

**Tom Origer & Associates**  
Archaeology / Historical Research

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October 25, 2016

Jeff Goodwin  
BAR Architects  
901 Battery Street, Suite 300  
San Francisco, CA 94111

CITY OF SANTA ROSA  
Santa Rosa, CA

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COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT  
DEPARTMENT

Dear Mr. Goodwin:

At your request, we reviewed plans for the AC Hotel by Marriot on the lot bounded by 4th, 5th and Davis streets, and Highway 101. At present, the parcel is a parking lot without buildings or structures. The planned hotel consists of a five-story, H-shaped building with a flat roof. Two wings extend east/west between Davis Street and Highway 101 forming a street-facing courtyard entry on Davis Street. At the rear (east side), the space between the wings contains a two story section with a parking garage on the first floor and a fitness center on the second floor. With the exception of the courtyard on Davis Street, the hotel extends to the property's build-to line. The fifth floor is stepped back with trellises above the void created by the stepback.

Plans call for a combination of brick, stucco, and metal cladding. Brick is used exclusively on the first floor where the design suggests storefront divisions similar to the historic commercial buildings along 4th Street. The key difference is that the "storefront" style windows extend to the bottom of the wall rather than ending with bulkheads beneath the windows. Piercings on the upper floors of the hotel primarily are tall, narrow fixed windows and paired windows with partial balconies. All doors and windows are metal clad.

Four types of signs are proposed, including individual letters applied to the facade at the first floor, a four-story, blade sign on the east elevation, illuminated acrylic and metal wall signs on the north and south elevations, and an illuminated acrylic and metal cube mounted on the rooftop.

The hotel parcel is within the City of Santa Rosa's Railroad Square Preservation District, and adjacent to the Railroad Square Historic District listed in the National Register of Historic Places. Note, the City's preservation district extends one block farther east between 3rd Street and 5th Street than does the National Register district. It is unclear why the boundary was extended, but the subject lot, although vacant, is included in the City's district.

The City established the Railroad Square Preservation District in 1990. The district is a concentration of commercial buildings from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, with certain key elements that define the character of the district.

**Character-defining Features**

- One story buildings
- Roof parapets
- Brick, basalt, and stucco cladding

- Large, display windows with bulkheads beneath
- Recessed doors topped by transom lights
- Transom windows above the large display windows
- Glazed tile decoration

Our review was guided by Santa Rosa City Code 20-28.040.G, the *Downtown Station Area Specific Plan* (hereafter, Specific Plan), *Santa Rosa Design Guidelines* (hereafter, Design Guidelines), and the Secretary of the Interior's preservation standards.

Architect Dan Peterson and landscape architect Winfield Smith first addressed guidelines for the Railroad Square Historic District in 1982, albeit specific to public spaces (Peterson and Smith 1982). When the district was created in 1990, The City adopted the Secretary of the Interior's preservation standards and guidelines as interim guidelines. In 2001, the City adopted *Processing Review Procedures for Owners of Historic Properties* promulgated by the Cultural Heritage Board, and in 2002, *Design Guidelines: City of Santa Rosa*, which includes the design guidelines outlined by the Cultural Heritage Board. Sections G and P of the Design Guidelines (see below) address new construction and signage within an historic district and are pertinent to the AC Hotel Project.

#### **G. New Construction**

1. Design new construction so that the architectural character of the neighborhood is maintained. *Specific architectural styles are not mandated. Designs for new construction can also be contemporary.*
2. Design new construction to be compatible in height and proportion with adjacent structures.
3. Use materials and designs similar to that found throughout the neighborhood.

#### **P. Signs**

1. Select traditional materials for new signs wherever possible.
2. Place signs in locations that do not damage or conceal architectural features and details.
3. Maintain a size that is consistent with the pedestrian scale of the district.
4. Keep graphics simple and legible. Graphics painted on windows or applied to fabric awnings are also appropriate. Neon signs mounted inside the storefront window are also consistent with the historic period of the Railroad Square District.

More recently, the Specific Plan, which includes the Railroad Square Sub-Area, outlined additional guidelines. The AC Hotel parcel is subject to the guidelines for Shop Front properties, which apply to "...all properties facing onto designated Shop Front streets and apply to all properties on intersecting streets for a minimum of 30 feet" (Design, Community & Environment 2007:5-9). Davis Street is not a designated Shop Front street but the property on Davis Street is adjacent to 4th Street, which is a Shop Front street.

