

HISTORIC PRESERVATION BOARD
CITY OF PORTLAND, MAINE

WORKSHOP
34 WHARF STREET

TO: Chair Sheridan and Members of the Historic Preservation Board
FROM: Rob Wiener, Preservation Compliance Coordinator
DATE: July 18, 2018
RE: July 25, 2018 WORKSHOP – Preliminary Review of Proposed Ground
Floor Façade Alterations and Rooftop
Addition

Address: 34 Wharf Street
Applicant: Patrick Roche and Joseph Powers, Portland House, LLC

Introduction

Patrick Roche and Joseph Powers have requested a workshop to review preliminary concepts for alterations to the ground floor façade of 34 Wharf Street, as well as a rooftop addition. The two applicants have formed Portland House, LLC to convert the ground floor of 10 Dana Street and all of 34 Wharf Street into a co-working space combined with a café – called Omne House. They seek the Board’s feedback on their preliminary proposal, which calls for enlarging the first floor windows facing Wharf Street and facing the alley (a.k.a. an extension of Plum Street) next to 34 Wharf Street. Mr. Roche and Mr. Powers would also like to know the feasibility of adding a rooftop addition and a deck to the low, flat-roofed building.

Both 10 Dana Street (circa 1879) and the much lower, connected warehouse at 34 Wharf Street are contributing buildings in the Waterfront Historic District. The July 25 workshop will focus exclusively on the latter property – the purchase of which is currently being negotiated by the partner applicants. (Later reviews will consider possible lighting and signage changes at 10 Dana Street, but no exterior alterations are currently under review for that building.)

As the attached project summary indicates, design development is in the early stages of concept sketches; Mr. Roche and Mr. Powers have not engaged an architect yet, but have submitted drawings of existing conditions and proposed alterations to explore the feasibility of moving forward with the purchase and development of the property. Staff has added additional photos of existing conditions at the properties.

Subject Property – 34 Wharf Street

Although the original appearance of this modest warehouse addition to the former Chase Leavitt Block (10 Dana Street, built by Francis Fassett in 1879 for James P. Baxter,) is unknown and there is no 1924 photo of it, the simple character is evident today. The building was rehabilitated in 2001, when the (then) Historic Preservation Committee approved the ramp and other improvements for the restaurant, but the clear simplicity of the warehouse architecture was retained.

Another review by the Historic Preservation Board in 2005 approved extension of the awning down the entire ramp, and new shutters, fencing, and lighting. Another result in 2005 was the required removal of banners, a sign, conduit and lighting that had been added without approval to the façade in the years since 2001 – thereby restoring much of the historic simplicity of the building faces.

Although original hanging hardware is extant on the building, there are currently no shutters. Lighting on the front consists of four downlights that wash the walls, with discreetly managed conduit. Two spotlights to the right of the unused front entrance may have been for a former sign, but there is no bracket. Signage is limited to small wall signs at the corner and a glass-fronted menu display box.

Windows have been replaced with appropriate, black, multi-light windows, except for one on the Wharf Street face that has one light instead of six. To the right of the restaurant, a stone patio and gate at the former extension of Plum Street appear to accommodate outdoor dining.

Proposed Alterations

As the project summary indicates, the applicants would like to enlarge window openings on the first floor to add light to the interior and with the reopening of the front entrance, foster a more active connection to Wharf Street. The sketches show the front and west side with wider windows and some kind of canopy, but we have no details yet on the windows or whether the canopy might be a fabric awning or a projecting, constructed hood. The existing awning over the ramp would be removed. In front of the property on Wharf Street the applicants would like to create outdoor seating, but the Wharf Street cobbles extend all the way to the building, unlike the north side of the street where outdoor dining is situated on brick instead of cobbles.

On the roof the sketches show a glass walled addition that includes clerestory windows, surrounded by a railing and deck. Mechanicals are shown in one sketch – presumably set back from Wharf Street in the back corner, but no roof plan exists yet. How interior access to the roof is gained is unclear; one of the views shows an exterior stair on the rear.

