

Sean Maroney's Comments to the ARB RE: The *One Hanover* Condominium Complex

5/13/2013

Promoting increased residential density and mixed-use development can be a very good thing for downtown; good for business, good for quality of life, and good for preservation. A mixed-use environment means new and more opportunities for adaptive reuse. A vibrant, economically viable downtown also means more private investment, which, from a preservation perspective, means more money for maintaining and rehabilitating historic properties, and more jobs.

New infill development, too, when compatibly designed to complement the size, scale, materials, and textures of its surroundings, can serve to strengthen and enhance the character of an adjoining streetscape and the downtown area as a whole.

With that in mind, there are certainly aspects of the proposed *One Hanover* project to appreciate. The inclusion of ground-floor retail space and off-street parking does resonate with the City's mixed-use development goals. And, the use of design features like modulated wall planes and recessed upper floors will help soften the overall impact of the building's size, scale, and massing.

But, there are other important considerations as well. Any time new construction is proposed within the historic district, it naturally raises questions about what its impact will be. Will it involve demolition? What will it look like? How will it contribute to, and enhance downtown?

The *One Hanover* project, as currently proposed, would require the demolition of three existing structures, each of which has been recommended a contributing resource to the downtown historic district, and generate hundreds of tons of land-filled construction & demolition debris in the process.

Moreover, and perhaps more importantly, the project would replace those one- and two-story buildings with a new five-story structure; the fourth new, multi-story, 50- to 50-plus-foot-tall, 60,000-plus square-foot building in this part of downtown in less than a decade.

The latter refers to a fairly dramatic and still-ongoing transformation; one that, ironically, developed around, and was arguably anchored by, the Executive Plaza building (the "Big Ugly")—the one structure that most people will agree has never been a good fit for downtown. It began with the city's new 65-foot, 97,000 square-foot parking garage in 2005, followed by the four-story, nearly 62,000-square-foot Marriott hotel in 2009. To this will soon be added the new 74,000-square-foot, 49-56-foot-tall courts complex one block to the west, and now possibly the five-story, 56-foot-tall, 64,000-square-foot *One Hanover* condominium facility one block to the north.

When taken individually and considered in context, it's clear as to how and why each of these projects might have been deemed lot-appropriate and compatible at the time. However, when viewed as a group, their collective impact on the historic district as a whole becomes equally clear.

Though currently limited to a four-block section of downtown, it's still important for us to question and anticipate how this ongoing transformation, with the "Big Ugly" at its center, will affect future development along adjoining streetscapes and what role the *One Hanover* project will play in this evolution. What kind of precedent, for instance, will the *One Hanover* building set for this part of Sophia Street; particularly at a time when we are still trying to formulate a vision for this corridor and the adjacent riverfront area? It is difficult to say, but we should ask and thoroughly address the question before moving forward.

No one is advocating that all new construction in downtown should read as "Colonial" or that it look exactly like its neighbors... only that it be context-sensitive and that it respect the overall look, feel, and character of its surroundings.

Preservation is not anti-development. Rather, preservation is concerned with the form that development takes and what its short- and long-term impact will be; and, not just on neighboring properties and adjoining streetscapes, but also on the district as a whole.

Through careful review, using clear and consistent design standards, and with the city's comprehensive plan and recently approved preservation plan providing the vision, we can accommodate growth and change without jeopardizing the historic fabric and overall integrity of the downtown district.