

Alexandria City Hall

South Façade Colonial Revival Detail Restudy Recommendations

BAR Hearing 10/16/25



EXISTING SOUTH FAÇADE

The reconstructed Governor's Palace in Williamsburg was the apparent inspiration for the 1960s south façade of the Alexandria City Hall.

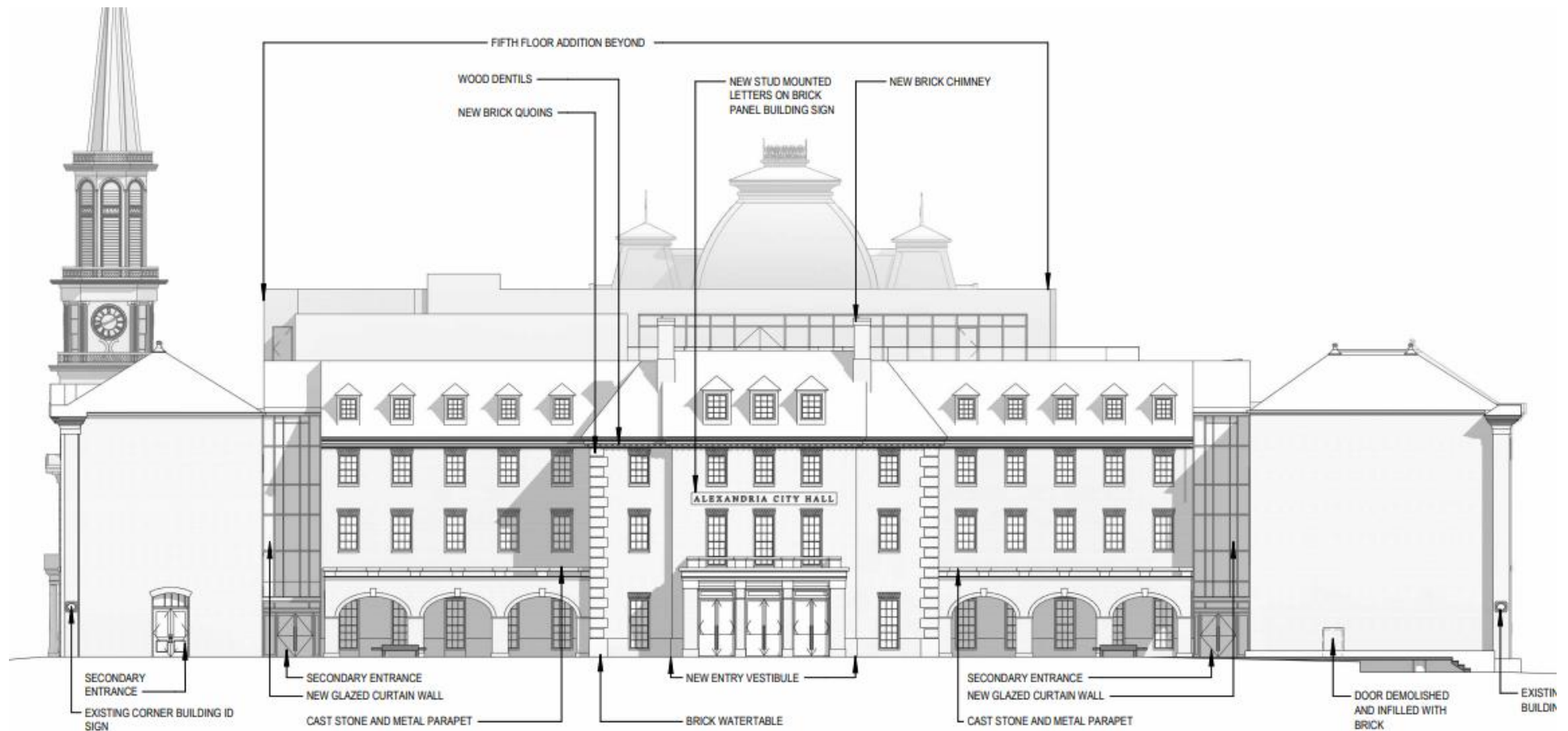


GOVERNOR'S PALACE, WILLIAMSBURG, VA

1706-1710, burned 1781, reconstructed 1930

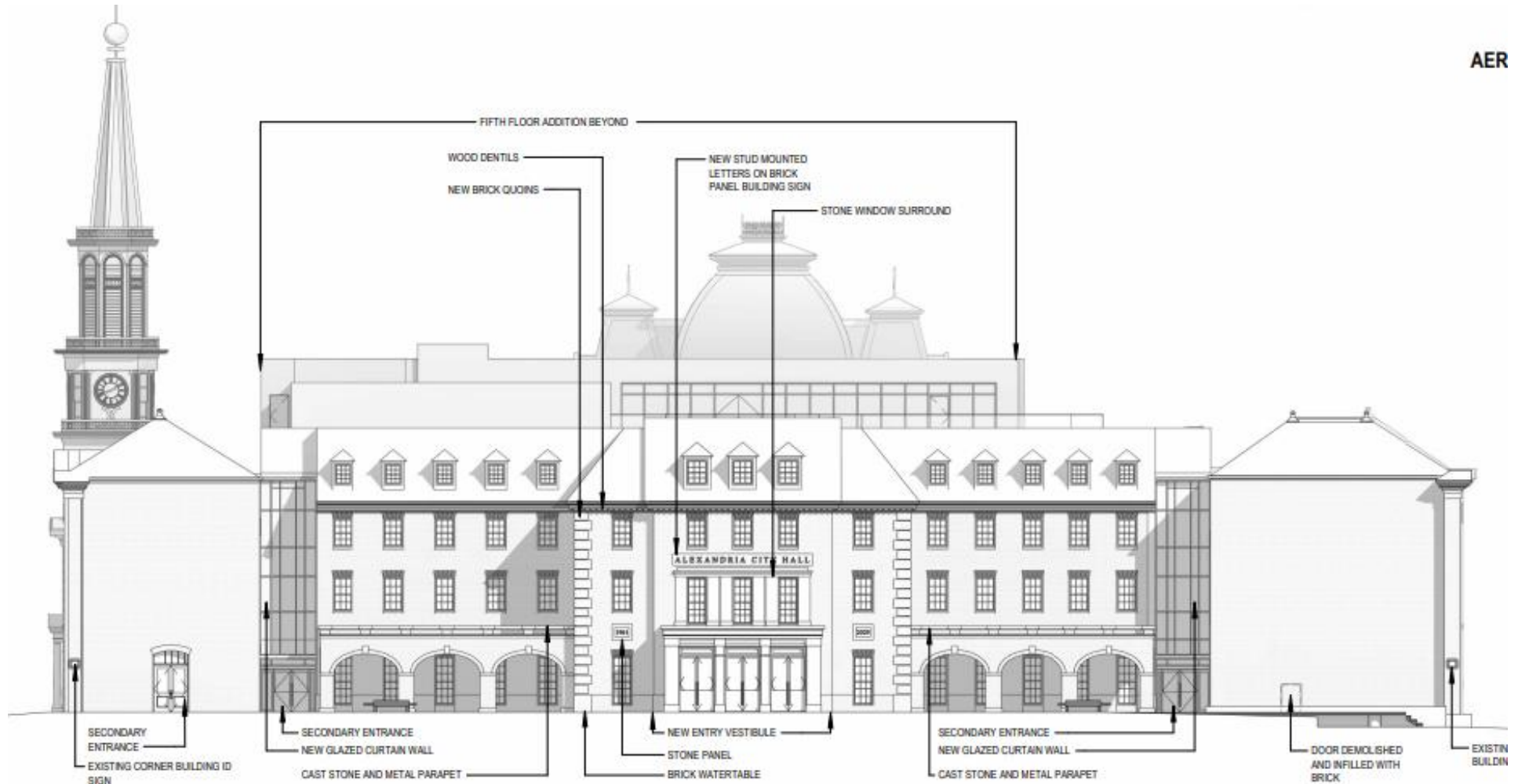
Hip roof with a simple balustrade flanked by large sculpted chimneys

