

**LIBERTY HISTORIC DISTRICT REVIEW COMMISSION**  
**Meeting Summary**  
**January 16, 2024**  
**5:00 pm**  
**City Council Chambers**

Roll Call: Paemon Aramjoo, Linda Armstrong, John Carr, Kathy Chelton, Vern Drottz, Aimee Gray, Matt Grundy, Brett Rinker, Katie Schmidt

Present: Paemon Aramjoo, Linda Armstrong, Kathy Chelton, Vern Drottz, Aimee Gray, Matt Grundy, Katie Schmidt

Absent: John Carr, Brett Rinker

Applicants: Henry Klover & Vu Le (Klover Architects), Tim Harris & Paul Jenness (Star Development)

Staff Present: Katherine Sharp, Director of Planning & Development; Jeanine Thill, Community Development Manager

Members of the Public in Audience: 1

Chairman Grundy called the meeting to order at 5:00 p.m.

Approval of Meeting Summary from December 5, 2023 - A motion was made by Commissioner Gray to approve the meeting minutes as corrected, to note Chairman Grundy was absent from the December 5, 2023 meeting. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Chelton. The motion passed 4-0-3 (Armstrong, Grundy, and Schmidt abstained due to absence).

**Current Business**

- Ms. Sharp explained that this work session is an opportunity to give Star Development, the owners of the lots at North Water and East Kansas, feedback on their concept for new construction at this location. This study session is the first step in the process. The applicant will come back to HDRC with a complete application for HDRC to review and HDRC's recommendation will go to the Planning & Zoning Commission, and the City Council will be the final approval, then they would apply for building permits.
- Henry Klover, Klover Architects, architect for the project, showed a presentation and explained that the concept is to put retail on the street level with multi-level of condominiums on the upper floors. He shared excerpts of Design Guidelines from a historic district in Washington DC, that state new construction should not try to duplicate historic buildings, as it would create false sense of history. He said they have incorporated design elements from adjacent buildings into the design of the new building. He shared concept images showing some design elements from other downtown Liberty buildings such as steel lintels", window patterns, and stone and brick on the facades of the proposed building. They are proposing rhythmic repeating bays and a monumental base for human scale. They were conscious of the height of the

surrounding buildings and of the proposed new building. The surrounding buildings are 47 ft and 50 feet tall, he stated that the new building would be one story taller. There is a proposed patio area allowing for ADA and single level access. There will be parking underneath the building for the 33 units for condos. They are here to answer any questions that the Commission may have.

- Commissioner Gray asked what proposed variances they plan to request, other than height. Ms. Sharp said any variance would be considered by the Planning Commission.
- There is a three-story maximum height in this zoning district, Central Business District (CBD). The height of 4 stories would require a variance request with public hearings at Planning & Zoning Commission and City Council.

Commissioner Gray shared images showing the scale of the proposed building in comparison to the previous buildings and also shared the following points verbally and in writing, from the Secretary of Interior Standards and the UDO:

#### THE SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR'S STANDARDS

- New addition, exterior alterations, or related new construction shall not destroy historic materials that characterize the property.
- The new work shall be differentiated from the old and shall be compatible with the massing, size, scale, and architectural features to protect the historic integrity of the property and its environment.

#### LIBERTY UDO DESIGN PRINCIPLES

- New construction shall maintain the visual style and character of the surrounding neighborhood and;
- New construction and additions shall complement the setbacks, building scale, parking, building and garage orientation of the neighborhood. 30-72.1: New buildings should not duplicate older styles of architecture but must be compatible with the architecture of the district. Scale, placement on lots, and street setback must conform to the scale, placement, and setback of adjacent structures, especially in the context of rows of buildings and streetscapes. Styles of architecture will be controlled only to ensure that their design, materials, and colors are in harmony with neighboring structures.
- New construction within a historic district shall be held to the same principles of quality design and appropriateness that are required of all structures and properties within the designated historic districts.
- New construction should not emulate a historic building but should reflect the contributing elements and character of the streetscape, neighborhood, and historic district.
- Fenestration: Windows and doors on new construction shall have proportions and patterns similar to the historic patterns within the streetscape and block. Ranking and window pattern and profile of existing structures within the streetscape shall be respected.

