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July 19, 2021

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Mr. Eric Zuena
ZDS
Via email

RE: 230 Waterman Street Proposal

Dear Eric:

Thank you for coming to the Providence Preservation Society's Planning and Architectural Review Committee (PAR) with your client Paul Griesinger and your team at ZDS on July 14 to present the project proposal at 230 Waterman Street. This letter contains a summary of our comments.

PPS opposes the demolition of the 1892 structure at 230 Waterman Street. We recognize fully that demolition at this property is allowable because it does not have the protection of historic district zoning. However, we are not convinced that a successful mixed use development - incorporating the extant building, rear parking lot, and the parcel that McBride's Pub occupies- cannot be achieved at this site; we understand 230 Waterman and 161 Wayland (McBride's) to be in common ownership. New construction in an ell around the building that incorporates the footprints of the later funeral home additions on the north and east sides of the original house and the pub would be a better alternative. Retention of the beloved pub establishment should be prioritized (and we are not arguing otherwise), but a rearrangement of spaces on these two sites and placement of new construction should be examined. We strongly urge you to reconsider the site plan and demolition of the house.

The building at 230 Waterman Street is currently enveloped in vinyl siding, but it maintains the form and character-defining features of the large, revival style, turn-of-the-last century residences for which Providence is well-known. Having stood at this site for 129 years, its presence in Wayland Square cannot easily be dismissed. The siding can be removed and the Colonial Revival details (as seen in the attached historical photo from the John Hutchins Cady Collection at the Providence Public Library), such as the modillions, can be restored. Although this building and this area have been overlooked for local and National Register historic district designation, this is a signature building that deserves consideration-- in the absence of preservation protections.

The existing building at 230 Waterman represents the historic architecture and setback that characterize residential Providence, especially on the East Side. We believe that the new design can preserve and celebrate this building while new construction can and should complement the fabric of this vibrant mixed use neighborhood.

You characterized the existing building as the missing tooth along this commercial portion of Wayland Avenue; that term usually describes a missing structure along a streetface, not a non-conforming antecedent. This building predates commercial Wayland Square as we know it today, and this portion of Wayland Avenue was exclusively dwellings a century ago. According to Sanborn maps, 230 Waterman is among the oldest buildings on Wayland Avenue between Angell and Waterman, and one of two residential survivors. (The other is across the street at 172 Wayland/228 Waterman now surrounded by the one-story commercial apron). In addition to the later commercial development, we also have the handsomely detailed, setback, and elevated three-story brick apartment building at 196-198 Wayland Avenue, which works harmoniously with its commercial and residential neighbors.

The charm of Wayland Square's commercial district-- dating from the mid-20th century-- comes from the low building heights and diverse street-level storefronts. The design presented does not respond to this context or character. (The only exception we can find is that the pale brick presented resembles that of 179-189 Wayland Avenue, the location of West Elm). The design is strikingly similar to buildings your firm has designed around the city and also those currently found around the country and therefore not specific to the residential or commercial character of the Wayland Square neighborhood. We find the design to be arbitrary for the location.

If this project moves forward as proposed, a more welcome design would stand as a fine example of 21st century architecture, finely detailed with specific attention given to the street level experience. If new construction is to replace the existing building, it requires timeless, contextual, and distinctive design. Simply using brick does not equate with good design, nor are the contrasting and delineating bands of color in material choices a sophisticated tool in conveying the articulation inherent in older buildings. The glass balconies are not the correct choice for an apartment building where they easily become highly visible, unattractive storage spaces.

Though not remarkable, we urge you to look at the other commercial structures at the intersection of Wayland and Waterman and to reconsider the shape of the corner. As mentioned, a chamfered corner, perhaps, would provide visual interest, presence, and intrigue to the pedestrian and help to define and elevate this prominent East Side intersection. For example, your successful treatment across the street at 229 Waterman opened up the existing building to the corner for the passerby. We acknowledge that you are dealing with a smaller lot at 230 Waterman, but we believe there is a strong argument for a more engaging corner design that is not square or flush with the lot line, especially if there will be restaurant or retail use in the space.

We do not support the two dimensional adjustments being sought. The additional floor creates an artificial hardship argument for parking relief. We disagree with the CPC staff's recommendation for this relief and hope that the commission will not approve the additional height or parking adjustment.

Thank you again for coming to PPS with your project. We do appreciate you keeping us, and other stakeholders in the neighborhood, apprised of your progress and we are happy to review revisions.

Sincerely,

Brent Runyon

CC: City Plan Commission

