

Lawrence Preservation Alliance

P.O. BOX 1073 • LAWRENCE, KANSAS 66044

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CITY MANAGERS OFFICE
LAWRENCE, KS

DIRECTORS

12-30-2007

DENNIS BROWN
PRESIDENT

MARY BURCHILL

City Commissioners:

VIRGIL DEAN

KATE DINNEEN

The following is text of a statement I made to the Historic Resources Commission on December 20:

ERNIE ECK
CO-TREASURER

MIKE GOANS

PAT KEHDE

SANDY MCKENZIE

NICOLE SABATINI
VICE-PRESIDENT

GREG SEIBEL

MICHAEL SHAW

The opinion of the LPA board on the Oread Inn proposal hasn't changed. We agree with your previous ruling that the project as designed will damage and encroach upon the two National Historic Districts it sits in the environs of, particularly the Hancock District, primarily because of height and mass.

We agree with staff that the project could have been designed in a way to meet the financial goals of the applicant while minimizing harm to the Historic Districts.

DALE SLUSSER
CO-TREASURER

MARY LYNN STUART
SECRETARY

REV. VERDELL TAYLOR JR.

If at this late date such a redesign were to take place, LPA would be happy to have representatives take part in the process, but we recognize that at this point the developer might not be willing to backtrack the design process to that extent.

CAROL VON TERSCH

MIKE WILDGEN

DENNIS DOMER
EMERITUS

MARCI FRANCISCO
EMERITUS

If as we suspect your current task as presented by the City Commission is to more or less tweak the design in attempts to soften and minimize the damage to the Historic Districts, we certainly encourage you to do as much as you can and we strongly support your efforts. However, unless reductions in height or mass are on the table for discussion, we offer no opinion as to what those design changes might be.

I will note that the LPA opinion on this throughout has been a strong majority but not unanimous: two members who live in the Oread Neighborhood and who served on the neighborhood subcommittee that worked with the



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applicant disagree with the majority. As we have since the very beginning, we will state that we appreciate the developer working with the neighbors. Whether preservation interests were represented by that subcommittee, we have a disagreement among public policy advocates who usually agree. The neighbors, in my view, won concessions for their neighborhood, and perhaps made preservation gains elsewhere, but at the expense of preservation interests at this specific property.

We know for instance that there is a handshake agreement with the developer to renovate and not demolish the Oread Apartments and the house to the south. LPA is concerned about those properties too, but we note that those aren't included in this agenda item. Those are future agenda items and we hope everything works out, but if the developer's idea of preserving those properties is drastically different from LPA's, we will be back at the appropriate time to provide public comment.

The neighbors hope that the infusion of capital on the site of an admittedly already-damaged environs area will spur quality preservation-minded property upgrades within and around the district itself.

Again we can only hope they are right, and that the reverse doesn't prove to be true. We note that there are right now pushes for demolitions to two significant properties in the general environs area, not to suggest a direct correlation, but just to state that the area is vulnerable, and we note that the applicant has inquired about purchasing the ECM building, a listable property directly across the street from the hotel site.

These neighbors are also backing this proposal at least in part from fear that if it fails something worse could get approved there. Again LPA must state that this design proposal is what's on the table now and it should be evaluated on its own merits using the same guidelines you use to evaluate other projects.

If in conclusion there are lessons to be learned from this experience, I can offer at least a few.

First, neighborhood interests don't always perfectly coincide with preservation interests regarding infill development in historic areas. Early on in the process, preservation expertise not connected to the neighborhood needs to be involved before the design gets too far along.

Further, approval by individual neighbors who support preservation interests should not be construed by the applicants as a trump card for the review process set forth by the state and this city in Historic Preservation Ordinances.

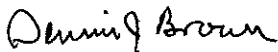
Third, no applicant should ever harbor the idea that the HRC review process is a meaningless exercise on their way to an automatic overturn by the City Commission. Certainly the scope of review by these two bodies is different, and sometimes overturns will happen, (although hopefully not often on a unanimous vote of the HRC), but it is very important that applicants and City Commissioners alike understand the significance of HRC decisions.

Fourth, while a direction to work with the Architectural Review Committee (ARC), is normally part of an approval process by HRC, LPA would suggest, as we did in this case, that there are times when ARC oversight can improve a project even though the final HRC action will be a likely denial. Those changes that could minimize or soften harm to cultural resources aren't going to happen at the City Commission level. Who better to suggest those changes than the ARC, and perhaps ARC involvement should not be offered but demanded.

Finally, an applicant's belief that he has a quality design should not overrule the basic tenants of appropriate historic design. Whether some can accept it or not, LPA firmly believes that there are profitable, exciting design alternatives when working with infill development in and around Historic Districts. Historic design review should not be construed as a speedbump to run over or a roadblock to circumvent. New design which successfully integrates with cultural resources in its midst will ultimately be seen as more successful than those designs which do not.

We do believe that this applicant and every member of his design team had good intentions here and are every proud of their design. We wish them and the neighbors the best. However, we would suggest that in the future this applicant incorporate into his design team a preservation design professional who understands the historic landscape as an exciting challenge and not something to be overcome or worse yet, ignored.

Sincerely,



Dennis J Brown
president