- Building scale: New buildings shall be constructed with an overall height similar to existing buildings within the streetscape. In addition, the floor-to-floor height, number of stories, and first floor elevation shall also be similar to existing buildings within the streetscape. Vertical and horizontal proportions shall also be maintained.
- Height: Maximum 35 feet or 2 1/2 stories, except that on lots having a natural slope, a full 3 stories may be exposed above grade on the downhill side.
- Architectural details: Architectural details on new construction shall be compatible in terms of design and scale with details found within the streetscape and district.
- Downtown Liberty Square is designated as a local historic district. Many of the buildings, which date from about 1875, have retained much of their historic integrity. Most of the buildings have features associated with traditional commercial designs. Ground level floors of the buildings are oriented to pedestrians, with large display windows designed to showcase the merchandise and services offered for sale inside. In Liberty, most commercial buildings are two stories, although there are a few exceptions.

Ms. Sharp said the guideline information on height is referencing a residential height. That the CBD Zoning is 3 stories.

Mr. Klover commented that a certain amount of density is needed to make the project work financially, so that is why they pushed it up to another level.

- Chairman Grundy commented that the new proposed building would be higher than the Courthouse. The Courthouse is higher elevation wise, it is forty-eight feet and the new building is proposed to be fifty feet tall. From the East Kansas elevation, it would be considerably higher.
- Commissioner Armstrong commented it would be helpful to see elevations that show continuity between the new construction and existing structures. If they could provide elevations from several perspectives, from North Water and from Kansas Street, it would be helpful. Ms. Sharp said that when they submit their application, there would be more details.
- Commissioner Drottz said he can understand that it isn't going to look historic. He added that this Commission is in place to save buildings. He feels that there should have been an effort to save the buildings, or at least the facades. Ms. Sharp reminded the group that 7 & 9 N Water have been deemed dangerous by the Chief Building Official following a report by a third-party structural engineer and therefore will be demolished. Commissioner Drottz commented that it was not a good decision, adding that he feels the buildings could have been saved. Ms. Sharp reminded the group that the purpose of this meeting it to provide the architects with feedback on the concept plan.
- Ms. Sharp said that the Commission will have opportunity to review the 1960's GM Peters building, however this cannot be discussed at this meeting because legal notice must be published and a public hearing held when an application for demolition in the historic district is received. That application will come before HDRC, but a formal application for demolition has not been received. Tonight's meeting is the opportunity to discuss the design elements of any new construction and give them constructive feedback prior to the submittal of the formal application.

- Commissioner Aramjoo said he feels like people will think that this new proposed building is grandiose. He asked if it can be divided up so it doesn't look like one large building. He suggested that it look less modern. He appreciates having more retail space downtown. He added that parking would be needed for the condos.
- Commissioner Armstrong suggested that if the west elevation would provide a bridge visually between this and the other buildings that would be helpful. At the Presbyterian Church they did the transition well between older sections of the building and newer additions. If it could look more integrated that would be ideal.
- Chairman Grundy said it's a neat looking building, but it is a gigantic building. This is much bigger and wider and doesn't seem to fit in with the other buildings on the square.
- Commissioner Schmidt agreed that it doesn't seem to fit with the other buildings.
- Commissioner Gray said the massing is over scaled in width and height. Materials that are delineated would be nice to help it feel like individual store fronts. It is two stories taller than City Hall. Scale and architectural detail, should complement the surrounding buildings. The inset balconies don't feel right. The windows around the square are punched. The deep overhang with wood is very modern and does not fit, wood materials have been denied in the commercial area in the past. The store front glazing feels out of proportion. There isn't a precedent for stone above foundation level in the Liberty Square Historic District area. The seating area and outdoor patio is nice but it needs additional detail.
- Referring to one of the concept images, Commissioner Gray said the cornice at the More Excuses building (2 N. Main) is a very large cornice, but is not an overhang as depicted in the concept images. She added that the wood on the new building isn't appropriate.
- Commissioner Gray added that the building will feel even taller on Kansas, it will be 3 stories taller than the brewery. She feels the color use, brick and masonry are all appropriate. The detail needs to be broken down horizontally and vertically. She said it would feel like it is overpowering the Courthouse and the City Hall. It doesn't feel right.
- Chairman Grundy said if the cornice doesn't stick out as massively as it does, it would help.
- Mr. Klover was asked how tall the windows would be. He said they would be about 10 feet on the top floor and the other stories would be 9 feet.
- Commissioner Armstrong said she appreciates the project having parking.
- Ms. Sharp said there will be a pre-application meeting on Thursday and the Public Works director, our ADA compliance officer, will be at the meeting.
- Commissioner Chelton asked if the parking would be exclusive for the residents. Mr. Klover said yes. Ms. Sharp said parking is not required for businesses in the downtown.
- Commissioner Armstrong said addressing creative compatibility on all elevations would be helpful.
- Commissioner Chelton said she is thrilled something is happening at the vacant site. But her first reaction to this concept was that we put a Johnson County building on our historic square. She has an appreciation for maintaining the historic feel with a façade that blends.

