

PLANNING COMMISSION

STAFF REPORT

December 16, 2010

REQUEST: City Council Bill #10-0486/Fells Point Historic District

For the purpose of modifying the area designated as the Fells Point Historic District to exclude Block 1830, Lots 30, 31, and 32/33 and Block 1832, Lots 1/4, 5/12, and 13 through 24; and restating the boundaries of the District.

RECOMMENDATION: Disapproval

STAFF: Robert Quilter

PETITIONER: Councilman Kraft on behalf of the Homeowners Association of the Washington Square townhouses.

OWNERS: Various

SITE/GENERAL AREA

Site Conditions: The properties under consideration for exclusion from the Fells Point Historic District generally include two story rowhouses that were built as a complete development ca. 1988. There are three such rowhouses located at the northwest corner of Aliceanna and Washington Streets and twenty-three located in the block bounded by Aliceanna, Washington, Fountain and Castle Streets. Additionally, the property located between Aliceanna, Castle, Fountain and Chester Streets and known as 2030 Aliceanna Street is also under consideration for exclusion. It is improved with a one story warehouse building and its associated paved surface lot. All of the lots have R-8 zoning.

General Area: The Fells Point area includes primarily two to four-story attached structures with larger buildings along the waterfront. The structures are mostly of brick and vary in architectural styles. To the east of Chester Street is the Canton community.

HISTORY

- Ordinance #07-555, approved November 26, 2007, established Fells Point as a Baltimore City Local Historic District

CONFORMITY TO PLANS

The proposed legislation is contrary to the City Comprehensive Master Plan with respect to LIVE, Goal 2, Objective 4: "Protect and Enhance the preservation of Baltimore's Historical Building and Neighborhoods.

ANALYSIS

City Council Bill #10-0486 proposes to remove sixteen properties from the bounds of the existing Fells Point local historic district. Fifteen of those properties are part of a late 1980's infill townhouse development known as Washington Square. The introduction of this Bill is at the request of the Washington Square Homeowners Association.

The historical and architectural significance of the Fells Point local historic district is clear. One of the three original settlements from which Baltimore City arose, the neighborhood exhibits a variety of architectural styles, from pre-Revolutionary War to post-Civil War, including a house dating from the 1760's. These buildings are of archaeological as well as aesthetic importance. In addition to its architectural features, Fells Point occupies a central role in the history of Baltimore. It was connected to the maritime trade in the early 19th century, participating in the shipbuilding industry that made Baltimore famous. Up to the present day, it has been populated by successive waves of immigrant communities, each of which has left its mark on the district.

In 2007, Planning lead the effort to update the antiquated Fells Point urban renewal overlay district that had been established in . To have the urban renewal plan repealed, it was agreed that the community would become a local historic district. The repeal of the plan and establishment of the Fells Point local historic district was concurrent on November 26, 2007. This ensured that certain rehabilitation standards would more or less seamlessly transfer from urban renewal review and approval to CHAP review and approval.

Recently this year, the Homeowners Association of the Washington Square Townhouses approached CHAP with a request to remove their development from the bounds of the Fells Point local historic district. They cited the adopted CHAP requirements for modifications and replacements of exterior elements as a burden to and not particularly relevant for their more-recently constructed infill development. The resulting request, City Council Bill #10-0486 was written and introduced by First District Councilman James Kraft and included the adjacent industrial lot to the east, 2030 Aliceanna Street (bounded by Aliceanna/Castle/Fountain and Chester Streets). **so that the aggregate removal would not create a "donut" within the district but modify it's eastern boundary.** 2030 Aliceanna Street is improved by a non-contributing low warehouse structure and surface parking.

Planning staff has reviewed the intent of this Bill and finds the following:

- Removing properties from the Fells Point historic district would create a precedent and be contrary to a previous well-thought out strategy to continue rehabilitation controls that have well-served the area since 1971.
- Although the townhouses are of more recent construction, they were originally designed in a traditional manner to complement their historic setting.
- Certain modifications and additions to these original Washington Square townhouses in the past 20 years (many done without proper review) have produced results that are not compatible with their surroundings.
- The actual lots listed in the Bill are not consistent with the entire Washington Square development. As written, it would allow eleven of the townhouses to remain in the district.

Furthermore, in response to the Washington Square HOA request, the CHAP staff has offered to utilize or employ Guidelines for New Construction to include recent infill development in all of its

historic districts. This move would allow more flexibility to owners of such properties with regards to exterior renovations and replacement materials and methods. In short it would allow the use of non historic structures with in the district. This resolution appears to be reasonable and a responsible approach to non historic structures in an historic district.

Thus, taking in the aforementioned findings, staff recommends disapproval of City Council Bill #10-0486 and recommend that the HOA pursue the recent CHAP staff offer to expand their existing Guidelines for New Construction to include recent in-fill development in the Fells Point Local Historic District.

The following community organizations were notified of this action: Fells Point Task Force, Douglass Place Community Association, Perkins Homes Resident Advisory Council, Fells Point Community Organization, Fells Point Residents Association, Fells Point Main Street, The Preservation Society, Waterfront Coalition, Fells Prospect, Inc. and Upper Fells Point Improvement Association. Additionally, all of the owners of the Washington Square townhouses, as well as the owner of 2030 Aliceanna Street were notified of this action.

Thomas J. Stosur
Director