

May 15, 2007

(via email)

Dear Central Business Architecture Committee,

I write with great concerns regarding the architectural value and environmental impact of the hotel and parking garage proposed for the Round House parking lot.

While there are clear design and aesthetic shortcomings of this project --such as, an unimaginative overall design, superficial decorative gestures and poor proportions--I would like to focus on what I see as the most egregious problem with this project; its enormous size and its detrimental impact on adjacent buildings --particularly the impact on the affordable housing units which front onto South Street.

This project is being promoted as a downtown "infill" project, and therefore has proposed minimal side setbacks. In reality the buildings on either side of the project do not have the blank walls that are typical of an infill project. Both buildings have windows that face the hotel and parking lot site and the siting, height and size of the project is completely unresponsive to that condition.

Particularly problematic is that the many windows and entries of the affordable apartments face the development site and rely on that exposure for light and air. Therefore the enormous size and uncomfortable proximity of the proposed parking garage will have a extremely detrimental effect on the lives on the many residents of this building. I am particularly concerned because these apartments house a large number of children who will be in close range to the harmful effects of exhaust from the hundreds of cars that will be using this garage.

Currently there is a great concern among many architects, planners, city officials and community activists regarding environmental justice issues within cities and towns. Historically there are clear patterns of building structures and facilities that have negative health effects on the poorest members of a community. Since this proposed hotel and parking garage is a city-sponsored initiative, it is particularly disturbing to see a project that will clearly harm low-income and people of color who live in downtown. A city-sponsored project that has the appearance of supporting racist and classist attitudes regarding development cannot contribute to the human, social and economic vitality of Northampton.

As a committee I recognize that your purview is to review the architectural value of proposed projects with an emphasis on encouraging compatible building design. But as members of industries and professions linked to the built environment --and as members of a board that seeks to promote and advocate for design excellence I hope that the negative "architectural" impacts of this project are clear to you and that you will seek to take a proactive role in promoting both good design and social equity in our community.

Sincerely,



Joseph Krupczynski