

CITY OF ST. AUGUSTINE, FLORIDA

Historic Architectural Review Board Workshop
April 10, 2003

The Historic Architectural Review Board met in a workshop session at 2:00 P.M., Thursday, April 10, 2003 in The Alcazar Room at City Hall. The meeting was called to order by Chairman Dana Ste. Claire, and the following were present:

1. ROLL CALL

Dana Ste. Claire, Chairman
Peter Rumpel
Roy Barnes
Paul Weaver

Excused: Sally Ann Freeman

City Staff: Mark Knight, Director, Planning and Building Department
David Birchim, Senior Planner
Pam Halterman, Recording Secretary

2. TO ALLOW OTHER THAN COLONIAL STYLE STRUCTURES IN THE HISTORIC PRESERVATION-1 DISTRICT

Mr. Ste. Claire advised that the purpose of the workshop was to consider allowing Colonial style buildings in the HP-1 District. He asked staff to proceed with the presentation.

Mr. Knight directed attention to Resolution 2003-01 and stated that it would provide alternative designs for new construction in the HP-1 District. He noted that the resolution had originally been brought to the board in somewhat of a hurry. He explained that the board had recommended that the City Commission move forward with the resolution and to include HP-2 and HP-3 Districts. He stated that when the resolution was presented to the City Commission, the Commission felt that HP-2 and HP-3 had more architectural styles; therefore, the Commission had suggested that the board

only include the HP-1 District. He noted that it was questioned how far down the street one could go to replicate a style and what parameters would be involved. He advised that the City Commission had asked that the resolution be remanded to HARB for further discussion regarding whether the board desired to allow alternative styles other than the style of an adjacent house regarding new construction.

Mr. Ste. Claire asked if staff would like to add any general comments prior to the boards' discussion.

Mr. Knight stated that staff had noticed the problem with new construction adhering to the Colonial style in the HP-1 District, because the majority of the buildings were not Colonial in style. He directed attention to the summary submitted by staff that indicated the number of Colonial and other styles located in the district. He stated that staff had found that Colonial style buildings would not fit into the HP-2 District.

Mr. Birchim recalled a comment had been made at the original HARB meeting that if the resolution was to be passed, the City's zoning Code might need to be amended because the setbacks and lot coverage had been crafted for Colonial buildings with a zero foot front setback, but a zero setback was not necessarily the setback that would be used for other styles. He suggested that lot coverage and setbacks be reviewed if the resolution passed.

Mr. Ste. Claire opened the workshop to public comments.

Hildegarde Pacetti, 305 St. George Street stated that she had been a resident for many years in the HP-1 District. She noted that the HP-1 District had followed the current guidelines for thirty years and it had worked very well thus far. She explained that the Historical Society seldom took a position, but they had written a letter which stated that the Society had voted to not endorse the new guideline. She advised that the letter had been submitted to the City Commission. She stated that she currently owned several properties in the district and would be negatively affected by the new guideline. She disclosed that the resolution had not been discussed with any member of the HP-1 Association and they had found out the Friday prior to the City Commission meeting that the resolution was on the agenda. She explained that she had spoken in opposition to the resolution, and she felt that if a change was indicated, HARB would have crafted the resolution.

Ms. Pacetti suggested that Commissioner Crichlow had obtained a client that required the change in the ordinance; therefore, a change should not be made to the current guideline for individual use. She noted that

eight houses were currently under various stages of restoration in the HP-1 District and the owners were following and had respected the historical significance of the area. She commented that the mixed styles in the City reflected the various stages of development that had occurred in St. Augustine. She added that no reason existed that had indicated a change in zoning was necessary. She stated that there had been no objections to the Colonial style of architecture and the style was simple to replicate. She expressed that she was deeply concerned and opposed to the "meddling" regarding the resolution and noted that Commissioner Crichlow did not own property in the HP-1 District.¹ She reiterated that HP-2 and HP-3 had been eliminated from the proposed resolution because it would cause additional problems for the area. She suggested that it would also cause enormous problems in the HP-1 District and she stated that it would be ill advised to continue with the proposal.

Mr. Ste. Claire stated that he favored the Spanish Colonial architectural style and suggested that the style was appropriate for any new construction in the City. He suggested that one should be more concerned about how a Colonial style building related to the surrounding residential properties in HP-1, which consisted of many bungalow and frame vernacular style homes. He questioned whether a Colonial style constructed house would appear appropriate near a bungalow or frame vernacular home.

Ms. Pacetti stated that Colonial style structures could be built and would fit nicely in the neighborhood. She indicated that houses could be placed in from the right-of-

¹ Mr. Barnes arrived at 2:17 PM.

way, which was seven feet in from the street and would line up with most existing houses. She recalled that a block of homes existed north of her home on St. George Street with a great mix of architecturally styled homes, which included such styles as Spanish Colonial, Victorian, Vernacular, etc. and proved to be a very interesting area. She stated that she objected to modern subdivisions because they all appeared to be the same style. She disclosed that many visitors came to the City to view the "Tour of Homes", which included a variety of architectural styles. She suggested that much more important issues should be taken care of in St. Augustine.