Rubbed brick quoins, belt course and jack arches above graduated height windows



APPLICANT PROPOSAL: ALT 1 MODERNIZATION APPROACH

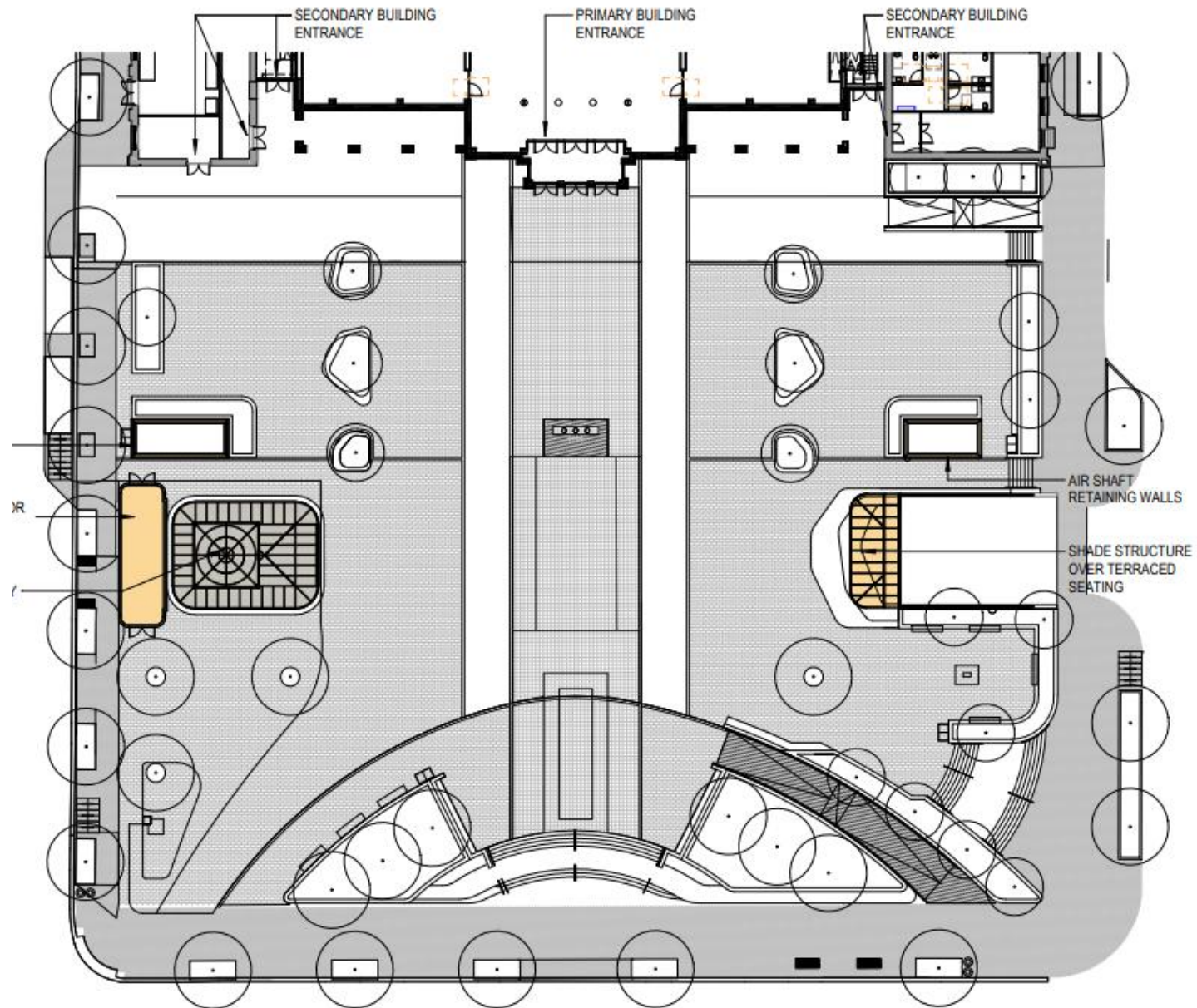
The raised roof above the new projecting entrance is inappropriate for a Georgian style building and creates unnecessary complexity in the traditional hip roof form. The new chimneys are in an awkward and untraditional location. The windows, and particularly the dormers, on the wings of the main block are visually crowded. The pilasters flanking the entry doors do not have classical proportions and appear to extend thru the entablature to the cornice. The quoins should have greater difference in widths, as shown on the Carlyle House and Christ Church. The new brick watertable cuts through the windows, which is not historically appropriate. The arcade makes absolutely no architectural sense on this facade. It will be expensive to construct and is shown with a “green” roof that will be difficult to maintain and visible to very few building occupants and the environmental benefits will be de minimis. While the vertical hyphens separating the 19th and 20th century portions of the building are welcome, why are they glass with a view of the fire stairs? This curtain wall should be something opaque that references other portions of the building, like slate or metal panels.



