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Concerns of a Homeowner Living in the Historic District South

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Intro:

1. I am extremely disappointed that on the night of July 16th, the City Commission set aside the recommendation of the Historic Preservation Board to limit the size of Reid Fogler's proposed building in the Historic District South to three stories. Now it has been rejected a second time. Now if your override the decision of the HPV then you may as well as disband the board because it is meaningless.
2. Instead of accepting the recommendation of the Historic Preservation Board you set up an ad hoc committee of consisting of three city employees and developer Reid Fogler to revised plan. As a resident of University Heights South I found this both disconcerting and perplexing. Why were residents of the district omitted.
3. At the City Commission Meeting held on the night of July 16th you, as a committee, strongly implied that the members of the Historic Preservation Board were not cooperating with the builder and that they had failed to offer the builder a reason as to why his plan was rejected. As one who has sat in on those meetings carefully listening to the dialogue between the builder and the board, nothing could be further from the truth. For the historic district the building was simply out of context. It was too massive.
4. As a resident of the Historic District South I am hear to defend the actions of not only the first committee, but also the second. The fact is, the builder was offered a reasonable solution. He was offered "approval with conditions," conditions which he rejected.
5. On the July 16th meeting of the City Commissioners, the city manager suggested that he meet with the builder with the hope that a "compromise" could be reached. Now the word *compromise* is interesting. What does the word mean? It means a settlement between two or more parties in which both agree to accept less then they originally wanted. Now who are the two or more parties in this dispute? Where were the homeowners who strongly believe that all structures in the historic area should be limited to only two stories, but are perhaps willing to compromise by accepting the construction of a three story building? Why were they omitted from the discussion? Regardless of what the builder and the ad hoc committee said to the members of the Historic Preservation Board, the presentation I heard that night was a blatant distortion and blurring of the *meaning* of compromise. The builder has not taken one step toward a compromise.

6. While on the topic of word meanings there is the word *substantial*. The Historic Preservation Board recommended the builder make a *substantial* change to his plans, namely, reducing the building from four stories to three. What is being submitted to you this evening for the second time is cosmetic change. It again failed to address the expressed concerns of the members of Historic Preservation Board. The builder and his architect were informed by one member of this committee that the “building *“is just too large for the Historic District....(and) part of the idea of Historic District is to preserve the integrity of the district and the property surrounding it.I think we need to be sensitive to the current owners that live in the area and having a possible structure this large up against their homes.”* How would you feel if your were Antonia Greene, having a four story apartment complex lacking adequate parking for its residence built fourteen feet from your home. I don’t think there is a member of the City Commission, including the builder, his partner, and architect, who would like it. Another said, *“as historic board members we need to look at something on a much smaller scale to be more compatible with the neighborhood.”* Another said, *“the scale (of this building) is what bothers me about this project.”* (If accepted) *it could spell the slow death of the character of the district.”*

The member was speaking prophetically for on the October 5th, 2004 meeting of the Historic Preservation Board its members were discussing whether *“a 3-story building with the 3rd story in the attic could be compatible.”* Now three years later we are now discussing whether a massive *four* story build is “compatible.” What will it be three years from now? Five, six, seven stories? By voting for this recommendation you will be setting a new standard which no doubt will be challenged by future builders. By accepting this proposal you will be actively contributing to the slow death of the historic district; on the other hand, a vote against will be a vote for history and what history has to say to future generations.

7. Now I would like to point out that one of the buildings designated for destruction by the builder and this committee happens to be a historic building. It is a garage apartment behind the Woodbury home. It should be saved, not destroyed as presently approved by the HPS. This garage apartment represents a certain kind of building used during a certain era. Let me explain. I live on 3rd Ave, and in an alley way there are a number of “garage apartments.” There are two such garages on 6th ave. On the first floor there was a utility room for washing clothes along with a garage for the owner to park his vehicles. Upstairs there was a small two bedroom apartment which the owner rented out to students attending the University of Florida. This means that this neighborhood was never purely a residential district, it was both residential and “other use,” the “other” being the providing of living quarters for students.

Today pressures from developers and the city's desire for increased tax revenues are slowly reducing it to a student ghetto.

8. The fact is, because of its proximity to the university, the district is a desirable place for some homeowners to live. It was for that reason, I, a homeowner, moved into the district. Recently two young couples bought homes in the district. I wish they could be here tonight. It is a trend that should be encouraged by the city and this committee rather than discouraged.

Thesis: I want to remind the board that the decision you make tonight is a moral decision, a decision based on right and wrong and on how human beings behave toward each other. Right and wrong in this case transcends what a "legal" document may say or how it may be interpreted. My concerns are:

- I.that the builder has reduced right and wrong to human "rights" while ignoring any *duty* he might have toward his neighbor. But what about one's duty to one's neighbors? Tell Nahuapaxahua story.
 - A. Because most societies in the world see "neighbors" as being important, as having intrinsic dignity, something bricks and mortar, four story apartments, and tax revenues do not possess. *Duties* and obligations always trump so called *property rights*, which incidentally, are not mentioned in the declaration of Independence.
 - B. During the last meeting, I believe, the builder was advised that no "right" to build a four story in 6th Ave. was not implied in the term guidelines. In the minds of the framers of the sentence that included the phrase 4 stories, he was informed that it was to apply to possible four story buildings on the North side of SW 2nd Ave., not in the heart of the Historic District.
 - C. After being informed by the HPB that his building was "massive," "too huge," and "incompatible" with the neighborhood, he and his partner nevertheless arranged a meeting in the Commerce building designed to drum up support for his project, completely ignoring the recommendations made by this committee. (This meeting occurred just before he brought his rejected plan to the City Commission where some of you members of commission were led to believe that members of HPB were unreasonable and uncooperative.) During that meeting in the Commerce Building I specifically asked, "*What will you do if the City Commission accepts the recommendation of the HPB and turns down your building plan? Will you sue the city in the same way the Springhill developers intend to do?*" His reply was: "*It is your rights versus mine.*" It is his rights versus the rights of his and my neighbor Antonia Greene.