Mr. Rumpel stated that he understood Ms. Pacetti's concerns, however, to mandate the Spanish Colonial style or any of the styles permitted would be a major mistake. He noted that by placing a Spanish Colonial style building "here and there" throughout the HP-1 area would "water down" the Historic Preservation District. He referred to Pierre Thompson's newly constructed house and stated that it was out of place in the area and had been built only because of the current code. He stated that he had previously discussed the issue with Commissioner Crichlow and others. He explained that diversity was important regarding styles along with integrity.

Mr. Weaver stated that one could observe the feature of how a building was set back or placed in relation to the street. He explained that during his private consultation with the amendment to the St. Augustine Historical District in the 1980's only ten percent of the four-hundred buildings had been Colonial in style. He noted that the National Register District encompassed forty buildings, which were considered to be historic; although, he disclosed that they had amended the district

to include an additional three-hundred plus buildings on the Register. He commented that while the Colonial style was most important to the district, it was obvious that the district currently represented much more than Colonial style. He suggested that changing the current Code would allow more flexibility along with reviewing each newly constructed building on a case-by-case basis.

Ms. Pacetti stated that she was planting roses and had discovered some Indian pottery and bottles. She commented that the only thing going for St. Augustine was its Spanish Colonial history. She suggested that HARB might require a person to replicate the style of a neighboring house, however, not allow one to replicate its own style.

Mr. Rumpel said that would not happen with the proposed resolution. He suggested that the change would allow more diversity and allow a much better context within a neighborhood. He expressed that the Flagler era was more architecturally important than the Colonial style. He noted that the new resolution would allow new construction to relate to neighboring context.

Ms. Pacetti asked if HARB had received any complaints concerning the requirement to build Spanish Colonial style homes.

Mr. Rumpel stated that HARB had received complaints and that was the reason for the workshop.

Ms. Pacetti suggested that the current resolution had worked for thirty years and asked that the Code remain as it had been.

Mr. Ste. Claire stated that everyone recognized that the Spanish Colonial style

made St. Augustine architecturally and historically unique. He suggested that one could not ignore the fact that the City was also an architecturally eclectic community. He noted that it would be very difficult to require an applicant to construct what might be a house with an architectural incompatible style in the context of one that should be another style. He expressed that it would be difficult to place a Spanish Colonial period house in the middle of bungalow style houses. He suggested that the key word was context and the suggestion of handling the issue on a case-by-case basis with context would be the key issue. He expressed that if HARB made the contextual decision, it would solve the issue rather than developing a loosely constructed ordinance.

Mr. Weaver noted that context could be refined on a block by block basis.

Ms. Pacetti directed attention to the property north of the Whetstone property on St. George Street and noted that it consisted of a bungalow style house and had blended well into the neighborhood.

Mr. Rumpel stated that the board did not imply that one could not build a Spanish Colonial house in HP-1, although that would be totally appropriate, but one should not mandate that to be the only style allowed to be constructed. He stated that the current Code had, at times, not worked well, such as the structure Commissioner Crichlow had previously worked on with the twenty foot wide building located on Marine Street.

Mr. Weaver noted that some of the lots on south St. George Street were not Spanish lots, but contemporary subdivision lots.

Ms. Pacetti suggested that it would be over-reaching to change the ordinance. She noted that most of the HP-1 District had been

restored and the area had made wonderful progress. She stated that the area had a Spanish Colonial style house currently under construction.

Mr. Rumpel commented that if the new resolution was passed, it would offer faith in the board to approve houses that fit the context that would work and compliment the neighborhood along with allowing the board flexibility to review which style would be appropriate for a neighborhood.

Ms. Pacetti asked if Mr. Rumpel was in favor of allowing new construction with a Queen Ann style or Colonial Revival, etc., or would it only be framed vernacular or bungalow.

Mr. Rumpel suggested that an applicant should be required to provide an elevation study of three houses on each side of where the new construction would take place along with photographs of each building for the board to be able to determine if the new structure would fit, how it would relate in scale and how building would compliment the architecture of the adjacent buildings.

Ms. Pacetti stated that a reason to change the current ordinance had not existed and the St. Augustine Historical Society had stated their opinion very strongly in opposition of the proposed change. She suggested that the change would only serve a particular person and property owners should be protected against such attempts.

Mr. Rumpel expressed that the change would offer more protection for property owners than mandating a Spanish Colonial style.

Mr. Ste. Claire stated that the general consensus of the board was to favor and support the new resolution. He said an

element should be added to the review process that would allow the assessment of the context of the architectural style that would be represented in a particular area when new construction was proposed. He suggested that it would be imperative that the applicant demonstrate that he/she was aware and understood the styles surrounding the new construction.