APPLICANT PROPOSAL: ALT 2 MODERNIZATION APPROACH

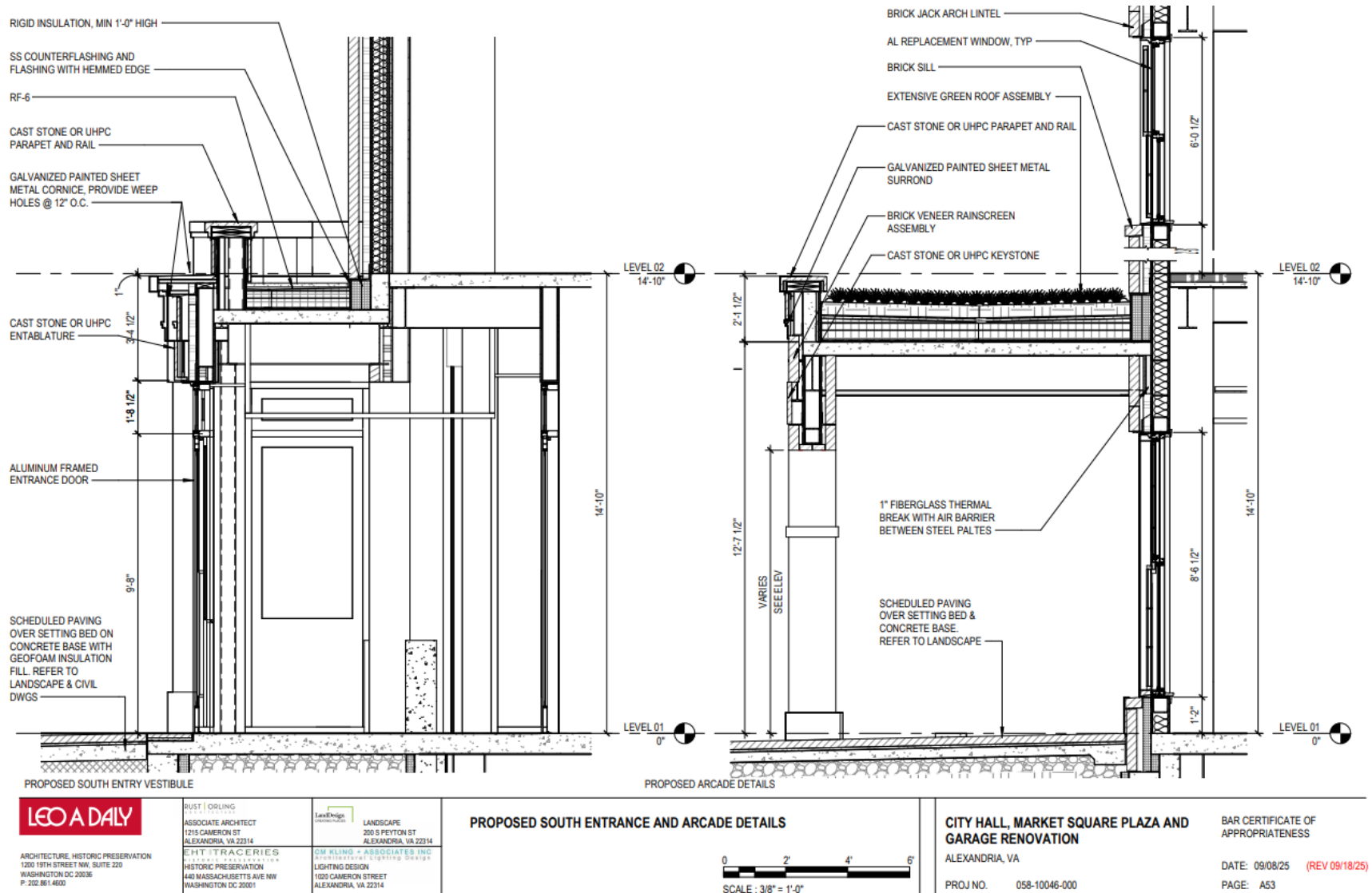
In addition to the comments in ALT 1, the pilasters of the second-floor stone surround do not have a capital or entablature and do not align with or relate to the first-floor entry vestibule.

