



DEPARTMENT OF DEVELOPMENT SERVICES – PLANNING DIVISION

REPORT: 55 Elm Street, Hartford, CT 06106

For consideration: November 18, 2020

STAFF REPORT

TO: HARTFORD PRESERVATION COMMISSION

FROM: Kate Montgomery, Consultant

Email: oneplan@hartford.gov

PROJECT: 55 Elm Street

PARCEL ID: 247-448-047

ZONE: MX-2

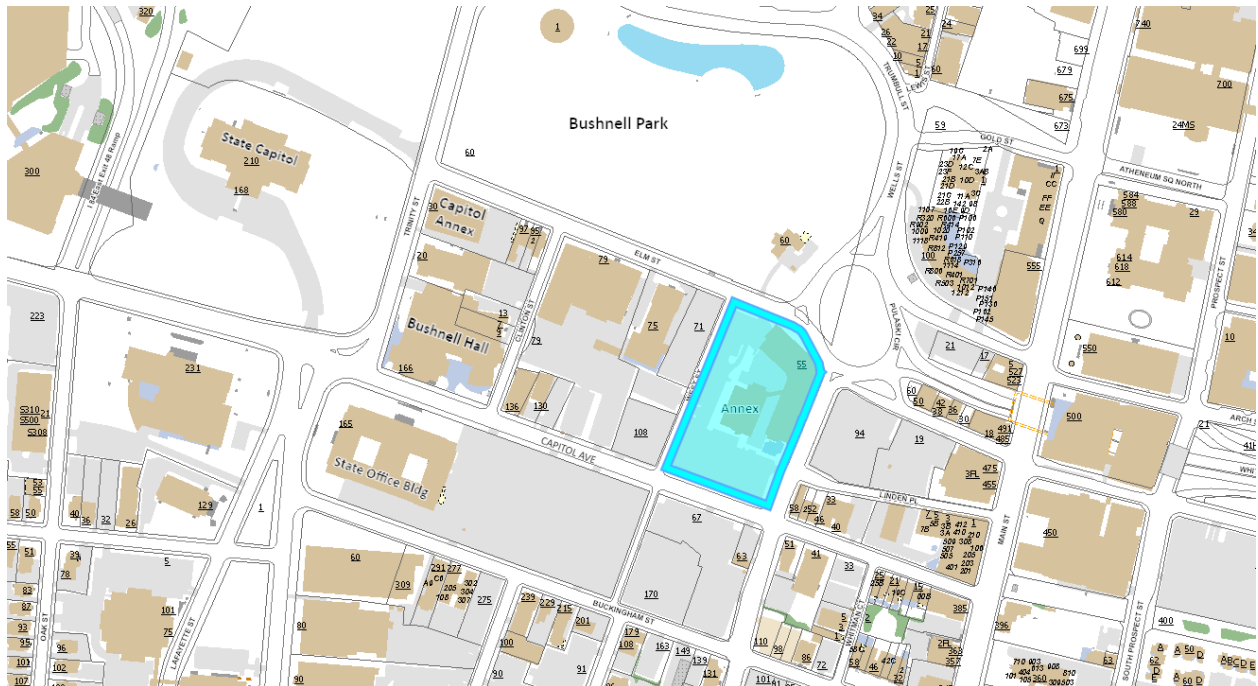
HISTORIC DISTRICT: Elm Street National Historic District

TYPE: ARTICLE XII HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION

Sec. 28-170 through 28-221

APPLICANT: David Goslin / Crosskey Architects, LLC.

OWNER: Matt Edvardsen / 55 Elm St., LLC.



Location Map

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The buildings at 55 Elm street were leased as state office space for the past several years. The completion of the State Office Building renovation has led these buildings to become vacant and it was sold to the current owner, Matt Edvardsen of Spinnaker Real Estate Partners in January 2020, according to the property record card.

