

Quirk Hotel returns to city panel with new layout  
written by Newspark Team | October 18, 2017



The developers of the proposed Quirk Hotel on West Main Street returned to Charlottesville's Board of Architectural Review this week with a new design that limits the project's impact on two historic structures.

"Both 501 and 503 West Main Street are now intended to stand alone," said Mary Joy Scala, the city's historic preservation planner.

A previously approved design for what would be Quirk's second location (the first being in Richmond) showed physical connections between the hotel and the historic structures, which require BAR approval for exterior alterations or demolition.

"Previously with 503 West Main Street we had proposed side and back connections and since have reconsidered," said Danny MacNelly, the architect for the project. "We felt like from your comments previously that letting those buildings breathe made a little bit more sense."

An empty lot at 423 W. Main would be filled by what would be the lobby of the hotel. The building would stretch back to a ballroom that would overlook Commerce Street.

"The hotel will be built to the property line on the east side," Scala said. "On the west side, there is an open walkway adjacent to the Eloise building that connects West Main and Commerce Street. That's an important connection."

On Tuesday, MacNelly and his team sought approval of a revised massing plan, building materials and a landscape plan.

The zoning for the property allows for building heights of up to 52 feet.

"The current design consists of four levels above Main Street and five levels above Commerce Street with a rooftop level which can be a maximum of 18 feet in height and 25 percent of the rooftop area," Scala said.

The materials to be used would be white brick and mortar with elements of light bronze and cedar.

"In the landscape plan, they intend to remove one street tree on West Main which is in front of the hotel itself and they're adding six canopy trees on Commerce Street," Scala said.

Some BAR members expressed concern about whether the removal of that tree would fit in with future upgrades coming to West Main via a streetscape plan that has a total cost estimate of \$31 million.

On Monday, the City Council agreed to apply for Virginia Department of Transportation funding to pay for the first phase of the streetscape, which would include the Quirk property. There is no firm date for when that work will begin.

"We are working to coordinate with the other improvements that are going in along West Main," said Jennifer Mullen, an attorney with the firm Roth Jackson.

Scala said she was unaware who would have to be consulted to give approval for removal of the street tree.

"They can probably coordinate with the plans for the improvements to West Main Street," she said. "Previously, this was approved for a hotel that had a garage entrance there. That clearly would have had the tree removed too."

All parking would be via valet from West Main to keep guests from driving through the Starr Hill neighborhood. There also would be a rooftop restaurant.

The building at 503 W. Main is now being considered for a coffee shop. A new exterior staircase would be built on the rear of the structure.

BAR members were supportive of the new design.

"I really like how this engages the Commerce Street side," said board member Breck Gastinger. "I am generally supportive of the massing, the scale, the site plan and the materials. I think you're heading in a nice direction."

However, BAR members did warn the applicants about using opaque glass and insisted on the use of transparent panes.

“My only red flag is the glass and making sure we get that cleared up,” board member Justin Sarafin said. “It’s been a huge deal on some projects before.”

For instance, the developers of the Violet Crown initially used opaque glass on their façade in violation of the city’s guidelines and had to replace it.

MacNelly agreed to return with something that would meet the BAR’s expectations.

“We definitely want this building to be bright and alive,” he said.

The BAR approved a motion to support the new design, materials and landscape plan. The applicant will need to return for final approval before construction can begin.