No exterior changes are shown for 10 Dana Street at this time, though drawings indicate that new signage and lighting will be proposed if the project goes forward.

Staff Comments and Questions for Consideration

Among the challenges presented by the Omne House proposal is how to change and intensify the use of the building and animate the ground floor façade, while respecting its origins (and enduring character) as a simple warehouse on a utilitarian alley. Consideration of the proposal will focus partly on Standard 1 for Review of Alterations – what compatible uses and alterations can be made to the structure, that “require minimal alteration to the character-defining features of the structure?”

Many of the buildings facing Wharf Street have been altered dramatically to accommodate modern uses, and in some instances significant original architectural character and integrity have been lost. A careful approach to these alterations seems appropriate, given the relatively unspoiled façade of the subject property.

Following are questions for consideration:

- Given that the spare facades of the building appear to be probably largely consistent with or at least similar to original features, to what extent can window openings be changed, and what type of larger windows and opening treatments might be appropriate – if any? Should the small arched openings be altered, and if so, is there an approach to simple, utilitarian windows that would fit? Should any new windows be clearly identifiable as modern? Whether or not the existing arched window openings are original, staff would argue that they have acquired significance as features of the property.
- Can the modestly scaled warehouse support a modern rooftop addition, visually? Would a scaled back, lower addition be easier to envision as compatible?
- Can mechanicals be discreetly hidden on the roof?
- Many other details will have to be considered if these plans move forward, including roof access, signage, lighting, finish on the doors, and wall finish and railing details for the rooftop addition.

Applicable Review Standards

- (1) *Every reasonable effort shall be made to provide a compatible use for the property which requires minimal alteration to the character-defining features of the structure, object or site and its environment or to use a property for its originally intended purpose.*
- (2) *The distinguishing original qualities or character of a structure, object or site and its environment shall not be destroyed. The removal or alteration of any historic material or distinctive architectural features should be avoided when possible.*

- (9) *Contemporary design for alterations and additions to existing properties shall not be discouraged when such alterations and additions do not destroy significant cultural, historical, architectural or archeological materials that characterize the property. The new work shall be differentiated from the old and shall be compatible with the size, scale, color, material and character of the property, neighborhood or environment.*

Attachments:

1. Applicants' project description
2. Staff photos of existing conditions
3. Applicants' sketches and perspective drawings

Att. 1

June 28, 2018

City of Portland
Historic Preservation Board
389 Congress Street
4th Floor
Portland, ME 04101

Dear Historic Preservation Board,

Per the attached Application for Historic Preservation Review page 2, we've detailed our Project Description below:

Portland House LLC is planning to purchase 34 Wharf St (currently operating as Cinque Terre restaurant) and lease the contiguous, adjacent ground-floor space within 10 Dana St (currently operating as Vignola restaurant). Final negotiations are taking place prior to signing a Purchase & Sale contract, and we expect to take delivery of 34 Wharf by roughly October 1, 2018.

Our vision for the ~5,000 sq ft space is called Omne House, which will be a pay-by-the hour work lounge that combines features of modern day coworking with cafe culture. Guests will enjoy quality food and beverage in a hip, professional setting with a variety of ergonomic workstations that encourage both productive focus and collaborative socializing. We're especially enthusiastic about locating on Wharf St because of the opportunity to play a role in the renaissance of this historic central area by bringing a professional, up-market concept to district patrons and visitors.

Our proposed changes, in order of priority for the success of our business, include:

1. Expanding street-facing openings in the 34 Wharf St building to present a more welcoming façade to Wharf St pedestrians
2. Reviving 34 Wharf St entrance point (currently sealed off) with front stoop
3. Installing a roof deck and atrium on 34 Wharf St on which to serve food and beverage

Additionally, we plan to improve lighting and signage both on the interior and exterior of both 34 Wharf St and 10 Dana St, though we have not developed concepts for those changes and will present the Board with a separate review at that time.