Proposed Project: According to the application, the structures will be renovated to convert from office use to mixed-use and will include residential apartments, hotel suites, a restaurant, fitness spaces, and lounge areas. The primary work visible from the exterior will be the site renovations, ramps, new windows, limited window replacements, and the cleaning and restoration of the masonry façade. The narrative description from the application follows:

“The existing building (currently vacant) will be completely restored according to the Secretary of the Interior Design Standards as both state and federal historic tax credits will be used to help finance the renovations. The main building and the annex building will be converted into a mixed use building containing a 75 suite boutique hotel, 110 units of rental apartments, restaurant and commercial space. The first and second floor of the main building and the upper floors of annex building will house the hotel suites. The apartment units will be located on floor 3-7 in the main building. A portion of the first floor space in the main building will contain a restaurant. The 1st floor of the annex will contain commercial space.

The exterior of the building will be restored. The masonry will be cleaned and repointed as needed. The existing windows and doors will be retained. New replacement windows will be provided where existing window louvers now occur. The new windows will match the existing windows. The rear courtyard (currently the loading dock and back entry) will be converted into a drop off zone for the hotel. The existing loading docks at the main building and the annex will be converted into building entries. The grade in the courtyard will be raised two feet to minimize the length of handicap ramps. The courtyard will remain as a hardscape space with new pavers as recommended by SHPO. The existing portal/tunnel at the 1st floor that connects Elm St. to the rear courtyard will remain and get repurposed into an outdoor dining space. The existing parking lot access curb cut to the west of the building, on Elm St. will remain. The parking lot will be modified and regraded to allow vehicular access into the rear courtyard. The remainder of the site will remain as parking. There is a master plan to develop those areas with new buildings. Existing roof top mechanical equipment will remain and be reused. No new roof top equipment is expected.”

LEGAL STANDARD

The Commission reviews and acts upon all applications for Document of Suitability. No person or entity may, without first applying and obtaining the approval of the Commission, file an application for a demolition permit, or for a building permit for any protected property as designated in the Historic Preservation Ordinance Sec. 28-219.

STANDARD SPECIFIC TO THE USE

The commission shall adopt the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation and the Hartford Guidelines for Renovations and Additions to Historic Buildings.

According to page 19- “*Windows and Doors*” of the adopted ***Guidelines for Renovations and Additions to Historic Buildings***; “*Consider repair and restoration first. Replace only when repair is not possible... Replace to match as closely as possible the dimensions and profiles of existing components such as stiles rails, muntins, glazing bars (interior and exterior) and area of glass...*”

According to page 23 - “*Designing for Missing Elements*” of the adopted **Guidelines for Renovations and Additions to Historic Buildings**; “Recommended... If you have evidence of what missing elements looked like (such as identical elements elsewhere on the building or photographs of the building before the elements were lost), try to match them as closely as possible.”

According to pages 7,8 - “*Masonry - Protect and Maintain*” of the adopted **The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation**; “Recommended...Cleaning masonry only when necessary to halt deterioration or remove heavy soiling... Cleaning masonry only when necessary to halt deterioration or remove heavy soiling.”

FINDING OF FACTS

CURRENT USE:	Vacant Office Space	PROPOSED USE:	Mixed use/Residential/Hotel
YEAR BUILT:	1926	STYLE:	Renaissance Revival

Particular Mention in historic nomination: In the 1984 Elm Street Historic District Nomination, 55 Elm Street is listed as a contributing property to the district. In item 7, page 3, the property is described as follows:

“CONNECTICUT GENERAL INSURANCE COMPANY BUILDING (CIGNA Group Pension), 55 Elm Street, James Gamble Rogers, New York, architect, 1926, Renaissance Revival (Photograph 12). Stony Creek granite street-facing elevations with yellow brick rear walls. Six stories high, with seven bays on Elm Street, ten bays on Hudson Street, and the entrance in the cut-away corner within a two-story round-arched opening. The first two stories are rusticated, with the rounded edges of the stones deeply cut back to about six inches. On the first story the windows are round-arched, with paired rectangular openings on the upper stories. Denticular cornices run above the second and fourth stories, while the building's prominent main cornice has dentils, egg-and-dart molding, and large modillions. The lobby features a coffered ceiling, marble walls, and tall marble Ionic and Corinthian columns (Photograph 13). Early addition and garage in rear.”

