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Mayor

**COMMISSION FOR  
HISTORICAL & ARCHITECTURAL  
PRESERVATION**

Tom Liebel, Chairman



Thomas J. Stosur  
Director

**STAFF REPORT**

February 13, 2018

**REQUEST:** Concept Review: Height, Massing and Scale of new construction to an existing empty lot and condemned former road.

**ADDRESS:** 509 South Washington Street (Fells Point Historic District)

**RECOMMENDATION:** Request that the applicant return to the full commission with a revised proposal that addresses the following requirements:

- 1) A reduction in the overall mass to better conform to the surrounding structures
- 2) Present at a Site Plan Review Committee meeting prior to returning to CHAP; and
- 3) Setback top floor or floors further from front façade

**STAFF:** Walter Edward Leon

**PETITIONER:** Justin Seto

**SITE/HISTORIC DISTRICT**

The site is located on the southeast edge of the Fells Point Historic District. Fells Point is significant as one of the original three settlements that merged to form the beginnings of Baltimore City. The area is directly linked to early maritime trade, which was to Baltimore's growth and development. Besides the significance of Fells Point in the eighteenth century, the community has been a constantly growing and changing urban place. Many of the earliest houses were added on to in the Victorian era creating a unique blend of pre-Revolutionary War and post-Civil War architectural styles and characteristics. Fells Point has been a diverse neighborhood of many ethnic groups each influencing the growth and development of the area throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Many of the later structures are of architectural significance and are consistent with the waterfront character of Fells Point, even if stylistically different. Recreation Pier is an example of this type of significant structure in Fells Point.

Site Conditions/Architectural Description: There were no structures located on the site when the district was designated in late 2007. Historic maps indicate that a pair of rowhouses existed. The site also includes a condemned former roadbed where a garage once stood. The site is land locked on all sides by other structures or rear yards. The site is near the intersection with Eastern Avenue, one of the prime commercial corridors in the neighborhood. There is no public right of way on the property. Today, the property is used as a parking lot.

The 500 block of South Washington Street comprises two, two-and-a-half, and three-story rowhouses and two and three bays wide. The rooflines range from slanted flat roofs with decorative and simple cornices to shallow gables roofs, and steep gabled roofs with dormer windows. The height of these rowhouses range from 30 to approximately 38 feet high. The width of the rowhouses range from approximately 14 to 20 feet wide.

## **BACKGROUND**

The site has not been reviewed by the CHAP Commission or staff since the creation of the district in 2007.

## **PROPOSAL**

The applicant proposes to construct a new five-story residential building with ground floor parking. The proposal is for apartment units built along a central corridor on each floor and a terrace roof deck above the fifth floor. The fifth story is set back by seven feet from the front property edge.

## **APPLICATION OF GUIDELINES**

The staff applied relevant portions of *Chapter 2: Design Guidelines for Additions, New Construction, and Non-Contributing Buildings*. Guideline 2.1 directs applicants to identify the character defining features of the surrounding historic buildings and streetscape. Design new buildings to visually relate to the historic environment. Respect the established design precedent in the immediate area. It also states that contemporary architectural design that reflects its current time, place, use, and culture is accepted, provided the design is compatible with the character of the historic district.

Guidelines 2.2 Site Design, directs applicants to retain established property line patterns, street and alley widths, setbacks, primary and secondary building orientation, and landscape elements, incorporate character-defining site design features of the historic district into the designs of new construction projects, and design new construction to follow the existing pattern of building widths and spacing between buildings. It also states that primary buildings should have a similar orientation and relationship to the street as the existing buildings. Primary entrances and facades should be located, oriented, and sequenced to be consistent with the pattern of entrances and facades in the neighborhood. Also, new construction projects should reinforce existing patterns of open space and enclosure created by existing vehicular and pedestrian circulation routes, fences, walls, yards, courtyards, gardens, and landscaping.

