

DATE: May 31, 2013

TO: Ms. Lisa Nicholas
Senior Planner
City of Ithaca
Planning and Development

FROM: Craig Jensen, AIA
CJS Architects, Partner-in-Charge

RE: Harold's Square Project – Historic Context and Project Approach

Dear Ms. Nichols,

On behalf of L Enterprises, LLC and the Harold's Square team, I would like to take this opportunity to present to you a number of considerations that have been studied and developed with regards to the proposed Harold's Square development project along the Ithaca Commons.

The replacement of the existing one-story structures at 123-131, 133 and 135 E. State Street is necessary to ensure the preservation, restoration and endurance of the Sage Block building (one of the most identifiable historic structures along Ithaca Commons). The Sage Block building by architect William H. Miller has held a prominent place along the Ithaca Commons since its construction in 1884-1885. The Sage Block was developed at a time when its footprint, size and extents would support its success and financial viability – unfortunately, this is no longer a possibility given modern-day market dynamics. The building has been owned by L Enterprises, LLC since the 1970's and its financial viability has been studied numerous times. Those studies have shown that it would not be possible to justify the costs of restoring the building if it were done as a stand-alone venture.

The incorporation of the Sage Block into the overall Harold's Square project will confirm its viability and longevity in the Ithaca Commons historic fabric. The replacement of the one-story structures with Harold's Square will also contribute to the sustainability, economic and urban vitality, as well as, the survival of other buildings in the historic district of Ithaca Commons.

With regards to the Sage Block, L Enterprises, LLC has committed to following the standards and guidelines established by the *Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties* for rehabilitation of historic buildings. While it has undergone a variety of alterations over time, the Sage Block's distinctive, decorative terracotta relief, cornice and stone banding have endured and will continue to contribute to the character of the surrounding environment.

As part of the development, the Sage Building will be rehabilitated with a number of improvements, some of which include:

- *Maintaining the existing terracotta cornice at the northwest corner of the building*
- *Cleaning, repointing and repairing the existing exterior masonry walls*
- *Repair and/or replacement of the existing roof*

- *New fenestration at existing masonry openings on the north and west sides of the building. When practical, existing windows will be repaired, but if they are deteriorated to the point of requiring replacement, they will be replaced to match design, color, texture and perhaps material construction*
- *Replacement window design will reflect a characteristic William H. Miller divided-light pattern at the upper window areas, similar to what currently exists on the Sage Block building*
- *The incorporation of the west fenestration into the new project atrium space*
- *The existing interior character will be restored and maintained wherever possible, with additional modifications developed per the needs and requirements of potential tenants*

It is the goal of L Enterprises, LLC and its design project team to thoughtfully integrate, maintain and revitalize the Sage Block building so that it continues to be a prominent and key building that contributes to the appeal and character of Ithaca Commons.

The lower-heights, low-density structures proposed for demolition are less complementary to the character of the existing streetscape presented by other buildings on East State Street. They will ultimately be replaced with a new three- and four-story structure which will provide denser mixed-use occupancies on the same footprint (an essential element to the vitality of urban environments) while restoring a once-lost continuation of the scale and proportions of the visual fabric of the existing façades along the Commons. The loss of the existing storefronts will be mitigated by their replacement with new storefront extents in the new building.

The Harold's Square project seeks to complement and maintain the existing rhythm, variety, sizes and character of the Commons streetscape elevations. The project team has incorporated the following considerations to sustain the distinctive quality of the historic district of Ithaca Commons:

- *The north façade of the new building will uphold the 60ft height standard established for buildings on the Commons*
- *The north façade will be visually segmented into three- and four-story portions to provide vertical variety and interest along the Commons*
- *To lessen its perceived overall width, the building's north façade is articulated every 30ft (reflecting building widths typically seen on the Commons)*
- *Retail occupancy will be located at the Commons level and large areas of glass storefront will be provided along the pedestrian streetscape in keeping with the historic, commercial nature of the district*
- *The proportions of window openings on the upper floors of the north elevation echo the proportions of other building openings nearby*
- *Horizontal, opaque zones or "banding" on the new façade preserve the existing visual banding that currently is prominent on adjacent and neighboring structures*
- *Articulated cornices on the new elevation are provided as a gesture to those traditional elements characteristically found on other Commons buildings*

- *Under consideration is the use of varied-colored terracotta rain-screen cladding on the north façade; terracotta is, of course, a traditional cladding material that will well-complement the existing surrounding materials palette of existing structures*
- *To lessen the likelihood of its visual presence on the Commons, the residential tower portion of the project is setback 60ft from the northern edge of the project boundary*

The residential tower portion of the Harold's Square project is located along the southern project boundary and its overall scale and height – as well as its suggested cladding materials - are appropriate to the scale, size and character of commercial buildings located along Green Street.

In closing, L Enterprises, LLC and its team has endeavored to thoughtfully integrate into its surrounding context by addressing urban issues of scale, proportion and materiality. As evidence of this a strong commitment has been made to maintain and revitalize the Sage Block building so that it continues to be a prominent and key building that contributes to the appeal and character of Ithaca Commons. It is an unequivocal objective of the Harold's Square project to positively contribute to the continued stabilization, development and economic growth of Ithaca's downtown core, while respecting the character of its existing architectural legacy.