depth and that's a loss since there are no color panels either. Regular fenestration is not good for this site because it creates too much mass, a variation and a depth can exist but will be a more difficult façade to build. The previous detail elements had the grey massing pulling away but in the new version they are aligned, so there is no longer a slipping of volumes, and all of these are solvable. The ground floor has improved, and the rest of the building can too, they need to make the current version as good as it can be rather than commenting on elements that have been lost. The current design feels monolithic, and it should be pushed back. He encouraged the exploration of wrapping the façade and a varied window alignment. Jaquith agreed.

Sides stated that she is very disappointed with the current design and agreed with Perras that the prior project had something different at each corner and that's been lost. The proposed is so flat and the materials are flush, so it loses the power it once had. There is all one material, but more variation is needed. It's also taller at the corner and she liked the changes at the roofline because it will be harder to make those transitions with a narrower building. At the Washington Street façade, the wood siding wraps the entire lower corner and that was once the most interesting corner. Color should be introduced in another way; the vertical material was shown on the columns and that

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looks odd, but it may be the regular shape rather than the irregular shape previously used.

Jaquith agreed with Perras, prefers the new roofline, and agreed with the wrapping at the corner. They should play with windows, perhaps add bays to break up the length, but a longer and thinner building could work well on site.

Perras stated that the overarching element was something they haven't seen in Salem, it was unique and customized, and the new building doesn't feel that way. It looks like something we've seen before, and Salem deserves better. They need to bring some of that ingenuity back.

Kennedy stated that understanding that pricing increased they shouldn't settle for a building because of what's going on now. O'Connor suggested they play more with the skin and noted that they didn't want to develop more options until they discussed the changes and heard concerns.

Sullivan noted that landscaping and the site has improved, but they need to reintroduce some of that interest. The previous design of the façade facing the river invited people to the river; this façade can seemingly be improved without too much financial burden. The previous design resembled a boat arriving in Salem and the mass needs that visual interest again. They've shown their ability to create that interest based on the uniqueness and character of the building approved through Schematic Design. He added that the lower park and monumental stair design have improved.

Miller requested they eliminate the oversized signage from the building rendering.

Chair Durand preferred the previous North Street bridge façade that turned towards the bridge, and it would invite better views from North Salem. He also liked the previous proportions and noted that the current design lacked detail. The previous Washington Street elevation was playful and quirky but wide and he thinks the narrower building is proportionally pleasing. The darker look could be proportioned better, and the ends could be treated similarly making them more appealing. The riverfront façade changes are understandable, but it lacks dynamic details. There may be too much focus on pedestrian experience that realistically may not happen. He preferred the look of the previous ramp that reached more towards North Salem, but he was fine with new ramp and stairs.

Perras noted the proportion of glass in the gray zones where the glass size was reduced for cost savings but the grey massing and proportion of the solid above is now more obvious.

Chair Durand asked about the roof top changes and suggested pulling back the railing away from the roof edge. Prestejohn noted the placement of a rooftop deck above. O'Connor replied that the railing won't come to the corner and the North Street bridge façade won't be flat.

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Public Comment:

Newhall-Smith stated that the following public comments were received on June 22nd before 4PM.

- Steve Kapantais, 23A Wisteria Street.
- Historic Salem, Inc. (HSI), 9 North Street.
- Deborah Prentice, 16 Hardy Street
- Zack Weeks, 123 North Street
- Richard Lindeman, 113 Federal Street
- Donna Seger, 7 Chestnut Street
- Flora Tonthat, 30 Northey Street

Emily Udy, HSI. The community in general is united in their thoughts on this project and they have considered the pros and cons. Pro's such as the more elegant site plan. This shows trust in the process to let go of the first plan since it won't work, and they look forward to new creative effort with the new plan. There are many ways to make the windows playful, they don't need to recreate the window pattern but should look to downtown Salem for window patterns that will add context to this building, as the Brix design did by studying existing window patterns. Halstead at Salem is not downtown but has interesting elements that differ from the residential buildings and creates interest. The design team should look at the layout of the retail that should be at the corner of Bridge Street rather than tucked behind the building. They are appreciative of the Bridge Street elevation, but they should pay attention to the pedestrian level because this is an opportunity to review the slip ramp design.

Victoria Ricciadelo, 5 Foster Street. Attended the SRA meeting where the consensus was a strong dislike for this building. She asked 1) With so much time and effort spent reviewing the previous design that was agreed upon, why this changed at the last minute since we've been in an inflationary period for a while so it should have been considered earlier. 2) If there were additional housing units that hasn't been discussed. 3) Including an elevator to the lower level, which she also asked about at the SRA meeting. 4) Where a HC area to drop off a passenger would be location and noting the lack of HC spaces near the MBTA. 5) Who can park below the building since Salem is losing many public parking spaces because of this project. She believed this project doesn't belong or represent Salem.