In item number 8, page 2, the significance of the structure is further detailed,

“The district includes two buildings in which the architects adapted Italian Renaissance palazzetti for their corporate clients. Both the Phoenix Mutual (Photograph 11, background) and the Connecticut General (Photograph 12) buildings follow the Renaissance division of the facade into a base, highly ornamented main floor, and plainer upper stories, separated by stringcourses or cornices, with a heavy, projecting main cornice completing the building. However, in both cases, the six-story buildings are far larger than their precedents, so that the levels occupy two or more floors. In both cases the Renaissance motif is carried into the interior, where marble walls and coffered ceilings create sumptuous lobbies.

The Connecticut General building is by James Gamble Rogers, a New York architect trained at Yale and at the Ecole des Beaux Arts. Rogers is perhaps best known for the Columbia Presbyterian Medical Center in New York and Harkness Quadrangle (Sterling Library) at Yale. His design, based upon the Medici-Riccardi palace in Florence, echoes the round arches and strong cornice of the Phoenix Mutual building [design by Benjamin Morris], but it is the dramatic rustication of the lower stories that makes this building so outstanding. The siting of the building on the corner and the use of the corner to provide the entrance are also significant, for instead of two elevations the building presents one massive facade when viewed from Pulaski Circle. These two are the largest and most stylish buildings in the [Italian Renaissance Revival] genre in Hartford.”

Current Conditions: This building is in good condition with some modifications to windows.

Condition of other properties in neighborhood: Other buildings included in the district are in fair to good condition, and included the 30 Trinity Street (Capitol Building Annex), Bushnell Hall, DEEP Headquarters/formerly Department of Health Services, and the recently renovated State Office Building at 165 Capitol Ave. Some of the smaller contributing building, such as the

apartments at 71, 78-80, and 126 Capitol Ave, as well as non-contributing buildings, 10 Clinton Street, have been demolished since the establishment of the District. The surrounding blocks, as well as a portion of the subject property, are dominated by surface parking.



Figure 1. Google Streetview, 2020. View east, across West Street, to the subject structures at 55 Elm Street which include the 6-story main building and 4-story Annex building with attached garage. See Attachment 2 for existing photographs taken by the applicant.



Figure 2. Left, Hartford GIS Maps. Right, Map from the Historic District Nomination. The 6-story main building and 4-story Annex building are the eastern boundary for the Elm Street National Historic District and are visible on essentially all sides from the street. Several smaller building shown on the 1983 map have been demolished.



Figure 3. National Historic District Nomination Photos, Image 11, 1983. Original image caption: “Elm Street looking southeast from the corner of Trinity Street.” 55 Elm Street is the furthest building at the end of the street.



Figure 4. National Historic District Nomination Photos, Image 12, 1983. Original image caption: “Connecticut General building, 55 Elm Street, view southwest.” View across Pulaski Circle shows the importance of the window repetition on the building façade and its impression on the street corner.



Figure 5. National Historic District Nomination Photos, Image 13, 1983. Original image caption: “Connecticut General Building, 55 Elm Street, lobby, view southwest.” While not subject to the Hartford Preservation Ordinance, the interior of the building was also noted for its importance by those that included it in the Historic District Nomination.