Our proposed changes above are important to the success of Omne House because the original design and use of 34 Wharf St (storage facility, as we understand) is not compatible with the modern, pedestrian-friendly activity taking place on Wharf St, and especially with our concept. To improve the quality and volume of commerce on Wharf St, and to set Omne House up for success, we seek a bright, welcoming space that engages passers-by. We understand and fully embrace the Board's charter to preserve historical architecture within the City and have suggested designs that we feel achieve our goals in keeping with this.

We are currently in the due-diligence phase of this project, and as such have not selected final architects or contractors. The included conceptual drawings (see Exhibit A) represent our intentions for the space with the goal of receiving early guidance from the Board to aid our initial "go, no-go" project analysis. We are flexible in our aesthetic approach and are looking forward to engaging further with the Board on how to best move forward in a mutually agreeable manner.

Thank you very much for your time & consideration.

Patrick Roche
Co-Founder, Omne House



7/3/18

Joe Powers
Co-Founder, Omne House



7/3/18

PROPOSED CHANGES TO 34 WHARF STREET PROPERTY

1. Window Openings

- Expand ground floor window openings for better interior lighting, street exposure and architectural balance. The current window openings are about 2' x 2' letting very little air or light into the space. We are proposing something closer to 6' wide with an operable window - something inviting.
- A standing seam steel awning (roughly 18" deep) above the enlarged window opening can help tie into the more industrial roof structure of Atrium above.

2. Front Step and Entry

- Install a granite slab/step at the front door. The cobble street has sunk and left the door sill 16" from grade.

3. Rooftop Deck

- Mahogany or composite decking with steel cable railings around perimeter.
- Built-in benches, seating and planter boxes throughout open deck area.
- If a second egress is required, we propose a fire escape mounted to back of the building.

4. Atrium

- Roughly 16' x 24' Glass & Steel Atrium with stair access from mezzanine.
- Interior wet bar with window service to deck area.
- Vaulted ceiling with 4-sided transom.
- Operable glass accordion door openings on S/W and S/E sides.
- Green roof with plantings and evergreen trees.

5. Awning

- Remove current awning over side entrance to Cinque Terre space.

6. Patio Space

- Expand patio space along front of building for table seating on cobbles.
- Grade cobbles out 8' from building. Currently very contoured and present trip hazard.



