



Preservation Maryland

July 30, 2008

The Honorable Sheila Dixon
City Hall, Room 250
100 N. Holliday Street
Baltimore, MD 21202

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Re: Proposed automated parking garage
18 W. Saratoga Street

Dear Mayor Dixon:

Preservation Maryland, which occupies The Rectory of Old St. Paul's Parish located at Cathedral and Saratoga Streets, is among a group of adjoining property owners and occupants who for over 4 years now have fought the City's allowing the construction of a massive automated parking garage towering over and right in the middle of all of us. Others in our group are pioneering owners of two single family residences fronting Mulberry, The Vestry of Old St. Paul's Church which owns The Rectory and owns and occupies portion of its former parish hall at 309 Cathedral, the law firm which has its offices in the parish Hall and holds a ground lease on it, an architectural firm with offices and a residence next to the above residential properties and the owner of the Professional Building fronting on Charles at Pleasant, extensively and expensively renovated and rented-out as apartments.

All of these interests are notable for either their long, long histories in Baltimore and/or their having chosen to come in or remain here, invest substantial time and money in their properties, and contend with the daily issues of downtown Baltimore – in each case well-before undertakings such as theirs were generally perceived as other than ill-advised, particularly by those who fled the City as we all stayed or came here.

Some of us were involved in or closely followed the City's adoption of the Downtown Urban Renewal Ordinance, the contents and purposes of which you will likely remember.

A few of its requirements directly apposite here and establish the basis for opponents' concerns raised over the last four years:

- The Project Area contains a number of publicly and privately owned buildings which, because of their age, architectural quality, and

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Mayor Sheila Dixon
July 30, 2008

government and mercantile uses, constitute an valuable cultural, aesthetic, historic and environmental resource in the Downtown Area

- To direct public and private development in a manner that is harmonious and complimentary with the existing built environment by requiring that all plans for new development, exterior rehabilitation, or demolition be reviewed and publicly approved as consistent with the Renewal Plan
- The Renewal Plan designates two Special Districts (*North Charles Street, East Redwood Street*) that are considered worthy of special recognition and attention regarding future actions within those districts... Within the North Charles Street Special District, new structures may not exceed the height of 80 feet. This provision is to encourage the maintenance of the existing pedestrian scale of the area
- Many of the buildings in the Project Area have historical and architectural significance that should be protected. It is important that new buildings are compatible with the surrounding buildings in terms of building setback, mass, proportions, and materials... Large expanses of blank facades are not permitted
- Building base, shaft, and crown should generally be articulated. Matching the base height of adjacent buildings is encouraged, as is creative adaption of nearby architectural details to provide continuity

Renderings and plans for this garage proposal demonstrate that to allow this project to proceed violates and is in total disregard of the City's own requirements. Regardless, after the second Final Review of the proposed project by the Urban Design and Architectural Review Panel on June 5, 2008, it came to light that substantial changes in the design had been made including increasing the parking capacity of the garage from 224 to 402 spaces. In response, the Panel required that the project go back for Site Plan Review, which of course, is where the project should have started.

At the June 18, 2008, Site Plan Review Committee meeting, several concerns were raised based on the Site Plan Review Guidelines and compliance with the requirements of the Urban Renewal Plan. Most notably, were issues related to stacking, circulation, traffic, and fire access. A Traffic Impact Study (TIS) and stacking analysis were requested before scheduling another Site Plan Review. These are critically important given the stacking capacity of the automated garage, the proximity to Sharp Street, Brown's Arcade parking garage,

Mayor Sheila Dixon
July 30, 2008

bus stop, surface parking lot across the street, and nearby intersection with Cathedral and Liberty Streets. We have requested information on the scope and timing of TIS from director McCoach, but have yet to receive them. We are particularly concerned with the timing, giving that much of the W. Saratoga Street is currently under construction and limited to one lane of traffic.

We have requested that the Planning Commission itself hold a public hearing on this proposal if it is to proceed, that reasonable advance notice be provided those who have been opposing this project for some four years now of any meeting of the Planning Department regarding the proposal and that before any demolition and construction permits are issued that all legal prerequisites be satisfied and that we be apprised in advance of any contemplated actions in that regard.

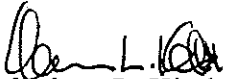
We have stated that we could welcome a development on the 18 W. Saratoga Street that meets the requirements of the Urban Renewal Plan and stated that we would support a parking garage on the surface lot across the street. Ironically, that site was targeted for acquisition for parking garage under the URP and subsequently sold and now co-owned by Mr. Hillman, the proposer of the automated garage in question.

As you may be aware, this very garage was turned-down flat by UDARP only to be somehow resurrected and re-floated in a meandering and confusing series of City procedures until it reached the anything but clear status it has today. Mr. McCoach, reversing the position of his predecessor, appeared a cheerleader for the project's approval and his unexpected departure possibly muddies the always opaque waters even more than previously seen from the outside.

I take the opportunity presented by Mr. McCoach's leaving as a chance for you, as Mayor of Baltimore, to make your views on this proposal known within your Administration and for you to insist that whatever is approved for this site be in compliance with the words and intent of the Urban Renewal Ordinance and all other applicable requirements.

In closing, a very quick visit to the site with renderings of the proposal in hand will show you all you need to know. It's just that obvious and bad.

Sincerely,


Matthew L. Kimball, Esq.
President