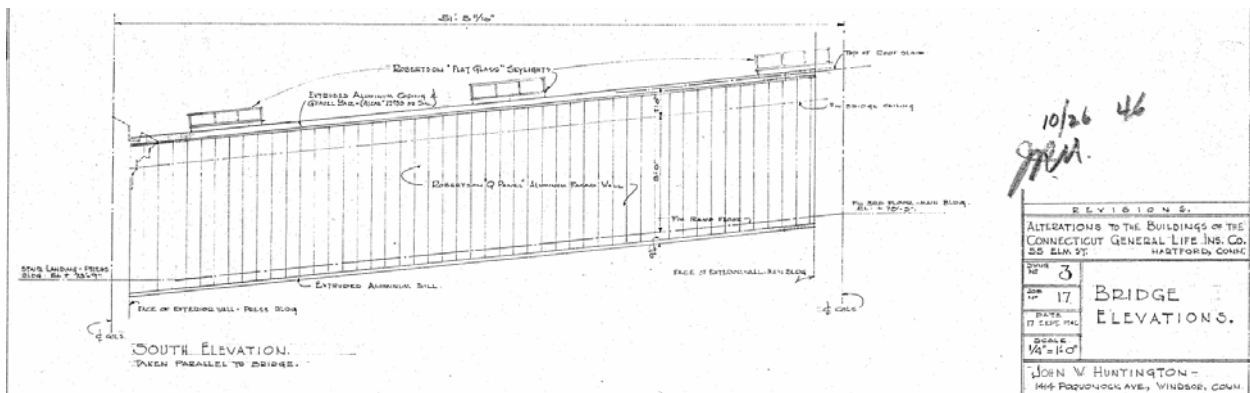


Figure 6. Plans titled “Alterations to the Buildings of the Connecticut General Life Insurance Co.”, by John W. Huntington, dated 13 Sept. 1946. This elevation depicts the bridge connecting the two buildings in plans found on the Hartford GIS Scanned Document Viewer. The drawings depict the bridge plans and details as well as other alteration to the annex building, referred to as the Press Building in the drawings.



Figure 7. Drawings and photographs provided by applicant. The changes proposed have been outlined in red for clarity and include new a ramp, guardrail, and window installations. New windows are proposed. No historic images were provided to indicate these were previously window locations, but their addition complements and completes the existing window repetition. The new windows are proposed as 4 over 4 to match the existing.



COMMENTS RECEIVED

(None received as of November 11, 2020)

ANALYSIS

The Italian Renaissance Revival Style buildings at 55 Elm Street are significant to the streetscape on Elm Street and the occupation of the corner of Elm and Hudson Street at Pulaski Circle. It is one of the two examples of this style listed in the Historic District Nomination and its careful rehabilitation into a mixed-use property, in compliance with to the Secretary of Interior Standards and Hartford Preservation Guidelines, can provide the historic buildings with a new position in the present and future of Hartford while honoring its history.

The three pages of elevation drawings provided with the application best illustrate the proposed changes to the exterior of the building. For ease of viewing, No changes to the exterior are shown on the front of the main building in the Northeast, North, and East Elevations on sheet A-2.1. Similarly, no changes are proposed on the exterior facades in the Southwest, Northwest, and South-B Elevation on sheet A-2.2, and the existing “Flemish bond infill” and louvers installed at historic window locations will remain. The only element that will be completely removed from the main building is the fire escape depicted in the Northwest and South-A Elevations. This steel structure and canopy are a later addition likely added for necessity rather than architectural character. While later additions to a structure can hold value, the removal of this fire escape structure is not believed to have a negative impact on the building’s historic significance.

As depicted in South-A Elevation and West Elevations of the Main Building, some of the louvers in previous window locations on the rear of the main building will be replaced with new windows, as proposed on the drawings. A new window will be installed where a door will be removed along with the fire escape. This replacement is consistent with the recommendations of the Preservation Guidelines to replace missing elements when possible. Clarification is need on how many will be replaced, as not all are labeled as new windows in the elevations.

The new windows, proposed on the lower level of the west facing façade, are one of the most extreme changes to the exterior of the main building. While it is not visibly evident that these windows existed based on the information provided, their addition compliments the repetition on the rest of the façade.

The applicant has stated in the narrative that the new windows will match the existing, but the general cutsheets provided (Attachment 4) are for the 2000 Series windows by Graham Architectural Products of York, Pennsylvania and do not give site specific window dimensions. The 2000 series windows are aluminum, which is a reasonable replacement material for the existing steel windows, as long as the color and style is matched as closely as possible the dimensions and profiles of existing components such as stiles, rails, muntins, glazing bars (interior and exterior), and area of glass.