Finally, the guidelines states that new construction at corners or abutting public spaces require special consideration in the design of entrances and multiple, publicly visible facades. Given the proximity of this property to Eastern Avenue, this final guideline is relevant to this project, as the upper stories and roof deck of this new building will be visible on Eastern Avenue behind the two- and three-story rowhouses located on the southern side of Eastern Ave.

Guideline 2.3 Scale and Form states that new buildings must be compatible with the height and depth of surrounding buildings. Where there is variation of building height within the immediate neighborhood, the new building should generally relate to the predominant pattern. This proposal does not.

The guideline also directs that new buildings must complement the massing of surrounding buildings, including the proportion of solid surfaces (walls) to voids (window and door openings.) Respect the characteristic rhythm (fenestration, bays, rooflines, etc.) of existing buildings. It also states that applicants should design the new building to be proportional to surrounding buildings. Consider important building proportions such as floor-to-floor heights, the size and placement of windows and doors, the scale of articulated elements such as porches, overhanging cornices, and bay windows. This design does not comply with this guideline.

Design rooflines to be compatible with those found on surrounding buildings.

## **NEIGHBORHOOD COMMENTS**

The Fell Point Design Review Committee and the Fells Point Task Force was notified of this proposal. The DRC has reviewed the proposal and given in-depth comments. (See attached)

## **ANALYSIS**

The Staff has reviewed the proposal and has determined that development on the site is appropriate for the site. There were historic buildings that have been removed prior to the designation of the district and the current open air parking appearance detracts from the surrounding community. However, the overall massing of the proposal is much larger than the surrounding structures immediately adjacent, and the height and massing exceeds what is found on the 500 block of south Washington Street and in this area of Fells Point. The third, fourth, and fifth stories of this building will be highly visible from Eastern Avenue which is composed of two and three-story buildings adjacent to this property. The staff is also concerned about egress from the site in the event of fire emergencies and accessibility by fire equipment. Staff finds that the current fifth-floor setback of seven feet is insufficient, and that the setback should instead be 15-20 feet, so that the fifth floor is not visible from South Washington Street

**CHAP staff recommends** that the applicant return to the full commission with a revised proposal that addresses the following:

- 1) A reduction in the overall mass to better conform to the surrounding structures
- 2) Present at a Site Plan Review Committee meeting prior to returning to CHAP; and
- 3) Setback top floor or floors to be compatible with the scale of the 500 block of Washington Street.