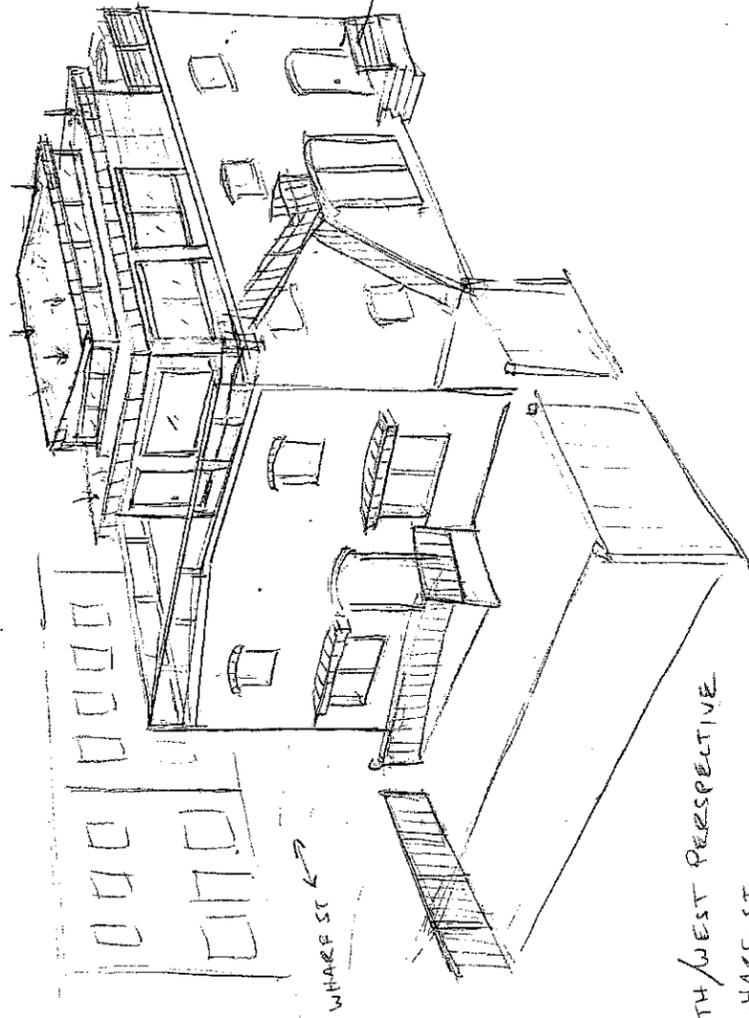
Cinque Terre
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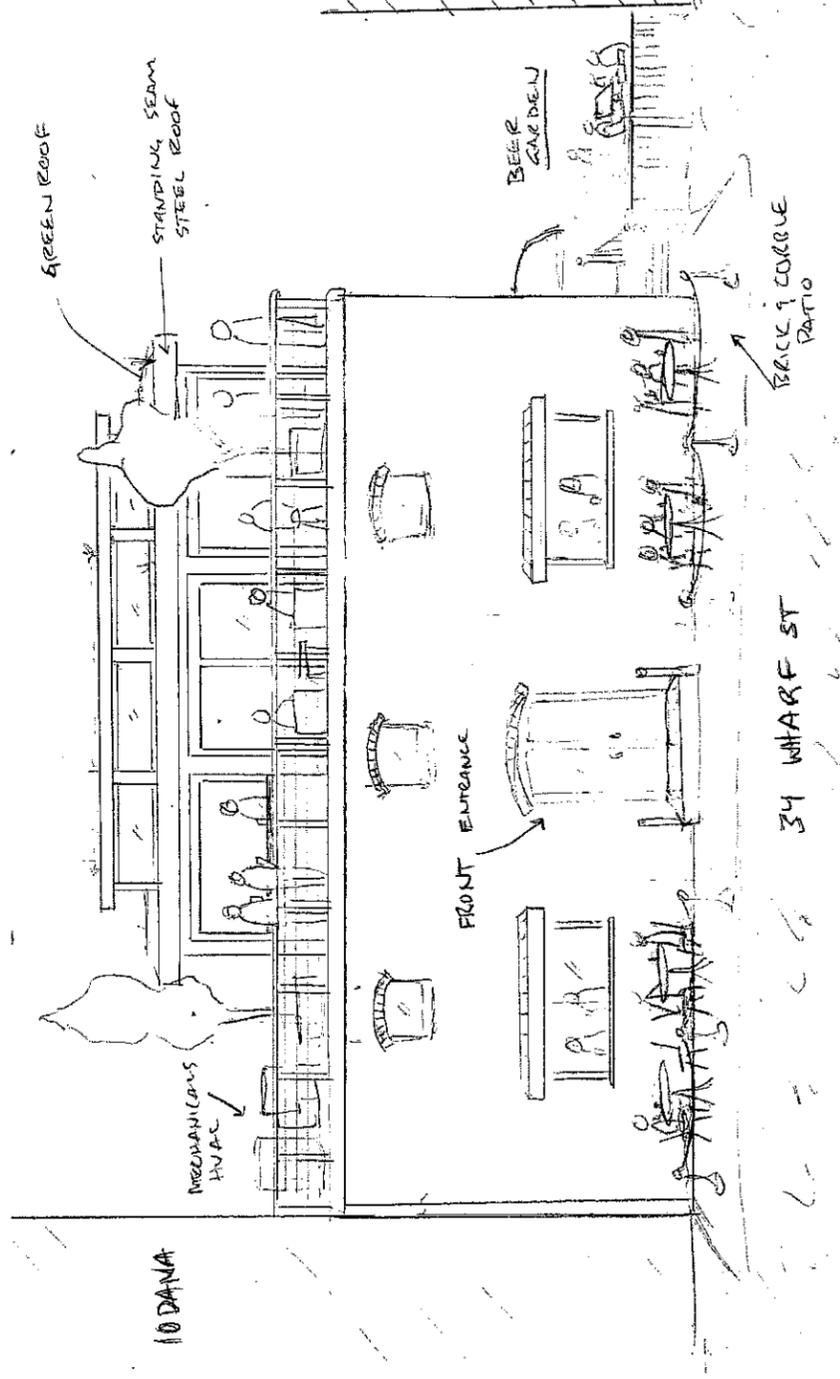
34 Wharf Street