The bridge connection between the top floor of the Annex building and the 3rd Floor of the Main building is shown to remain. While structure could be viewed as an addition deterring from the character and style of the buildings, it is depicted in plans dated September 13, 1946 by John W. Huntington of Windor, Connecticut. Due to its age it may have some significance to construction methods at that time period or other importance that would need to be further explored before the proposal of its removal.

The application narrative also states the exterior of the building will be restored and masonry will be cleaned and repointed as needed. No specific areas of deterioration of the existing masonry were called out in the drawings or visible in the provided photographs. The exterior masonry work is a key feature of the building's façade and the rusticated stone first floor and smooth finish on the upper floors of the main building is characteristic of the Renaissance Revival Style. Therefore, appropriate maintenance and gentle cleaning of the masonry façade is important to the rehabilitation of these buildings and should abide by the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation, as is required for the state and federal historic tax credits.

Staff believes that the proposed renovations and rehabilitation will not negatively impact the character of historic structure in question and will have a positive outcome on the surrounding historic district and future use of the structure.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends approval of this application with the following condition(s):

1. Where new windows are installed, components shall match as closely as possible the dimensions and profiles of existing components such as stiles, rails, muntins, glazing bars (interior and exterior), and area of glass. Window features shall also match the color of existing windows as closely as possible.
2. Clarify the location and number of new windows to be installed in the South-A Elevation of sheet A-2.2.

A draft resolution follows.

ATTACHMENTS

1. Application
2. Existing Photographs
3. Elevations
4. Cut Sheets for the proposed windows
5. Floor Plans
6. Amenity/Program Plans
7. Site Plan

REVIEWED,

Aimee Chambers, Director



CITY OF HARTFORD
HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION RESOLUTION
55 ELM STREET
HISTORIC PRESERVATION PROPOSAL

- Whereas,** The City of Hartford Historic Preservation Commission reviewed the proposal for renovations and site work at 55 Elm Street; and
- Whereas,** The property is located in the Elm Street National Historic District and encompassed by Elm Street, West Street, Capitol Ave, Hudson Street, and Pulaski Circle; and
- Whereas,** The subject structures at 55 Elm Street include the 1926, 6-story main building and 4-story Annex building with attached garage; and
- Whereas,** The applicant proposes interior and exterior renovations to the buildings to convert from vacant office use into mixed-use and will include 110 residential apartments, 75 boutique hotel suites, a restaurant, fitness spaces, lounge areas, and commercial space; and
- Whereas,** The applicant states, “the existing building will be completely restored according to the Secretary of the Interior Design Standards as both state and federal historic tax credits will be used to help finance the renovations”; and
- Whereas,** The majority of the proposed exterior work is visible from the street and includes site renovations, ramps, stairs, railing, guardrails, new windows, limited window replacements, and the cleaning and restoration of the masonry façade.
- Whereas,** New aluminum windows will be from the 2000 Series by Graham Architectural Products of York, Pennsylvania will be used to replace existing windows in select locations, replace louvers at previous window locations, and be installed on the rear west façade where new windows are proposed.
- Whereas,** The proposed work retains the elevated pedestrian connector between the Annex Building and 3rd floor of the Main Building; and
- Whereas,** The proposed work is consistent with the City’s Historic Design Principles;

Now therefore Be It

Resolved, The City of Hartford Historic Preservation Commission hereby approves the proposed work with the following conditions:

1. Where new windows are installed, components shall match as closely as possible the dimensions and profiles of existing components such as stiles, rails, muntins, glazing bars (interior and exterior), and area of glass. Window features shall also match the color of existing windows as closely as possible.
2. Clarify the location and number of new windows to be installed in the South-A Elevation of sheet A-2.2.

Be It Further,

Resolved, This 18th day of November 2020.