

Manayunk Neighborhood Council, PO Box 4667, Philadelphia, PA 19127

www.ManayunkCouncil.org 215-482-5528



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June 10, 2005

Julia Chapman, 4th Council District
City Council
Room 404, City Hall
Philadelphia, PA 19107

Re: 3 Rector Street; Labov Building

Dear Councilman Nutter,

The hearing for Rector Street Associates' application to the Zoning Board of Appeals is to be held on Wednesday October 4th for approval to build a 5 story addition to the existing property providing a multi family dwelling for 22 residential units.

Previously at hearings of the Philadelphia Historical Commission and the Board of Building Standards, Councilman Nutter and then, following his resignation, the 4th council district office has written in support of the development scheme at those hearings. Should the office be asked again to write in support of this development, we ask that the following points be taken into consideration.

This is the third scheme proposed by the developer for this site. The first scheme proposed total demolition of the existing 2 story building despite being on the National Historic Register and listed in the Manayunk Historic District. The scheme proposed 17 residential units in a 5 story building. The application for demolition was denied by the Historical Commission.

The second scheme retained the walls of existing building and built within and on top of the existing structure increasing the height of the proposed building of the building by an additional story to 6 stories. This proposal was approved in concept by the Historical Commission.

The third scheme proposes an additional story from the previous proposal and increases the footprint of the building by demolishing the north wall of the existing building and building on the existing sidewalk from sidewalk to roof level providing 22 units. 21 car spaces are provided at street and canal level with the lower level accessed by an elevator.

The present proposal demolishes the whole building except for three exterior walls; it introduces 22 cars into a site with constricted access and the development towers 30 feet above any adjacent building. The use of parking at street and canal level is in conflict with the intention to develop the canal as a public amenity. The design and materials proposed for the addition are alien to the area and inappropriate for an area of historical significance.

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The idea of demolishing the building was rejected by the Historical Commission; each of the schemes has been recommended for denial by Commission staff and comments and recommendations by community members have been ignored and yet Councilman Nutter's support has been continuous and unconditional. He has played no role in asking the developer's to consider the concerns of the Commission staff or members of the community. His support has continued as the scheme has increased in size and the materials and design grew increasingly aggressive and discordant. Is this the vision that Councilman Nutter has for Philadelphia's future? Is this his approach to Historical Preservation and community involvement?

This scheme, if approved, will set a significant precedent for all future development in Manayunk. It ignores the Property Maintenance code, undermines the positive steps to bring life and activity to the canal, overwhelms the historic fabric of the remaining mill buildings and is totally alien to the character of the area.

The existing building remains structurally sound and the roof intact, though it has been neglected in the last few years. There are many uses for which it is suited and the lack of bidders when it was offered for sale reflects the high purchase price that the present owner demanded for the building, not its unsuitability for adaptive re-use. The insistence of the owner and the developers to aggressively pursue demolition and inappropriate development continues to create blight in the area and negatively impact businesses while the building remaining unused and poorly maintained

This application to the Zoning Board of Adjustment should be denied. There is no hardship in this instance which should allow the proposed development to proceed. Residential development for sale demands a high parking provision and high density development. Many other more thoughtful and imaginative uses for the building could be encouraged which build on the history of the canal and the mill buildings and contributes to a stable economic environment to allow Main Street and the canal towpath to develop in a harmonious way.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Kevin Smith', written over a white background.

Kevin Smith
President