

HISTORIC LANDMARKS COMMISSION  
**DESIGN REVIEW COMMITTEE (DRC) MEETING**

September 16, 2020

**Action Minutes**

**ROLL CALL**

*Present: Commissioner Saum and Polcyn*

**AGENDA**

**Meeting Goal:** Discuss preliminary project design and provide comments to staff and applicants.

**Proposed Projects for Review:**

1. **PRE20-111**. Preliminary review request to rehabilitate the Bank of Italy building, a designated City Landmark and contributing building in the Downtown Commercial National Register District, on an approximately 0.397-acre site located at 12 South. First Street.
  - a. Provide initial input and feedback prior to the submittal of a formal Historic Preservation Permit Amendment application on 1) exterior renovation and improvements, 2) preliminary signage and exterior lighting concepts, and 3) interior uses.

***PROJECT MANAGER, DANA PEAK***

Attachments:

1. Applicant Presentation

*Dana Peak introduced the item and the speakers to follow including the applicant (Project BOI LLC) the design team BIG (Bjarke Ingels Group) in collaboration with RMW Architects, and Architectural Resources Group providing information related to the historic resource.*

*Andrew Jacobson (Westbank), representing the applicant, introduced the project team and BIG representatives (Agne Rapkeviciute, Andreas Buettner, Nicholas and Thomas Christoffersen - partner in charge). Agne Rapkeviciute provided an overview of the project. The project presentation was included as Attachment 1 on the Design Review Committee agenda.*

*Ben Leech, Executive Director PAC\*SJ, commented that the organization submitted written comments prior to the meeting and he went on to highlight those comments. PAC\*SJ appreciated the applicant, Gary Dillabough and representative Andrew Jacobson, reaching out to inform them of the proposed project. PAC\*SJ met with the applicant in August to discuss the scope of work and the PAC\*SJ advocacy committee made several subsequent site visits. Four main concerns were cited that involve the application of the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties, which should be the guiding principles for review. The areas of concern were: 1) alterations to the ground floor on First Street, specifically the removal of historic fabric (extending length of windows); 2) introduction of windows in the attic level; and the 3) compatibility of the stair tower.*

*Mike Sodergren (PAC\*SJ) commented that the context of the building is very important and recommended that the architects review the projects being developed around the project site, for example, a site across the street and also to the west of that site. He felt that those projects could affect the building in terms of shadowing. Mr. Sodergren also recommended reading the history about how the Bank of Italy building was developed in San Jose.*

*Commissioner Polcyn commented that the project will be high profile because it is one of, if not the most, historic buildings downtown. He expressed appreciation for everything the applicant and team have done to bring the project to the current point and felt it is going in a positive direction. Commissioner Polcyn appreciated the Green Building principles and street activation of Fountain Alley and First Street. He commented that the Historic Landmarks Commission often does not get the full context of what other development projects are going on downtown and how the proposed project fits in with other proposals. Commissioner Polcyn appreciated the level of detail, including the operable windows. He commented that removing historic fabric will be a challenge in terms of meeting the Secretary of the Interior's Standards and the windows and entry will need more discussion. Commissioner Polcyn wondered whether there were any alternatives to the removal of historic fabric. He questioned the curving form of the stair tower and balconies, and felt he needed to examine that further. Commissioner Polcyn commented the elements might be too much motion and activity (too heavily designed) that might take away from the historic building. He wondered whether the proposed removal of the clerestory vents was appropriate.*

*Charles Chase of Architectural Resources Group (with Stacy Farr) stated that the current design was presented to them and they have provided a preliminary memo (initial response) to the design team about the impacts to the historic fabric of the building in relation to the Secretary of the Interior's Standards and the California Environmental Quality Act. Mr. Chase commented that Architectural Resources Group was looking to the Design Review Committee to provide comments to be consolidated into their response. Stacy Farr commented that the Architectural Resources Group assessment is ongoing. She commented that they are working with historic architectural drawings and photographs and existing conditions to get a better understanding of what is original and what has been altered. The spaces along Fountain Alley are not contributing to the historic building and so the Secretary of the Interior's Standards analysis around this has been minimal. Ms. Farr stated that the windows along Santa Clara Street are original windows and the company's preliminary assessment is they are character-defining features and not recommended for removal. Along First Street there have been a lot of alterations in the storefront openings. She commented that where changes have already been made, change would be appropriate. These items and others have been related to the design team. Ms. Farr stated that the period of significance for the building extends to 1970, which covers all the changes to the building within that time. Commissioner Polcyn inquired what is the period of significance for the*

*building? Ms. Farr stated that it was previously established by other documentation and starts from the year the building was built to 1970, when the Bank of America moved out of the building. This would relate more to its cultural significance, than to its architectural significance. Commissioner Polcyn commented that the period of significance is challenging to address due to its breadth and suggested perhaps it should span to 1935.*

*Chair Saum appreciated the level of detail and attention being given to this project. He was pleased with the removal of the air conditioner units in the windows, cleaning up the façade, having operable windows and the possibility of natural ventilation. He commented that the Historic Landmarks Commission would be interested in information regarding any interior features and material that are intact so they can be incorporated into the project. Chair Saum thought the clerestory vents might be high enough up that they will not impact the pedestrian view, but also felt that the terracotta panels were consciously designed for a purpose (clear intentionality) for the front of the building (vs. the back) and that should be considered. He agreed that the profiles of the windows should be maintained along Santa Clara Street, but felt the devil is in the details with the First Street façade and any modifications need to be carefully done (e.g. terracotta returns). Chair Saum suggested that incorporating the development of new buildings across the street in review materials would be important. He felt that the focus on the details was a positive thing for the project in that the larger concepts had been appropriately addressed. Chair Saum commented on the choice of form for the stair tower. He was not concerned about the curved form, but that it does not reflect the composition of the building with a base, shaft and capital. Chair Saum felt that the undulation of the curved forms did not relate to the building. He commented that the stair tower does not have any relation to the capital, in particular where it transitions from the shaft. Chair Saum commented that the balconies in that area should relate to the capital because these elements interact with each other. He inquired if the materials proposed for the balcony were going to be the ones selected. Thomas Christoffersen (BIG) responded that solutions could be found to keep more of the historical fabric at grade. He commented that BIG was trying with the stair tower to match the level of ornateness that the building has, while being clear about what is the addition and what is the historic building. Mr. Christoffersen wondered whether the desire was to make clear what is new and old, or was the desire to extend the language of the existing building into the stair tower. These are different approaches. He commented that the design presented is what is intended to be proposed. Chair Saum felt that of the selection of materials considered for balconies, the proposed is the most successful with the verticality and relationship of color and materials. Mr. Christoffersen thought that locally relating to a greater degree what is happening on the historic building would be appropriate for the stair tower. He appreciated the idea of the base, shaft, capital and the dialogue of the stair tower between the building and have that in mind when continuing to develop the design. This could occur on the base and thought could be given to how the tower terminates at the top.*

*Commissioner Polcyn agreed that the materials of the stair tower are compatible, but commented that there is a lot of motion and activity with the design of the stair tower that is somewhat distracting from the historic building. He preferred the balconies that move away from the building (rather than the ones up against the building) which provide a little more respect and relief. Commissioner Polcyn commented that perhaps there should be a different treatment or break in the last two stories of the stair tower and maybe that element should be lowered so it does not compete with the historic building.*

**Meeting adjourned at 2:08 p.m.**