

GOTHAM

Padriac Steinschneider
Gotham Design & Community Development Ltd.
329 Broadway
Dobbs Ferry, New York 10522
(914) 693-5093 ■ Fax: (914) 693-5390
Cell (914) 906-4802 ■ arch329@gmail.com

April 29, 2021

Dobbs Ferry Planning Board
112 Main Street
Dobbs Ferry, New York 10522

**Re: 156 Palisade Street
Site Plan Review**

Dear Members of the Planning Board:

This Letter is to request that the Public Hearing opened at the February 4, 2021 Planning Board and continued at the March 4 and April 1 Planning Board meetings be continued at the May 6, 2021 Planning Board meeting.

While at the May 6, 2021 Planning Board meeting, it seemed that we have made progress, there are several issues that we are wrestling with resolving, which may require adjustments to the plans that we presented at the May meeting.

A neighbor to 156 Palisade asked several questions pertaining to the construction; specifically asking about noise, disturbance, and disruption that would be caused as a result of the unusual depth of excavation required to accommodate the building that was presented. As we have noted during the review of this application, there is a 17 foot change of level from the west elevation at the curb to the east property line. This is a two story rise in grade from front to back. It has been clear from the beginning that the Planning Board has been concerned with the height of this building and in fact is in the process of making a recommendation to the Board of Trustees that the height limits for the MDR-2 zoning district be changed. While we contend that the building we have designed is compliant with the height limits in the existing Code, our efforts to date have focused on trying to get the building down to fit with the proposed changes to the Code.

The neighbor made two points at the April meeting:

- The driveway running adjacent to where she lives is less than desirable, in part because the building in which she lives is very close to the property line.
- Construction can be very noisy and dusty.

I asked one of our engineers to walk the site with me the Sunday after the April meeting. We showed him the grades and depths of excavation we were proposing, as well as the challenge that could be caused by the garage floor being lower than the street, in terms of managing storm water runoff from the site. The engineer's opinion is that the depth of the excavation will be very expensive, since it will require driving sheeting to stabilize the sides of the deep excavation. These are not unusual methods, but more appropriate in Manhattan than Dobbs Ferry. We drove sheeting along the property lines shared with the street at 2 Ashford Avenue, but that was to go down 10 feet. The plans that we reviewed at the April meeting require excavation from el.124 down to el.102.5; a depth of 21.5 feet.

While we have intended to create stepping retaining walls between the east end of the building and the east property line, our excavation will still exceed an angle of 45 degrees, necessitating the sheeting. On the sides, it is more of an issue, with needing to dig down that deep within 10 feet of the property line. Again, possible to do, but both very expensive and very disruptive. The sheeting is driven in with a pile driver, which is a hammer that hits the top of the steel to drive it in. The estimates that we have gotten suggest that this would take approximately 10 days to do, assuming working from 7:30 AM until 5:30 PM.

The conversation with the engineer and with a contractor who would do this work led me to want to look for an alternative. There are some simple ones, such as raising the height of the building or eliminating the on-site parking, that we would be willing to consider, but which I anticipate would not be acceptable to the Planning Board. It may be worth discussing how much higher and how parking could otherwise be accommodated, but I also wanted to look at other ways that we may be able to create the on-site parking with a building that would not exceed the proposed height limits.

Submitted with this letter is an alternative design that follows directly from the design that you reviewed at the April meeting. Following are the changes:

1. The building has been mirrored to move the driveway from the south side of the building to the north side. This facilitates a change in the elevation for the garage, while also removing the driveway from being in relatively close proximity to the adjacent building at 154 Palisade Street. We looked at the driveway on the north side in previous submissions, but I do not believe that there was ever an objection to this location by the Planning Board and our reasons for not locating the driveway on this side was not a response to a concern.
2. By mirroring the building, the portion of the building closest to the street is on the right side of the building when looking from the street, instead of on the left. The setback to the primary mass of the building remains the same, which is significantly more than the zoning requires. Since we are north of the neighbor to the south, this will not block sunlight from the neighbor.
3. Instead of the parking level being located at the base of a ramp descending from the street, with the floor of the garage being at el.103.5, the parking level would be at the top of the ramp ascending from the street, with the floor of the garage being at el.114. This keeps the garage at the back of the building and enclosed. We have pushed the actual garage door further back into the building to make it less visible from the street. The garage in this location means that the green roof would be at approximately the same elevation as the east property line, at el.125. This positioning of the garage eliminates 10.5 feet of excavation under the east half of the building, eliminates the need for sheet piles to be driven, eliminates the tall retaining walls previously proposed, eliminates the feeling that the building is sitting in a hole, and makes it easier to manage stormwater on the site. Unfortunately, this location of the garage also takes the space of approximately 2,000 square feet that was previously allocated to apartments.