The stone panels at the second-floor spandrel are characteristic of the later Adam or Federal style and inappropriate to the Georgian Revival style of this façade.



APPLICANT PROPOSAL: MARKET SQUARE

The irregular shape of the six new Mid-century Modern style planters and terraced seating platform are inappropriate to the formal and orthogonal Colonial Revival style of Alexandria.

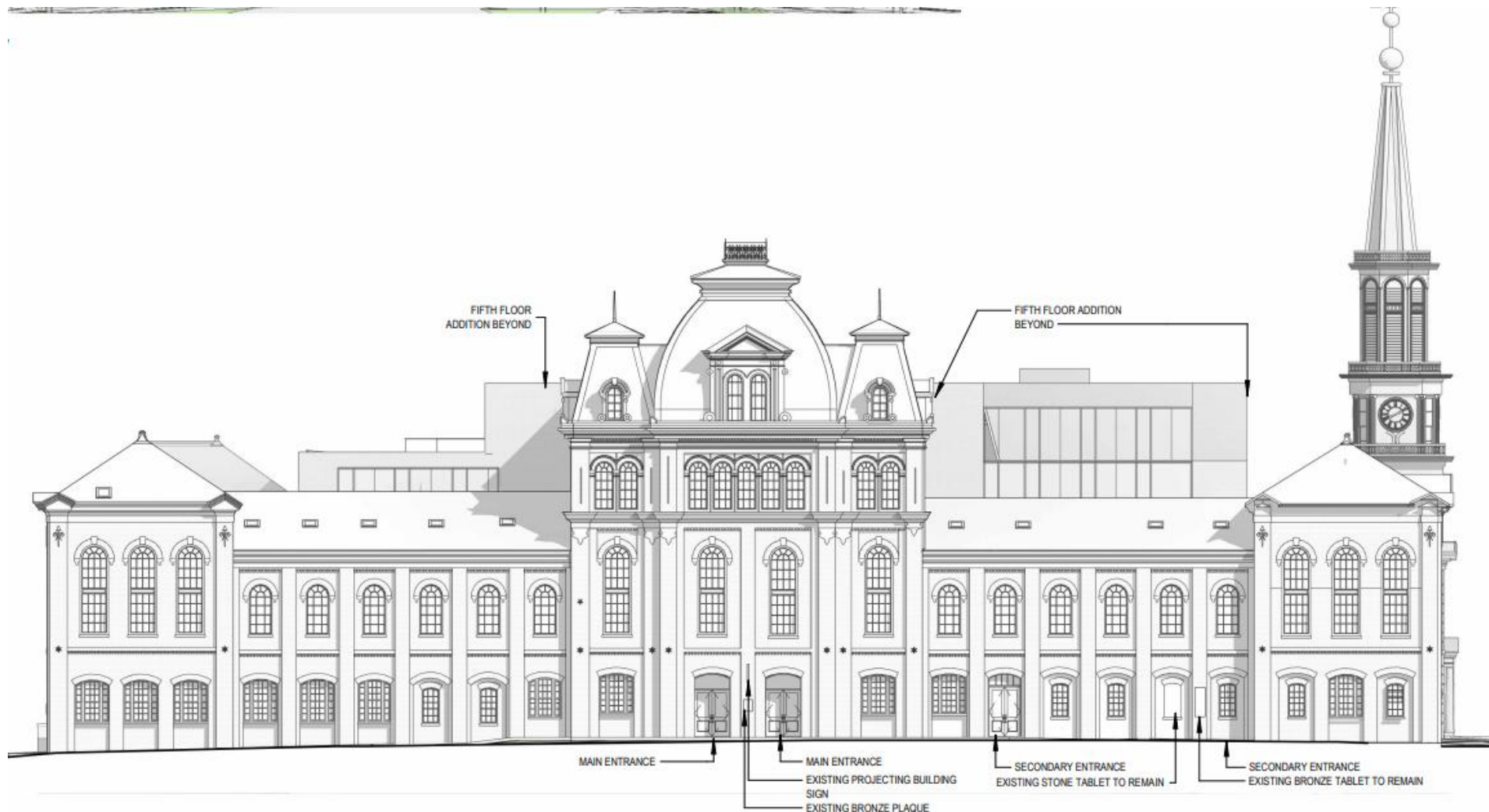


APPLICANT PROPOSAL: ENTRY AND ARCADE SECTIONS

Pilasters at the building entrance extend inappropriately thru the entablature to the cornice and the pilaster base and capital are not correctly detailed.

The “balusters” above the entry are out of scale and lack appropriate detail.

The green roof of the pointless, reconstructed arcades will be expensive and difficult to maintain and are not visible to the public.



APPLICANT PROPOSAL: CAMERON STREET ELEVATION

The 1879 building has a beautifully clear, symmetrical five-part façade with the focus on the ornate central entry, flanked by less prominent hipped roof corner pavilions connected to the main block by simple hyphens. There is a hierarchy of size and ornament that quickly identifies the primary entrance to the public building. This classical hierarchy should be repeated on the south façade.

Notable Examples of Georgian and Colonial Revival Buildings in Alexandria



GADSBY'S TAVERN/CITY HOTEL

Acquia stone lintels above windows of the 1785 Tavern building and rubbed brick jack arches above windows in the 1792 City Hotel.

Graduated window sizes -- becoming smaller on the upper floors -- on City Hotel.

Watertable course occurs *below* windows



BANK OF ALEXANDRIA

133 N Fairfax St., completed 1807

Acquia stone water table, window lintels and rooftop balustrade



CARLYLE HOUSE

121 N Fairfax St., completed 1753

Hip roof with large chimneys

Stone façade with quoins and projecting watertable at the first floor level, *below* the windows



