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From: Philip Chen FAIA  
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Date: December 22, 2021

Subject: Design Review Meeting #1

This memo conveys my understanding of the Planning Board's concerns and priorities for proposed 10 Converse Place design, and the discussion of these concerns and priorities with the project proponent and architects in the first Design Review meeting on December 17, 2021.

I attended hearings on the project (virtually) on November 23, November 30, and December 7.

In the November 23<sup>rd</sup> meeting, the Planning Board discussed whether the proposed development provided a "diversity of housing types (rental, condo), price points and sizes to accommodate a wide range of ages and economic levels" so as to permit an increase in FAR from Special Permit standards from 2.5 to 3.0. Mr. Suhrbier of the Winchester Housing Partnership Board submitted their opinion that the proposed development meets the requirement for diversity of housing types. In the discussion, the Planning Board indicated unanimous willingness to continue openly exploring this issue. The Planning board also asked the development team to study the location of commercial or retail and the residential lobby in the ground floor of the development.

In the December 7<sup>th</sup> meeting, the Planning Board expressed their concerns and priorities for the development of the design:

1. Activate Mt. Vernon and the waterfront
  - Shown options by the development team, the Board voiced a preference for the residential entrance location on Mt. Vernon, to make the residences part of the Town
  - It is important to have commercial use on Mt. Vernon and on the waterfront to make both sides part of the public realm
2. Each of the 4 elevations of the building should be developed with their unique character, based on the different uses at the ground level.
3. The Converse Place elevation, with the garage entrance and transformer rooms, should be developed to soften the "service" aspect and to make it a pleasant pathway to the water.
4. The design of the building should be developed – with massing, materials, roofline, and details – to mitigate the scale of the building and respond to the intentions of the design guidelines.

In the first design review meeting held at the architect's office at 500 Harrison Ave on December 17<sup>th</sup>, we reviewed the planning board's priorities and discussed the design team's response. Here is a summary of the discussion and directions:

- The team discussed the proposed 5-story height of the development and how it fits into the village context. Brian noted that historic photos show that buildings in today's CBD were typically taller than the current buildings.
- The development team agreed to locate the residential lobby on Mt. Vernon. Rather than recess the entrance (as shown in a previous scheme), the design team will explore an entrance that is more prominently oriented to Mt. Vernon Street.
- The development team agreed to explore commercial use at the waterfront and asked Brian what an ideal and viable use of the space might be. Brian noted that it was an ideal location for a café, though there are already 5-6 other local cafés or coffee houses nearby. The commercial use should serve to activate the waterfront and strengthen its place in the public realm.
- Philip wondered whether the oval lawn facing the waterfront could be programmed as public space, and Brian noted that Toole design has been exploring concepts for a waterfront overlook.
- The development team described how the residential lobby would enliven the corner at Mt. Vernon and Converse Place. Philip noted that having the active, transparent, and lit spaces wrapping the northeast and northwest corners of the building would be critical to activating the Mt. Vernon, particularly from the perspective of pedestrians or vehicles going east and west on the street.
- Philip asked if the building "base" at the ground level could be emphasized to balance the mass of the "middle" section of the building at the Mt. Vernon elevation. The development team discussed the possibility of increasing the height of the ground floor level to benefit the commercial use and to provide the required opening height for the transformers on Converse Place.
- Philip suggested that the garage and transformer room openings in the west elevation be designed to relate to the other ground floor openings in rhythm, proportion (height and width), and details. Could areas of the wall be designated for public art?

The group also discussed the 1:20 scale physical model required by Section 7.3 of the Zoning Bylaw, meant to *"portray the architectural character, height, mass, and bulk of the proposed development and environs. The purposes of this physical model and related computer analysis are to ensure the harmony of the individual project within the town design context and to illustrate the extent of shadows cast on the open space system and adjoining private development"*.

The development team debated whether building a physical model or a computer model would be more beneficial for presentation and design purposes. A few thoughts:

- Given the virtual format of planning board meetings, a digital model may be more accessible and useful for design and presentations. A computer model is able to easily portray both aerial views as well as street level views.
- A digital model can be used to create animated views of the development and context, or a "flyover"
- A computer model can be used to present multiple design options from different views, and more detail can be developed as the design progresses.
- It is possible to create a computer model that looks like a physical model, if that is the preferred aesthetic. Here is a sample of a computer model created by my office to look like a wood and cardboard model



Brian and I spoke again on December 22<sup>nd</sup> to discuss two of the questions arising from the design review meeting. The first question was about the scale of downtown buildings historically. Brian noted that speaking with the Historical Commission, he discovered that downtown buildings from 1850-1900 were typically 3-5 stories and higher, but many were destroyed or reduced to fewer stories by fire in the early 1900's. The second question was about a viable use for the commercial space facing the waterfront. We agreed that the use should support public access and activity on the waterfront and extend beyond commercial business (office) hours. Brian thought the most viable outcome might be the relocation of an existing retail establishment or café to this site.