**The proposal is to come back to the full Commission for Concept review and approval.**

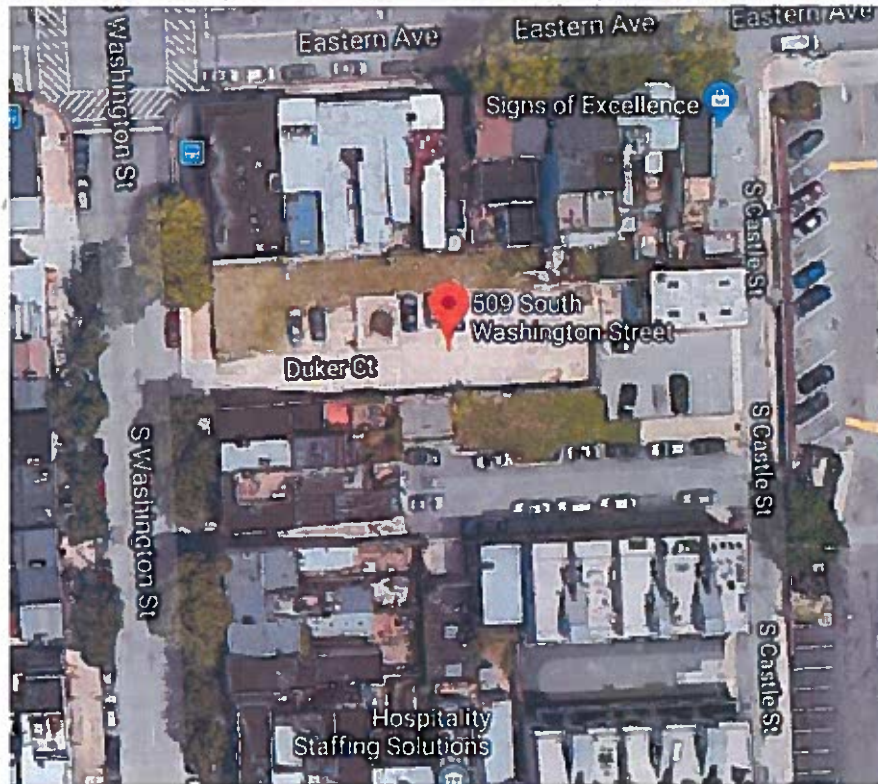
Eric L. Holcomb  
Executive Director







Aerial View

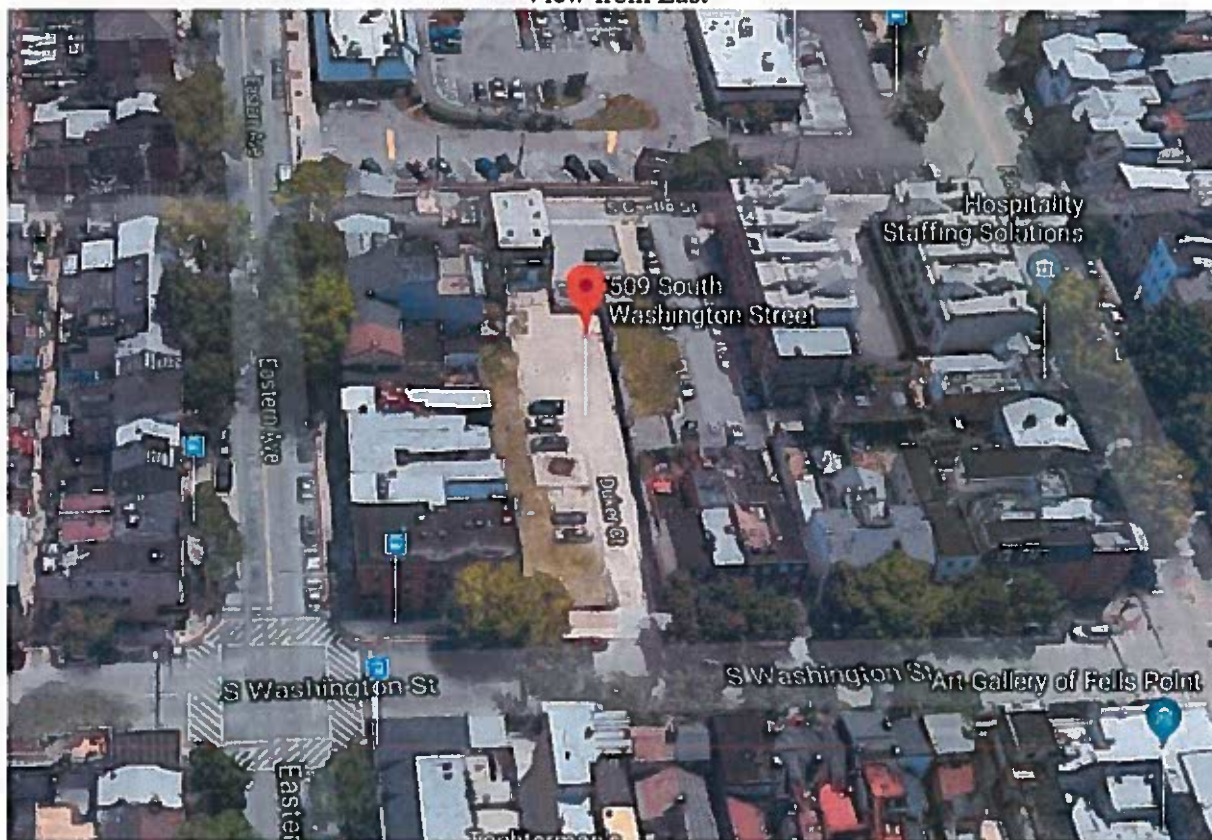




View from South



View from East





View from North



View from the West