Newhall-Smith stated that design changes won't change the existing access to the upper or lower levels of the MBTA garage.

Polly Wilbert, 7 Cedar Street. Wished the Board could be more engaged in having the context of downtown Salem relate to the rest of the downtown, since there is no reference to it in the new design. Residents are drawn to the historic character and this building belongs in Cleveland and isn't respectful of the things in Salem that have become timeless. The Board should be considerate of the value placed on structures that have been here because it will be jarring to see this as one of the first buildings

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when you enter Salem. There is also no reference to the character of the existing commercial buildings that the City Council requested be included in the new design, and the new building must stand the test of time.

Tim Obert, 170 Federal Street. Asked the Board to work with the designer to see the plans before the day of the meeting so the public can provide feedback.

Liz Bradt, 22 Larchmont Road. This is her first time seeing the design and she hopes it is HC accessible. She is shocked to see such a huge building, but in favor of constructing a building and providing affordable housing since she's lost employees because they couldn't afford to live in Salem. She preferred the angularity of the previous design which creates interest and had angular footings. She suggested enlarging the windows because the gray massing reminds her of the Salem Jail. She suggested bringing back the balconies because the design reminds her of the alley of 5 or 6 story buildings along Rantoul Street. She is glad they are working on the design, and Historic Salem, Inc. is good but there should be some pop, this doesn't need to be a redo of a 150-year-old design.

No one else in the assembly wished to speak.

Jaquith: Motion to continue. Seconded by: Sides.

Roll Call: Jaquith, Kennedy, Miller, Perras, Sides, Sullivan, and Durand were in favor. Passes 7-0.

Perras requested materials for the next in-person meeting. Newhall-Smith replied that applicants required to be in-person needs to be determined since some consultants can be remote for the hybrid meeting. She noted that the applicant is aware that a materials board is needed for the final design, but materials may not be available by the July DRB meeting.

Projects Outside the Urban Renewal Area

There are no projects outside the Urban Renewal area to review.

New / Old Business

1. Salem Historic Commission's 2022 Design Guidelines Notebook Update

Newhall-Smith stated that Patti Kelleher led this project with a consultant and the SHC. She noted that she references the guidelines for each new application and sent the link to the DRB. Jaquith stated that these are the best guidelines on the North Shore, it might be long, but the information is good and should be considered. Sides agreed and added that this is the most comprehensive guide.

2. Approval of Minutes: **a. May 25, 2022**

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Sides: Motion to approve the May 25, 2022, regular meeting minutes. Seconded by: Jaquith.

Roll Call: Jaquith, Kennedy, Miller, Perras, Sides, Sullivan, and Durand were in favor. Passes 7-0.

3. Staff Updates, if any:

Perras stated that the window signage at Ascend on the Essex Street pedestrian mall has been installed, the applicant was supposed to return to the DRB for review of their signage prior to installing their blade sign but their blade sign has been installed. He reviewed the meeting minutes, and at a minimum they were supposed to submit their paperwork. Newhall-Smith replied that she never issued the permit because she was waiting for their documentation, but she will contact the business owner and sign maker.

Newhall-Smith stated that outdoor dining is ongoing but next year when the COVID-19 allowances aren't an option everything will return to normal. She will reach out to businesses using sidewalks and along the pedestrian mall before those occupying parking spaces, to let them know they will have to go through the SRA and DRB review process for outdoor dining in 2023. Chair Durand asked if this would affect the licensing board. Newhall-Smith replied yes, restaurants with alcohol service need to go to the state board for approval to extend their liquor license area as well as code compliance with the building department related to the number of bathrooms vs. number of seats. Perras asked if the accessibility needs would be reviewed and noted that the conditions have improved this year vs. 2021. Miller suggested applicant begin applying this fall so the Boards aren't overwhelmed with applications and applicants can plan for any plan modifications.

Miller asked about the possibility of an extension for remote meetings. Newhall-Smith replied that she heard of possible continuation until the end of the 2022. Chair Durand noted that remote meetings are easier and more effective. Kennedy added that while an extension has been suggested to the governor, and it would only go to the end of the year and not past his term. Newhall-Smith agreed to investigate an extension of remote meetings.

Adjournment

Sides: Motion to adjourn. Seconded by: Jaquith.

Roll Call: Jaquith, Kennedy, Miller, Perras, Sides, Sullivan, and Durand were in favor. Passes 7-0.

Meeting is adjourned at 7:45PM.

Know your rights under the Open Meeting Law M.G.L. c. 30A §18-25 and City Ordinance Sections 2-028 through 2-203