- D. Now as a linguist I am fully aware that unconscious word order in speech actually conveys *meaning*. For example, we say *Liberal Arts and Science*, not *Science and Liberal Arts*. What does the word order mean? It means that *Liberal Arts* courses designed to help students learn how to live and spend their money is more important than science which deals with our material existence. When we say *parent-child* or *employer-employer* we are unconsciously signaling that a parent and employer are in a superordinate or leadership role while the child and employee are in a subordinate role. Now interestingly, the traditional rule in English grammar, which incidentally is a moral rule, is to say “*You and I will do.....*” not “*Me and you.*” Now why the moral grammatical rule of “Your before I?” It is to signify that your significant other, your neighbor has intrinsic dignity, should be treated in the same way I myself would like to be treated. Now when Mr. Fogler said, “It is *my* rights versus *your*” instead of “*your* rights verses *mine*” he was unconsciously informing me exactly what he personally thinks of me and my neighbor Antonia Greene, though not stated explicitly. Word order is not meaningless.
- E. Will the builder sue the city if his imagined rights are violated. I propose that this is exactly what he will do, for that is exactly what he said he would do a couple of years ago in a meeting in our home where he was laying out his development plan to Antonia Greene. Despite the fact that he knew her building was classified as an historic building, he said he would, if purchased, would have it demolished, fully expecting that the City would grant him permission. He made it clear that if necessary he would bring in lawyers from Miami to argue his case. So my advice to City Commission is not to be terribly anxious about what Reid Fogler and his partner will or will not do, just do what is right and ethical.

II. The builder has stated that any building less than four stories would be economically impossible.

- A. I would challenge that statement. I believe there are others here who would also challenge that statement. If other builders in the neighborhood are able to demolish homes and put up three story condos and apartments then there should be no reason why this builder should not be able to do the same.
- B. I believe this statement added to win your sympathy in order to cause you, the City Commissioners, to relax the standards.
- C. While we certainly should all be interested in the builder’s well being, he should not be helped in maximizing profits at the expense of his neighbor, even though it might increase the tax base for the city.

III. Concern #3 involves the problem of parking your car.

- A. If the present plan is approved, it is going to make an impossible situation even worse. The ration between bedrooms and parking spaces in the historic district should be equal, not 60-40 as presently proposed by the builder. In addition the builder should provide additional parking space for guests. It is the right thing to do.

- B. There is a dental student who lives next door who left the Stratford apartments which is just a couple of hundred feet from where the proposed building is to be constructed. The reason she left was over parking. She would come home during the evening and then have to find parking on some other street, if she were so fortunate. She moved to 3rd Ave. where street parking was available, that is, until a few weeks ago. With the building of Camden Courts two houses West of us, parking spaces on the street have virtually disappeared. Even in places marked "Private Parking" one will find student car filling your space. It has become a parking war, and for me as a homeowner, very frustrating and troubling.

- C. A month ago, as I was mowing the lawn, I noticed that the chinch bugs were destroying it. This made me wonder about the last time the pest control man had come by and sprayed it. I discovered that they had been indeed been by but, simply were not able to find parking space in order to serve me. Is the city going to reimburse me for the financial costs I will incur in repairing my lawn. Would that not be a "neighborly act" on your part?

- D. As a resident of the Historic Preservation South I would request time to gather petitions that will oppose the construction of this out of context build as presently proposed by Reid Fogler and his partners.

Conclusion:

1. Let me conclude by saying that while tax revenues, bricks, mortar, and apartment buildings have value, they do not have dignity. Only human beings have dignity. This is why it is important that we treat our neighbors in the same way that we, individuals all prone to make mistakes, should be treated.

2. Finally, as one who can remember going through the depression as a child, these are very uncertain times. Let me remind everyone here that if we as a nation are hit with a deflationary collapse, a real concern of chairman of the Fed, Ben Bernake, then increased

tax revenues will collapse, hedge funds will declare bankruptcy, income rental will decrease, and millions of people will walk away from their homes because they can't pay their mortgages, and people will lose their jobs, including those working in Gainesville.

3. In the words of one financial advisor, *“the collapse of the sub prime mortgage business is merely the first symptom in what will continue to reorder the economic universe.”* Now is the time to get out of debt, not leverage it. Another advisor writes: *“There is no magic elixir we can swallow to cure what ails us. The free market is the only force that can fix this mess. Unfortunately, the fix won't be pretty. Prudent lending standards will return, guaranteeing that real estate prices collapse.”*

4. Now I would suggest that there is one thing we can count on and it is this: *history repeats itself.*