Mr. Rumpel said that it would not work on Marine Street because of the ranch style houses currently in that location.

Mr. Weaver advised that ranch style buildings were not a contributory style and were not historic in any way.

Mr. Ste. Claire articulated that was the reason why the review should fall within the purview of the HARB and the board should have the authority to determine what architectural style was appropriate in HP-1.

Mr. Knight advised that the City Commission had voiced that architectural style should be determined by HARB.

Mr. Rumpel suggested that the City should mandate that any new construction in HP-1 would be required to obtain an Opinion of Appropriateness prior to a Certificate of Appropriateness.

Mr. Ste. Claire clarified that, regarding the new resolution, the board would not be inundated with requests, because very few vacant lots existed within the City limits and most would be restoration of existing houses.

Mr. Rumpel noted that the board would receive requests for demolitions. He suggested that the board attempt to influence the applicant to rebuild with a style that

would relate better to the area. He offered an example such as the ranch style homes on Marine Street, which would require one to rebuild a Spanish Colonial style house.

Mr. Ste. Claire stated that it was an important measure and would be an overall benefit to the architectural development of St. Augustine in the future.

Mr. Rumpel stated that he would like the ordinance changed to include HP-2 and HP-3 Districts.

Mr. Birchim advised that the City Commission had decided to eliminate HP-2 and HP-3 from the resolution.

Mr. Knight affirmed that several issues that the board had reviewed would be added to the resolution and staff would return the proposed resolution to the board for their final recommendation.

Mr. Barnes asked if the change would affect remodeling projects.

Mr. Rumpel noted that it would not affect remodeling construction.

Mr. Barnes questioned whether the board could deny predominate styles in an area if they did not agree with that style or would the board agree to a style if the applicant could argue and prove that their proposal would fit into the area.

Mr. Rumpel stated that the board would have the authority to deny an application, although he suggested that the application should be an Opinion of Appropriateness.

Mr. Ste. Claire suggested that an Opinion of Appropriateness was the perfect time to present the proposed architectural style.

Mr. Barnes asked staff to clarify setback requirements for Colonial style construction.

Mr. Knight advised that one would retain the right to construct a Colonial style house no matter if it would be out-of-character on the street. He added that if they chose to build other than Colonial design, then it would fall under the new resolution and be reviewed by the board. He suggested that the proposed resolution would offer one more layer of security for the board due to the required variance for setbacks with a design that would be other than Colonial style.

Mr. Rumpel suggested that placing a Colonial style building on the edge of the street could have an adverse effect on a neighbor.

Mr. Birchim suggested that Colonial style could potentially harm the streetscape.

Mr. Ste. Claire questioned why Spanish Colonial had been segregated out and would remain in the Code.

Mr. Knight advised that the City would not change the related ordinance, but would offer more flexibility with the new resolution.

Mr. Barnes stated that allowing one to build Colonial style would locate a building very close to the street. However, he noted that if one proposed to build a Colonial style between two framed vernacular style houses, it would be allowed.

Mr. Rumpel advised that the ordinance needed to be changed to allow the board flexibility to review a proposed style.

A discussion followed regarding loopholes with the ordinance and it was determined that staff would review and attempt to cleanup the loopholes in the ordinance.

Mr. Barnes questioned whether staff could determine which paint colors were appropriate and if enough information would be offered by an applicant to predetermine if the proposal would be adequate for the board.

Mr. Birchim suggested that it would be better to offer direction to an applicant regarding the architectural style surrounding a vacant lot.

Mr. Knight advised that by removing the right to place Colonial style buildings, it would not allow staff to offer an upfront answer, although the board would not end up with potential inconsistencies.

Mr. Barnes questioned whether a property facing the HP-1 District would be governed under the resolution.

Mr. Knight affirmed that to be correct.

Mr. Birchim stated that any structure visible from the HP-1 District would be required to be reviewed by the board and to be substantially compatible. He commented that research on the style would need to be completed prior to an application being reviewed by the board.

Mr. Barnes questioned whether, in an attempt to harmonize with the immediate neighbor area, one would be required to remodel or restore a structure with a Spanish Colonial style.

Mr. Birchim advised that an addition to an existing house would need to be consistent

with the existing architecture of that structure.

A discussion occurred between board members and staff regarding setbacks and styles and it was determined that setbacks and lot coverage would be zoning issues and handled by the PZB.

Mr. Birchim advised that staff had previously presented a Certificate of Appropriateness from the HARB to the PZB to obtain variances. He suggested that in the future the Zoning Code could reflect other than Colonial style setbacks and lot coverage.

Mr. Ste. Claire welcomed Mr. Weaver as the newest member to the board.

3. ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 3:13 PM.

Dana Ste. Claire, Chairman

Pam Halterman, Recording Secretary