GENTRY ROW TOWNHOUSES

200 Block Prince Street, late 18TH century, Georgian style

Brick belt courses with stone lintels and brick jack arches

Decorative cornice with modillions

Watertable course occurs *below* windows



GEORGE MASON HOTEL

130 S Washington St., 1929, Colonial Revival style

Projecting colonnade emphasizes entrance location

Brick jack arch above windows with stone keystone

Exaggerated brick quoins



CHRIST CHURCH

1767 – 1773, James Wren, Architect

Acquia stone quoins

Semicircular arched and rectangular windows with brick and stone jack arches

Molded brick watertable course *below* windows

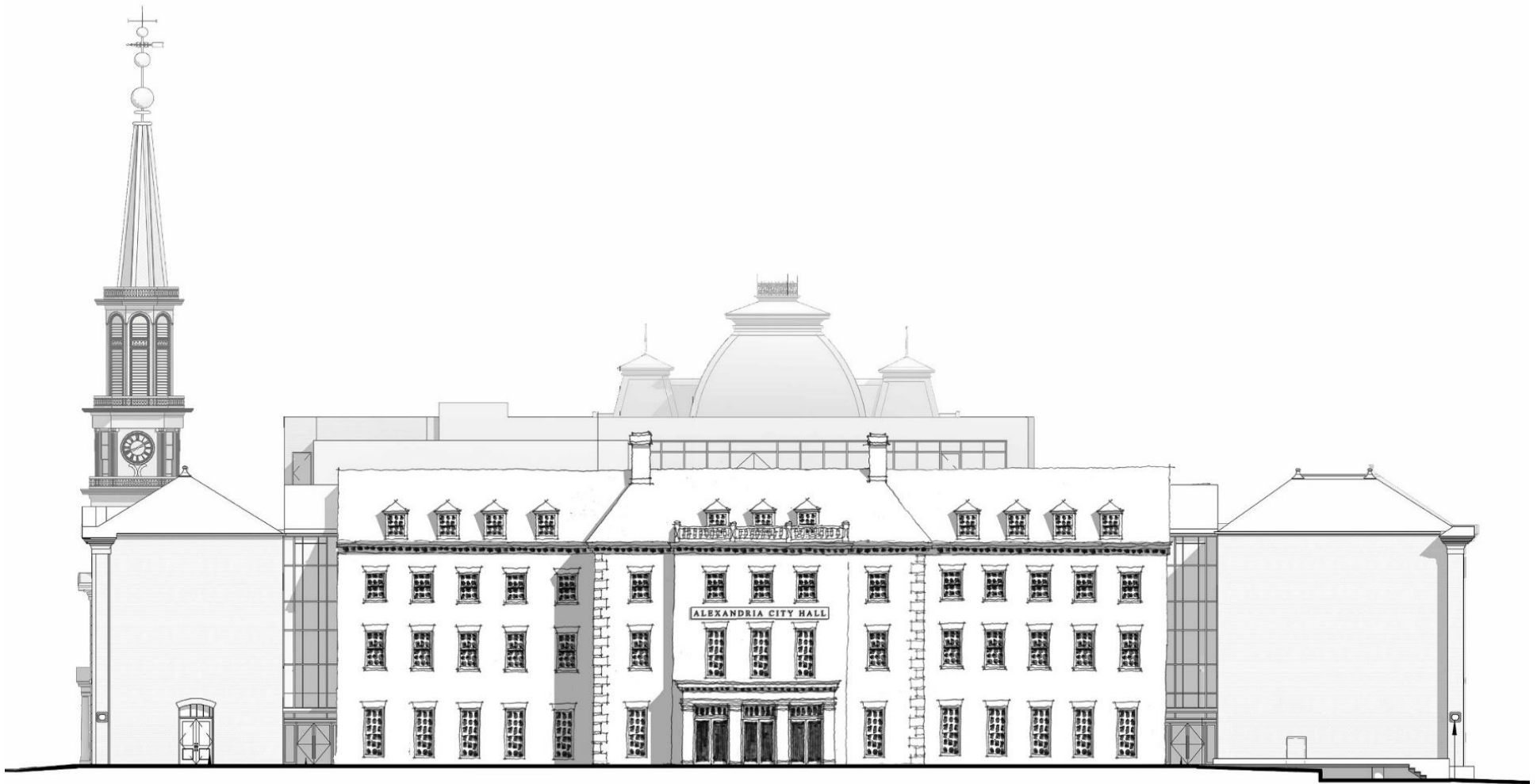


MARTIN BOSTETTER US COURTHOUSE

200 S Washington St., constructed 1930, Colonial Revival style, James S. Wetmore, Architect

Projecting entrance features stone columns and pilasters at the piano noble with quoins below and stone balustrade above.