CONCEPTUAL SOUTH/EAST ISOMETRIC



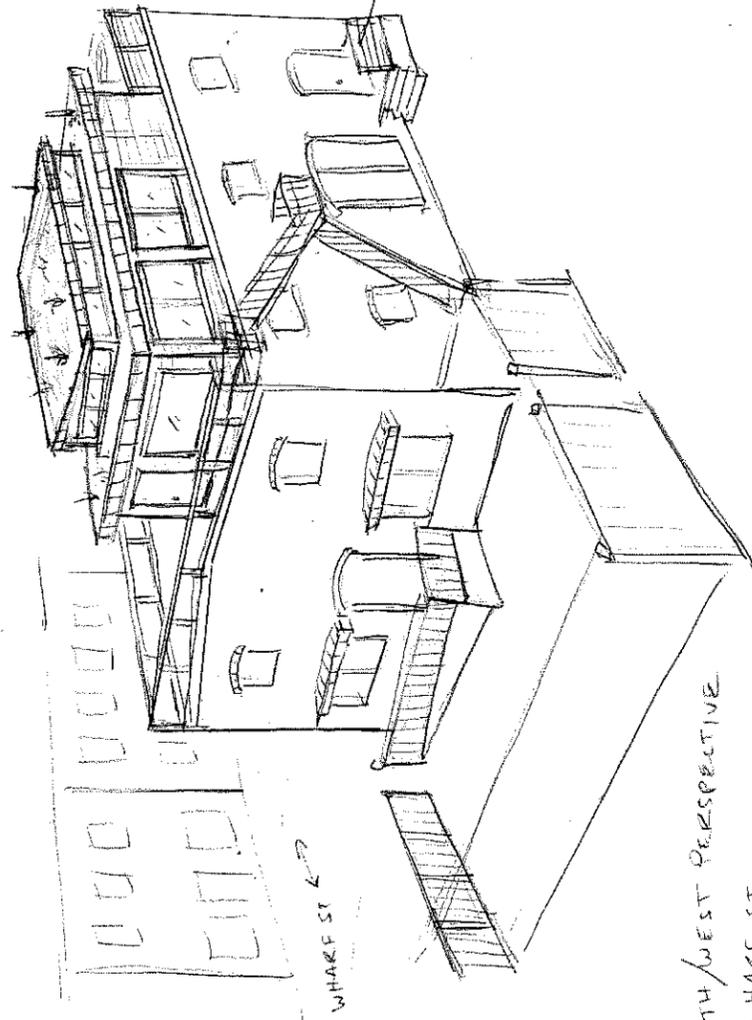
SOUTH/WEST PERSPECTIVE
34 WHARF ST
CONCEPTUAL

CONCEPTUAL - SOUTH PERSPECTIVE



34 Wharf Street

CONCEPTUAL SOUTH/EAST ISOMETRIC



SOUTH/WEST PERSPECTIVE
34 WHARF ST
CONCEPTUAL

CONCEPTUAL - SOUTH PERSPECTIVE