- Chairman Grundy said we want to see something happen at this location, but it needs to fit in with the historic district.
- Tim Harris, Star Development, said they have other plans in downtown Liberty and this will tie in well. He said for years people have been asking what can we do to bring people to downtown. This will bring people downtown. He added that in Bozeman, MT they are doing a project just like this, there are people walking around and its exciting.
- Mr. Klover said they will discuss and go back to the drawing board however, there are some things that won't make the project viable.

#### Other Business:

- Ralph Brandt said he is glad that something is happening and thanked the Commission for their work.

#### Miscellaneous matters from the Commission:

- Commissioner Drottz asked how many of the other Commissioners are okay with the other two building coming down and how we can avoid this in the future.
- Commissioner Schmidt said it feels bad that it all happened so fast. It doesn't feel like there was an opportunity to offer other options.
- Ms. Sharp said 7 & 9 N Water didn't have City ownership until recently. The City wanted to get a developer to come in and do an RFP. In the meantime, Star Development bought the properties.
- Staff had been monitoring the buildings to make sure another collapse doesn't occur and 7 N. Water was shored up. MDNR and the demolition company will be involved. They have to follow strict rules. We did not think this was going to happen when it did, it all happened right around Christmas, when we got the structural engineers report.
- Commissioner Drottz said he is embarrassed that this is happening in our City, adding that we could have saved these buildings. He asked why aren't we issuing citations to people that should be fixing their buildings.
- Chairman Grundy asked if we have any ability to require people to cover a façade in an effort to save buildings, can preventative action be required, does the city have the ability to do something about this? Ms. Sharp said that 7 N. Water was shored and monitored while the court cases were in progress over several years. The level deterioration was immense since the last time a structural engineer looked at the buildings. The engineer said there was daylight through the bricks. These bricks were not for external walls and were not intended to be exposed to the elements.
- Ms. Sharp said that when they take down the dangerous buildings there will be a demolition plan, they will be required to cover the wooden trusses on the adjacent building to the north, for example.
- Ms. Sharp said the reason she had the applicant come forward now with the concept plan for the new construction was to have them get feedback from the Commission on

how it might fit in the historic district before they put all the time and effort into the formal submittal

- Commissioner Gray asked about the process. Ms. Sharp said the Planning Commission is a recommending body. HDRC sometimes approves and sometimes recommends, with new construction HDRC makes a recommendation. The City Council has final approval.  
For a variance there is a public hearing. It won't come back through the process unless City Council denies the variance. Then it would come back to HDRC.
- Ms. Sharp added that because it's new construction, now we have to meet ADA. We have to match the grade of the street.

Miscellaneous matters from Staff:

- Staff will send the minutes drafted to the Commission for review. Staff will also send the Commission the Washington DC Design Guidelines, referenced in the applicant's presentation.
- Commissioner Armstrong asked if there are other CLG's in Missouri that might have processes in place that offer a more measured and controllable method for monitoring a buildings' decline in certain phases.

The meeting adjourned at 6:24 pm.