Specific Plan guidelines pertinent to this review are:

- Properties on 4th Street between the railroad crossing and Highway 101 (including the AC Hotel property due to its proximity to 4th Street) shall be 2 to 5 stories tall (Design, Community & Environment 2007:Appendix B).
- Buildings shall stepback a minimum of six feet above the third floor.
- At least 80 percent of street frontage shall be located on the build-to line. The ground floor frontage shall have a minimum of 80 percent transparency, and entries must face this frontage. All proposed recess or setback shall be associated with building entries or public space.

## **Discussion**

### *Design Guidelines: City of Santa Rosa*

The City's Design Guidelines require new construction within the City's historic districts to be compatible with architectural character, height and proportion of adjacent structures, and materials and design used in the area. The proposed hotel follows those guidelines in most respects. The hotel exceeds the height of most buildings within the preservation district; however, we do not see this affecting the district negatively. Rather, the height of the hotel and the adjacent office building to the south provide a visual barrier between the district and the Highway 101 overpass. The brick, stucco, and metal cladding of the hotel are similar to the materials found in the preservation district, and although of modern design, the first floor of the hotel suggests the storefront motif of the Railroad Square Preservation District. In our opinion, consideration should be given to truncating the "storefront" windows with bulkheads similar to those on 4th Street.

Signage guidelines for the Railroad Square Preservation District call for signs to be a size that is consistent with the pedestrian scale of the district, the use of traditional materials, and simple, legible graphics. Street level signs proposed for the hotel are in keeping with those guidelines; the illuminated wall signs, blade sign, and rooftop sign are not. In our opinion, the blade sign is acceptable because it is a type of sign that could have been available in the early twentieth century, and because it faces the highway rather than the historic district. The wall signs and rooftop sign are not compatible with the district.

### *Downtown Station Area Specific Plan*

The Specific Plan requires at least 80 percent of a building's frontage at the build-to line, with exceptions limited to entries and public space. The proposed hotel meets that requirement. With five floors, the proposed hotel is within the 2 to 5-story range established in the Specific Plan. The Specific Plan also stipulates that buildings are stepped back a minimum of six feet above the third floor. The proposed hotel meets that requirement on 4th Street with a stepback of six feet above the first floor. On Davis Street, the entire wall plan is setback to leave a void of about 18 feet at the corner of 4th and Davis streets, and is stepped back six feet above the 4th floor. While that does not comply exactly with the Specific Plan, in our opinion the 18-foot void allows a sufficient break between the Shop Front Street (4th) and the non-Shop Front Street (Davis).

## Summary


With one exception, the proposed hotel falls within the guidelines set by the City of Santa Rosa in their design guidelines for historic districts and *Downtown Station Area Specific Plan*. The exception is that some of the signage is not compatible with historic Railroad Square.

We suggest that, where practical, the first floor windows meant to suggest storefront windows be truncated and end at a low wall similar to those along 4th Street in the preservation district.

Regarding the National Register-listed Railroad Square Historic District, the proposed project is adjacent to the district boundary; however, the proposed project will not affect the district's National Register eligibility.

Please contact us if you have any questions or need additional information.

Sincerely,



Vicki Beard  
Senior Associate

## References

Design, Community & Environment

2007 *Downtown Station Area Specific Plan*. <http://ci.santa-rosa.ca.us/departments/communitydev/projects/Pages/DowntownStationAreaSpecificPlan.aspx>

City of Santa Rosa

2002 *Santa Rosa Design Guidelines*. <http://ci.santa-rosa.ca.us/DEPARTMENTS/COMMUNITYDEV/PLANNING/Pages/DesignGuidelines.aspx>

Cultural Heritage Board

2001 *Processing Review Procedures for Owners of Historic Properties*. <http://web1.ci.santa-rosa.ca.us/CD/pdf/HistoricReview.pdf>

Peterson, D. and W. Smith

1982 *Santa Rosa Railroad Square Design Plan*. Report prepared for the City of Santa Rosa Department of Community Development.