

Northwest Quadrant Study Committee
Notes from Workshop with Historic District Review Board
May 20, 2009

Attending: Palmer, Bellew, Smalley, Gadson, Hefner, Pinkerton

Absent: Goode

Historic District Review Board: Huddy, Weidner, Estes

Absent: Newman

Public: Thompson, Holman, Ivy, Holman

Palmer: HRB process protects us. Seven voting members of our committee. We have a complex challenge; every house is a separate story. What's different this time? Our Mayor is committed to it!

Gadson: Introduction of HRB. Overview of membership requirements and how we got here. The ordinance change has been withdrawn until the committee returns with recommendations to Council. This seems directed toward the NW Q particularly. NWQ seems to have been identified as a location for development. Explanation of demolition process.

Discussion among those attending.

Palmer: Is there some recommendation we could present that would make the HRB's job easier?

Huddy: A document to help someone through the process would be helpful, perhaps a flow chart. A Design Center would be great.

Hefner: Preservation Committee of HBF is working on brochures and also one for realtors. We have been tasked with coming up with this proposal. The HRB is doing a good job. Major development wants to eliminate the HRB and destroy the historic district – NWQ.

Weidner: We on the HRB are not ideologues. We are practical.

Bellew: Where does this perception come from?

Estes: It comes from people who can publicize their experience – larger developers in particular.

Huddy: We strive for appropriateness no matter who the applicant is. We do not always do what is politically popular.

Hefner: We need an evaluation of the Q, with HBF, identifying the “keepers” and “goers” to develop new replacement structures – conceptual plans.

Gadson: Time has changed. There is still a process to follow. We could use some of the recommendation in the new Preservation Plan to go back to Council. 100 days may not be enough time. Ultimately, we must respect the community that is the NWQ.

Estes: Our guidelines work.

Palmer: It has been asked, if a house is beyond hope of saving, can the footprint be maintained?

Huddy: Zoning may be a hindrance to this. Our guidelines do work.

Thompson: Can the zoning ordinance be changed to give the HRB authority to act as the ZBOA for historic district? This would be a “one stop shop concept”.

Weidner: It seems we need a study of the NWQ to identify traditional development features and then make that a zoning code for the NWQ.

Hefner: This is a form based code. Keep character, enhance character. Lanes exist and can be utilized. What can be built today with the current zoning may not be what is best for the neighborhood.

Bellew: Do we need a new zoning overlay?

Huddy: Fire issues may be a problem. It is always easier to start with a clean slate, as in a new development. This is very complex but it can be done.

Thompson: Term limits on the HRB should be staggered so that all board members don't go off at the same time. This helps with continuity and consistency of decisions.

Ivy: Where would check and balances be? A new overlay would provide the legal check and balance

Hefner: How can we write an ordinance to save the neighborhood?

Gadson: We ask that people look at the context. We should look at the character of the existing neighborhood. The character is what we are trying to save.

Hefner: Once there was a community of people. We want to keep it as a community.

Huddy: What is allowed is an issue. We as architects do have opportunities to be creative and explore alternative development. It becomes more of a challenge in the NWQ.

Weidner: Development at Duke and Harrington seems to be a good new model of higher density that is appropriate for the neighborhood.

Thompson: HBF has partnered with Coastal Conservation to study the 4 center blocks in the NWQ to come up with a form based code based on the 1924 Sanborn Map. We have restored 2 houses in this area. We will look at maintaining the alley and this could be a guide for future development in the NWQ.

Smalley; Were there any variances required to build the project at Duke and Harrington?

Huddy: Our firm was involved in the project. No variances were required.

Hefner: There is some historic evidence that houses fronted alleys. A service alley would help clean up the streetscape.

Estes: Henrietta Goode did not like the project at Duke and Harrington. She seemed to think the houses were out of scale.

Huddy: We need to allow density that is appropriate.

Palmer: I support giving the HRB more teeth.

Smalley: The ordinance change to not allow flag lots seems to be an impediment to development and density.

Huddy: I agree. Flag lots seem appropriate for this neighborhood.

Hefner: Trees are very important to this neighborhood and should be maintained. Design new houses around the grand trees.

Weidner: Duplexes were built in the district historically.

Thompson: Shows a 1924 Sanborn map with coding that shows how many structures have been demolished and the ones on the vacant and abandoned list. We must save what is left.

Huddy: Small houses are popular again.

Thompson: Incentives for keeping carbon footprint small may be a good plan.

Palmer: We can recommend anything we wish to Council.

Bellew: This neighborhood is unique. It will be complicated.

Ivy: HRB has had a unique perspective in reviewing NWQ projects. What are your observations?

Weidner: Guidelines suggest appropriate measures. Sometimes folks can't afford to follow these. Substandard property kills vitality of adjacent properties. We need to secure houses until we can figure it out. Mothballing is done well in Savannah.

Huddy; Minor projects or Conceptual Review could be initiated in some way by the HRB having a weekly informal meeting with prospective applicants to give board feedback about projects. Much like the City's pre-application meetings.

Estes: It would require full board attendance to be fair to applicants.

Palmer: It would be good if this meeting could be held in the NWQ.

Smalley: Did the projects at 800 block of Newcastle require anything special to happen?

Huddy; These went through full public hearing for demolition and final review of new houses. One house has received final. The other house is being re-designed to be more appropriate for the neighborhood.

Gadson: The NWQ has some folks who can afford to rehab if they had assistance with the loan process. Many residents are afraid. We need to work hard to get a Design Center.

Bellew: There are financing vehicles available.

Huddy; More flexibility is needed in lot size, house types and setbacks.

Hefner: Does the HRB feel pressure from the City?

Weidner: The HRB was left out of the Block By Block process or brought in at the last minute. I think some of the work was sub-standard as a result.

Thompson: NWQ is not consistent in its development patterns. Bladen has many blocks that could be redeveloped at once. This could become an entire block of identical houses. The area around the Education buildings on King is another example. We need long range visioning for those areas. Historic Savannah's new director has extended an invitation for us to see a neighborhood they have worked on with some success. We could plan a field trip.

Huddy; To be affordable, we need to be able to put several 800SF houses on one lot. Use is another issue it seems.

Palmer: We will have to craft appropriate language in our recommendations to Council.

Gadson: I invite all of you to come to next Tuesday's Comprehensive Plan Advisory Committee meeting in the Wachovia Room at 2:00. Final Draft will be presented and the NWQ is targeted as a redevelopment opportunity.

Palmer: Next committee meeting will be tomorrow at 5:00 at Mayor's office. Thank you all for coming.

Adjourned at 6:50PM

Notes taken by Donna S. Alley