Arched and rectangular windows with graduated heights and brick and stone lintels.



ALTERNATE SOUTH FAÇADE

Al Cox, FAIA 9/30/25

Recommended for Restudy

Strongly Recommended Revisions

1. Remove the proposed shed roof form from the center of the hip roof and replace it with a flat roof and ornamental railing with plinths on the cornice above the projecting entrance feature.
2. Replace the two existing brick chimney forms in the appropriate scale, shape and location on the central hip roof.
3. Revise the detailing of the projecting entrance feature to be classically appropriate to the Colonial Revival style found in Alexandria. Refer to [Andrea Palladio's Four Books of Architecture](#) (Ware edition 1738); Sebastiano Serlio's [Five Books of Architecture](#) (English ed. 1611); or William Ware's [The American Vignola](#) (pub. 1903), etc. for the correct classical proportions and details of columns, entablatures, etc.
4. Study making the quoins, jack arches, entry pilasters, entablature and the balustrade of limestone or cast stone to give primary architectural prominence to the central building mass.
5. Increase the differentiation in width between courses of the quoins to properly represent header and stretcher courses.
6. Delete the proposed brick watertable that intersects the first floor windows and delete the existing ogee brick projection at the second floor, as it conflicts with the proposed quoins.
7. Remove the proposed non-functional flat roof arcades on the wings.
8. Make the glass wall of the exit stair hyphen an opaque material, like slate or metal panels, so that the illuminated fire egress stair behind is not visible from Market Square.
9. Make the terraced seating platform and planters in Market Square orthogonal in a simple Georgian style.

Recommended Revisions, Dependent on Cost and Related Construction

1. Reduce the height of the windows as the height of the building increases.
2. Respace the windows on the flanking wings to provide more exposed brick and visual mass at the east/west corners of building.
3. Raise the roof of the main body of the building so that there is more room for a pronounced decorative cornice and more exposed brick between the lintels of the top windows and the cornice. Conversely, make the third floor windows slightly shorter.
4. Provide a continuous cornice with modillions or dentals appropriate to the Georgian style.
5. Rearrange the location of the dormers on the wings to align between the windows below to simplify the roof.

FW: [EXTERNAL]City Hall Colonial Revival Details

From William Conkey <william.conkey@alexandriava.gov>

Date Wed 10/15/2025 1:52 PM

To Ted Alberon <ted.alberon@alexandriava.gov>; Luke Cowan <luke.cowan@alexandriava.gov>; Kendra Jacobs <Kendra.Jacobs@alexandriava.gov>

Please see the attached letter regarding the City Hall docket item tomorrow night. This should be distributed and attached to the docket.

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The City of Alexandria's 275th Anniversary

From: pbeckmann@beck-arch.com <pbeckmann@beck-arch.com>

Sent: Wednesday, October 15, 2025 1:18 PM

To: William Conkey <william.conkey@alexandriava.gov>

Cc: Jeremy McPike <Jeremy.McPike@alexandriava.gov>; 'Al cox' <alcox@comcast.net>

Subject: [EXTERNAL]City Hall Colonial Revival Details

Bill,

I recently reviewed the proposed renovation plans for City Hall and was pleased with the overall scope of the restoration effort. However, I have significant concerns about the design approach to the south façade and plaza. The treatment appears somewhat clumsy and lacks the appropriate level of detailing. This was particularly surprising given John Rust's involvement on the design team. I can only assume that John's contributions may have been limited by the Leo A. Daly team, as the current design does not reflect the high quality of work typically associated with him and his colleagues.

I have also reviewed Mr. Al Cox's detailed design critique and strongly agree with his "Recommended for Restudy" conclusion. I encourage the BAR to request a reevaluation of the south façade and plaza design. I plan to attend the BAR hearing tomorrow evening to speak to this issue directly and to be available to answer any additional questions from Board members.

Respectfully,

Paul Beckmann AIA



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