

Memorandum

From: 30 WEST HIGHLAND SUB-COMMITTEE
Date: 12 April 2021
Subject: 30 WEST HIGHLAND AVENUE DEVELOPMENT PROPOSAL

The Sub-committee of the Development Review Committee was charged with detailed evaluation of the 30 West Highland Development proposal. The Applicant proposes a zoning variance to allow residential development. The development proposal is to demolish the existing building and construct eight four-story townhouses, in buildings of six and two units, each with garages for two cars.

Issues

There were three primary issues discussed by the sub-committee with the Applicant and his architect:

1. Fate of the existing building, which is a “contributing” structure in the Chestnut Hill National Register Historic District.
2. Compatibility of the proposed development with the adjacent context.
3. Operational issues.

Issue 1: Fate of the Existing Building

Since the building is not on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places, it is not protected from demolition, even without the requested zoning variance.

The reasons that the Applicant and his architect have given for removing the building come down to three:

- The building is not suitable for residential re-use.
- There is a very weak current market for commercial uses, and any reuse of the building presents a myriad of problems.
- Retention of the building on the site compromises the development of the remainder of the property.

For these reasons the Applicant decided not to retain the existing building.

Issue 2: Compatibility with the Neighborhood

Discussions of compatibility focused on the height, bulk, and density of the development. These issues were of particular concern to the near neighbors. The sub-committee made substantial progress during discussions with the Applicant and his architect on these issues.

A subset of the compatibility issue is the architectural style of the building, the type and quality of the building materials, and the quality of design. Through protracted discussions, the sub-committee focused on the relationship of the design to the neighboring structures and on the use and quality of materials. Significant modifications were made to the Highland Avenue façade, including an increased setback from Highland Avenue, a setback of the top floor at Highland Avenue, and the use of materials on the top floor that reduce the appearance of the project's mass. These changes are replicated in the South façade (facing Weaver's Way parking lot). In addition, significant changes to the west façade, incorporating a series of bay windows and a 1-4-1 rhythm of units, reduce the monolithic appearance of the original design.

Modifications were also made to the Highland Avenue streetscape. Landscape improvements are proposed at the western property line, subject to third party approval.

Issue 3: Operational Concerns

Discussions were held with regard to traffic, deliveries, trash collection, snow removal and other maintenance and operational issues. The development is proposed to be eight condominium townhouse units. A condominium association will be formed and the operating agreement will address many of these issues at that time, although the sub-committee has received oral commitments from the Applicant for most of these issues.

Conclusions

At our 12 April meeting the Sub-committee voted to support the variance request, subject to several conditions. As the vote was not unanimous a dissenting opinion will be available. Conditions of our approval include:

1. The appearance of the development will be as shown on architectural drawings by McEwen Architects including all changes/modifications agreed to through 11 April 2021. These changes/modifications are further described in text format as of 12 April 2021.
2. The operational issues discussed and agreed to are described in text format as of 12 April 2021. These items will be incorporated into such documents required for the operation of the completed development.
3. An enforceable Agreement will be executed between the development's Owner and the Chestnut Hill Community Association stating these conditions, to be recorded with and run with the deed.