4. Mirroring the building also shifts the massing on the east side of the building further to the north, which does not adversely impact the neighbor to the north, but opens up the space towards the back of the property for the neighbor to the south.
5. To recapture some of the lost apartment space, we have proposed a lower level under the right side of the building on the front. This projects forward, but is a step down from the street level.
6. The height of the building is not increased by these changes. Using the measuring point on the curb of el.109, we would still be 36.5 feet to the top of the flat roof and 39.25 feet to the midpoint of the highest pitched roof on the building.
7. Making these changes would likely reduce the number of apartments in the building from seven units to six units.
8. The changes would likely increase the building coverage from the previous 35.6% to 38.3%. This is to accommodate the apartment that would be on the lower level, as well as some of the shifts in design. At the same time, the floor area in the building has been reduced by approximately 1,500 square feet.
9. The ramp has been eliminated, but replaced by being able to use the driveway. Where we felt that providing ADA access via a door into the basement was less than desirable, the door now would be into the main lobby.
10. The setback from the sidewalk to the terrace in front of the building has been increased from 2 feet to 3.5 feet to provide more room for planting. This change in the location of the driveway also means that the existing street tree in front of the property would not need to be removed.

While it is common for some to think that the solution for all things in the world of creating residential units is to reduce the number of homes that will be created, the reality is the opposite. We are struggling with the idea of reducing the number of units, particularly given the fact that the Village identifies two different requirements for affordable housing units, with one being having 10% of the units in a building with 10 units or more being affordable and the other being providing a minimum of one affordable housing unit in any building with five or more units. Without some form of subsidy, grant, or similar financial offset, creating an affordable residential unit when it is one of nine or fewer units is challenging.

Since the April meeting, we also had the opportunity to present the project to the Architectural and Historic Review Board (AHRB) on April 26, 2021. While it took some time for the AHRB to adjust to our surprise of mirroring the previous design, I think that the AHRB's concerns are the same for the changed design as they would have been for the previous design. The primary concern at the AHRB seemed to be that the west facade was overly animated, with too much going on. Suggestions were made to find a way to calm the front design, including potentially having a flat roof on both the left and right sides of the building, with the pitched roofs only being part of the entry volume. We will look at this and possibly present some ideas at your May meeting, but we were not able to do that for this submission.

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At the May meeting, we would also like to discuss the potential of having an additional level under the roof line in the east end of the building to increase the size of one of the apartments, making it a duplex. The value of a building like this is driven by the amount of square footage that can be rented or sold. Moving the garage from the lower level to the first floor level took away significant value. We are trying to find the way to restore some of that value so that this can be a successful project.

The drawings submitted have been prepared by Gotham Design & Community Development Ltd. in collaboration with David T. Kim, R.A., Aspect 120 Landscape Architect, Sirius Miandoabi of Integral Engineering Services, and Hudson Engineering and Consulting, PC. include the following, which are dated 0429/2021 as submitted to the Planning Board:

Sheet CS	"Location Map, List of Property Owners, Design Criteria Table"
Sheet SP-1	"Site Plan, Zoning Table, Building Coverage, Impervious Coverage"
Sheet SP-2	"Proposed Plans and Building Sections"
Sheet SP-3	"Proposed Elevations"
Sheet SP-4	"West Elevation"
Sheet SS	"Streetscape Elevation and Context Area Site Plan"

With the changes that we are considering to the design, we have not authorized the civil engineer to move forward with their Site Plan documents, which include the Stormwater Management Report, as well as the Erosion and Sedimentation Control Plan. Subsequently, we will need to ask that this matter be continued to your June meeting. We will also continue our review with the AHRB.

Thanks for you time and attention. We look forward to presenting this to you at the May 6, 2021 Planning Board meeting.

Sincerely,

GOTHAM DESIGN & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT LTD.
Paddy Steinschneider, President
As Agent for 156 Palisade Street LLC.