

MOUNT VERNON HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION
MEETING WITH CORNELL COLLEGE ARCHITECT
OCTOBER 19, 2016

Cornell College arranged a meeting between the Mount Vernon Historic Preservation Commission and the college's architectural firm, BWBR of St. Paul, MN. This architectural firm is doing the planning for the new science building on the Cornell campus.

People present for the meeting include from the Historic Preservation Commission, Mary Evans, Leah Rogers, Hugh Lifson, Janet Budack, Sarah Kelly, Patty Westerkamp, Susan Hargus, Dick Thomas and Guy Booth. Deanne Rexroat and Joel Miller were present on behalf of Cornell College. Craig Peterson presented for BWBR.

Mr. Peterson gave a good overview of the science building project. He indicated the firm studied the campus, its historical perspective and its location and place within Mount Vernon. Mr. Peterson indicated that one of the issues that was thoroughly reviewed was placement of the building. He showed an overhead view of the campus and the distribution of buildings throughout the campus. He reviewed the spacing between the buildings, the scale of the buildings, the style of the buildings and material of which the buildings were constructed. The new science building is viewed as a contemporary building, but a building to be balanced with the current campus and with the use of the building.

Hugh Lifson pointed out that he felt there was a lack of sympathy shown in the proposed building with other buildings on the campus. In particular, he asked questions about the windows in the building. Mr. Peterson indicated that there was more depth to the windows than what was seen on the various drawings. There was also questions about the style of the roof, and how it does not match the style of most of the Cornell buildings. Mr. Peterson said the roof was designed as a flat roof, partially to consider the availability of using solar panels in the future.

Mr. Peterson pointed out the four different concepts that were considered for placement of the building. Concept four is the one that is being proposed by the college. It will place the building on the east side of the campus along 5th Avenue as it goes downhill from the intersection of 5th Avenue and 3rd Street. A major concern of HPC is that the college is projecting the demolition of two historic houses near the building site. Janet Budack read from the Cornell College master plan indicating that the college feels the historic nature of the campus needs to be maintained and that care should be taken of the historic buildings located on the campus. There was discussion about changing the location of the science building by moving it slightly south and west of its current proposed site. The major concern expressed by the college is that there needs to be adequate distance between buildings to comply with fire codes, and to allow access of fire equipment. There was also discussion regarding moving the two historic houses down the hill and to maintain them on the campus. Joel Miller indicated that he would check with house moving companies to determine if the move of the buildings a distance of several hundred yards would be substantially less expensive than trying to move the buildings elsewhere within the community.

It appears the major reason for removal of the two houses is to allow work on soil compaction around the site of the new science building. Joel Miller indicated that a large amount of dirt will need to be placed on the site to conduct pre-loading of the soil. In other

words, by adding a substantial layer of soil on top of the current land, this will cause compaction of the soil and make it more ready for construction. The building will be supported on caissons, which will be below the building. Mr. Miller said there will be no caissons on the location of the two historic homes. Soil compaction would not seem to be an issue for the land where the two houses are located. There is an issue as to how much room there is between the two existing houses and the actual foot print of the new building. A question arises as to whether these two houses will complicate the construction process of the new building. The east side of the new building is estimated to be approximately 75 feet from the sidewalk on 5th Avenue. The two houses may extend approximately 40 to 45 feet west from the 5th Avenue sidewalk.

Mr. Peterson indicated that he would review the building location to see if it could be moved slightly to the south and to the west. This would give more room for the two houses to exist. Joel Miller indicated he would be contacting a house moving company to see what the costs will be if the houses stayed on the Cornell campus and did not need to be moved where trees would be cut down or utility wires would have to be moved.

The Commission appreciated the information provided by Cornell and its architect. The Commission will look forward to receiving reports regarding the issues of moving the houses and possibly realigning the placement of the science building.

The meeting ended at approximately 8:10 p.m.