

Historic Annapolis Testimonies to the Historic Preservation Commission Public Hearing, February 27, 2025

Rachel Robinson Vice President, Preservation, Historic Annapolis

Good evening, commissioners. I'm Rachel Robinson, VP of Preservation at Historic Annapolis and a resident of Maryland Avenue.

Prior to the January pre-application review of the proposed MWC, HA submitted analysis of the ways in which this application does not comply with your Annapolis Historic District standards and guidelines. This was a counterpoint to the project team's preservation consultant, who analyzed the ways that it does comply.

Tonight, I press you to address the inaccurate review of the project as new construction rather than as an addition, dismissing an importantly more stringent guideline, which is B.6—Size and Massing of Additions.

We do not have written narrative in the application that makes the case for new construction over addition, although the MWC is on the same parcel as the Burtis House and shares the same address, 69 Prince George Street. We respectfully disagree with the staff report characterization of this application as “a distinct and separate structure from the late 19th century Burtis House”, even though we can all see that it is physically attached to the Burtis House by a glass hyphen, and there 6 references in the staff report to this being “attached” or “connected” to the Burtis House. This project is an addition.

The removal of the staircase at the Burtis House and relocation of that function to the glass hyphen makes Burtis House interior circulation completely dependent on its addition. Furthermore, MHT, who holds the preservation easement on the Burtis House, states in their August 2024 letter granting conceptual approval that the application is a “request to construct an addition to the Burtis House.”

Why does this classification matter? It matters because the guideline for New Building Design (B.2) is more lenient than B.6—Size and Massing of Additions.

B.6 states “Additions shall be designed to be subordinate to the main part of the building in terms of massing, height, scale and detail.” The staff report generously assesses the MWC as “generally subordinate in appearance to Burtis House despite its size and taller ridge height” and “marginally sympathetic to the Burtis House.” This is not good enough for such a conspicuous addition to the Burtis House and the historic district.

What is the defensible rationale for reviewing the MWC as separate, new construction rather than an addition to a contributing structure, when it is literally connected as were previous additions, as documented in Sanborn maps and noted in the staff report?

HPC Commissioners, this application is for an addition to a historic structure. HA urges you to hold this application to the higher standard and safeguard the Annapolis historic district by requiring a subordinate and more appropriate building addition at this prominent site.

Karen Theimer Brown
President & CEO, Historic Annapolis

My name is Karen Theimer Brown, President and CEO of Historic Annapolis, 18 Pinkney Street.

I would like to first thank you all for serving on the HPC. I too have served on the HPC, and I have staffed the HPC, have testified before the HPC as a property owner, and I have testified as a representative of Historic Annapolis. I know firsthand what responsibility it is, how important it is to make defensible decisions, and I understand the challenges you face with this application, which requires a strict standard of review.

I also want to recognize the team who have been committed to this project since Historic Annapolis brought Bryce Turner to Annapolis 7 years ago to lead the Urban Land Institute panel, and subsequently when we hired Eileen Fogarty to staff the CDAC. We appreciate the project team's attempts to be responsive to public concerns, in particular to change the orientation of the building.

I was part of the CDAC, on the preservation subcommittee, and the first City Dock Advisory Committee. I have personally been a part of this conversation for 15 years, championing revitalization and resiliency of City Dock. Historic Annapolis has been advocating for the good of our historic city for close to 75 years and does not challenge the idea of an addition on the rear of Burtis. In fact, in our submitted written testimony you should have received a report we prepared with preservation architect Michael Dowling and NPS, setting forth a plan for an appropriate addition on the rear of Burtis, one that is subordinate and which preserves the prevailing setback line, in compliance with the HPC design guidelines.

The plan before you now, however, does neither. First, Guideline B6 states: "Additions which compete with or obliterate an original structure will not be approved." The addition is not subordinate to the historic structure, not deferential. The historic structure is obscured from multiple vantage points; Burtis is overwhelmed by the addition, that is bigger, wider, and taller than Burtis. Bottom line: the mass of this new building is more than double the size of the historic structure to which it's attached.

Second, Guideline B10 states: "The prevailing setback line at the street should be preserved. Any new construction should address the street in a manner consistent with neighboring structures and the overall street form." The building extends well beyond the Burtis lot, the existing building line that has been well established for $\frac{3}{4}$ of a century.

The commission must consider Guidelines B6 and B10 in your deliberations. Once again, I am sympathetic to the tremendous responsibility before you to apply these standards consistently with all applicants, so it is not perceived to be arbitrary and capricious in your deliberations. Simply put – our city needs a smaller, more contextual building, and this design is not it.