



SOCIETY HILL CIVIC ASSOCIATION

Civic Design Review – 1 Dock Street (CDR meeting February 5, 2019)

CDR Comments from the Society Hill Civic Association

Preliminary statement: The Society Hill Civic Association (the “Civic Association”), the Registered Community Organization for this neighborhood, is concerned about the legality of the Conditional Zoning Permit and with even the concept of a tall tower at this location, as other concepts are possible; but as the purpose of the CDR process is to review the concept the developer has proposed, we respectfully provide our comments on that proposal.

CDR information relevant to the ZBA Meeting Summary Form: We hosted a meeting on January 17, 2019 at the Zubrow Auditorium at Pennsylvania Hospital at 800 Spruce Street in Philadelphia. We invited the other RCO (the Republican 5th Ward) but it did not show up. The event was well-publicized and approximately 100 residents attended. By a show of hands, more than half of the attendees were residents of the Society Hill Towers but a large percentage were residents elsewhere in Society Hill. Approximately 40 people made comments. Most if not all of the commenters spoke to the massing and design of the proposal. All comments were negative.

RCO Comments

The Civic Association’s Zoning & Historic Preservation Committee has the following comments for consideration by the CDR panel:

Reaction to the proposal: Society Hill is fortunate to have several redevelopment-era sympathetic infill projects designed by BLT Architects (formerly known as Bower and Fradley). Unfortunately, we do not believe the proposal for 1 Dock Street represents the same architectural quality and design suitable for our historic district. With all due respect, the design is hulking and inelegant and makes the hotel appear diminutive. Also, while we understand the theory behind the podium, we find that, as designed, the podium has an unsatisfactory relationship with the tower part of the building. This is not a streetscape in the middle of a heavily built up downtown where the main impression and experience of the building would be viewed by a pedestrian on the sidewalk; instead, the full extent of this tower would be viewed by the public from many distant and diverse vantage points. Therefore, more distinctive architecture is called for.

Suggestions:

1. We would like to see a proposal with more refined architecture and craftsmanship. This location is in a very open and public part of Philadelphia, with many people from near and far, and many tourists, visiting Penn’s Landing, Spruce Street Harbor Park, Headhouse Square, Old City, etc., and, hopefully, increasingly on the waterfront in general. The partial capping of I-95

will add to the public, civic nature of this area and, at some point, Foglietta Plaza will be improved. If there is to be a tower here, it should be one of the most beautiful towers in Philadelphia, sparking inspiration and pride. The current design falls short of that expectation.

2. If there is to be a tower here, it should differentiate itself from the Society Hill Towers (SHT). Perhaps the tower could have setbacks at various points, or curves. If there is to be a tower here, it should have an elegant design. It should not compete with, nor draw attention away from, the SHT. It should respect and compliment the iconic SHT.
3. Most if not all towers in Society Hill have a large, proportionate amount of open space, to act as a buffer from smaller buildings and also to act as a sort of public, intermediary space as the visitor enters the building. Even Philadelphia townhouses have stoops. As we look at this proposal, we appreciate the attempt to have a small open area at the entrance to the building, but this open space is significantly disproportionate to the size of the tower. Even the walls of the podium are stark and suggest a “keep out” attitude. A better design is warranted.
4. Finally, in addition to the number of cars driven by those lodging at the hotel and the number of daily delivery trucks, the hotel has a thriving event business, which attracts a large number of cars. During these events, the vehicular traffic, including queuing traffic, is significant. The current proposal does not seem to appreciate that reality. A traffic study is warranted.

Submitted February 1, 2019