The special meeting was called to order by Mr. Briggs at 12:00 Noon in the Commission Chambers of the Winter Park City Hall.

Present: Chairman Drew Krecicki Vice-Chairman Rick Swisher, Michael Dick, Sarah Whiting and George Livingston. Absent: Wendell Hays. Staff: Planning Director Jeffrey Briggs, Sr. Planner Stacey Scowden, Planning Technician Caleena Shirley and Recording Secretary Lisa Smith.

UPDATE ON THE OUTCOME OF CITY COMMISSION PUBLIC HEARINGS

Planning Director Jeffrey Briggs gave the Board members an update concerning Fairbanks Avenue improvements. He explained that a preliminary work product has been received from Placemakers for the form based code for West Fairbanks. He stated that many property owners along West Fairbanks have expressed discontentment with the landscape median portion of the sewer project that is anticipated to commence in June. He noted that the City Commission public hearing concerning this item is scheduled for March 28th.

Building Official George Wiggins also provided insight into the layout of the preliminary work product received from Placemakers.

Mr. Briggs also provided an update concerning the State Office Building.

SPECIAL MEETING ITEM:

Appeal of the staff recommendations for the building façade changes proposed for 124-126 North Park Avenue per the Central Business District Façade Design Guidelines.

Planning Director Jeffrey Briggs explained that the applicants are appealing city staff recommendations for proposed building facade changes at 124-126 North Park Avenue. He gave the Board members background of the appeal process. He said that the City of Winter Park adopted the Central Business District Façade Design Guidelines in 1997. That was in conjunction with the implementation of the three year project that modernized the streetscape infrastructure, bricked Park Avenue and enhanced the appearance of Park Avenue. Based upon the positive features of the existing buildings, the guidelines encourage creative design and promote a sense of connectivity among the properties that make up the downtown area. He explained that the owners of Luma desire to open another restaurant in the above-referenced space (former Ann Taylor building). He said that the vitality of downtown Winter Park relies on an “experience economy”. Further, the Planning Department is charged with ensuring that the downtown experience is protected and enhanced.
He provided background information concerning 122-126 North Park Avenue building. After the Ann Taylor store closed, the building was converted back to three bays: two smaller side bays with side entries and one center bay with a center entry. The original brickwork was repaired and re-pointed and new brick columns and bulkheads were built with assistance from a $20,000 CRA façade improvement grant. This building was deemed to be a contributing historic element to the National Register of Historic Places Downtown Winter Park District application. Kilwin’s Chocolates has leased the right side bay at 122 North Park Avenue.

Mr. Briggs explained that Concentric Restaurants, the owners of the Luma restaurant (Robert Amick) want to use the remaining two storefront bays for an upscale-casual “gastropub” style restaurant which would be the left and center bays of the building. The two bays would be combined into one interior space with a U shaped bar in the center flanked by table seating. Concentric Restaurants, the same company that owns Luma on Park, has a successful local track record and there is no doubt this new restaurant will be very successful and bring new traffic and customers to Park Avenue.

The concept for the exterior Park Avenue façade of this restaurant proposes an entry door centered between the remaining two bays. New brick columns are planned to match the existing brick columns which is complimentary to the historic features of the building. The front door entry then is flanked by two large storefront openings with folding doors that would open from the sidewalk to reveal the interior of the restaurant. The goal of the restaurant is to create an “outdoor” experience when you are “indoors” within the front portion of the building shell. The façade elevation drawings show the look of the building when the restaurant is closed. When the restaurant is open, then the storefront bays are open.

There are two goals of the Park Avenue Façade Guidelines that apply. One is to “preserve features of building facades with historic importance” and the second is “promote a uniform architectural style within each building façade”. The proposed design meets the first goal but fails to meet the second façade coordination goal. That is why the P&Z Commission is hearing this appeal. As stated in the CBD guidelines, “the coordination of storefront facades among a group of contiguous storefronts in an individual building is necessary to create a successful overall appearance.” The guidelines also state that, “the new storefront should coordinate with the original architectural style of the buildings and the existing storefronts within the same building.” The proposal lacks architectural unity with the building as a whole; creating a completely different appearance for two-thirds of the building.

Staff has asked the petitioner to provide some commonality between the tenancies in this same building so we could have some element of “uniform style within the façade”. We asked for them to provide the commonality of an awning so the overall façade would match but that is not acceptable. The staff asked for the restaurant to preserve the existing symmetry of the overall building façade by utilizing the openings ‘as now built’ for the folding door system and using the interior space as desired but that is not acceptable, as they are fixed on the center door and center bar, floor plan arrangement.

This issue is very frustrating for the staff (and the petitioner). First of all, if the building owner had just kept the Ann Taylor space intact, rather than chopping it into three pieces, this restaurant would have taken the entire space and this issue would never have happened. Second, staff realizes that 95% of the people that come to Park Avenue pay absolutely no attention to the building façade elements in the background, even though it is part of their experience. They are focused on the stores and the restaurant interiors. Third, staff realizes that there are many “chopped up” building facades up and down Park Avenue. The 310 Park and Spice restaurants are a mish-mash of architectural styles in the same building, for example, and very few people think that is an issue. Still the staff has been ‘tasked’ with the goal and design approval authority that says to “promote a uniform architectural style within each building façade”. That is why this issue had to come to P&Z for review.

Bob Amick, 22 Walker Terrace, Atlanta, GA, (owner of Luma) spoke concerning the request. He expressed his desire to open a new restaurant in this location. He provided extensive details of the
proposed use of the space. He added that he does have a signed lease with the owner of the building that has a 60 day exit clause if he is not able to obtain the necessary approvals and permits. He responded to Board member questions and concerns.

No one else wished to speak concerning this request.

The Board members discussed the request and the changing dynamics of Park Avenue. Mr. Swisher stated that he agrees with the details of the staff report and he supports staff’s position on this particular application. Mrs. Whiting stated that she can support the applicant’s appeal but questioned whether it was possible to work with Kilwin’s with regard to window compatibility. Mr. Livingston said that he feels that the applicant’s proposal is aesthetically pleasing and economically viable for Park Avenue and that restaurants by their nature of opening onto the Avenue are not going to conform to the guidelines that were drawn up with retail storefronts in mind. He indicated his support of finding an exception to make this work. Mr. Krecicki expressed his support and stated that he feels that the guidelines do need a review and an update to possibly incorporate special language for restaurants versus retail. Mr. Dick noted his support of this request detailing when the guidelines were established and how Park Avenue has changed since that time, specifically with the introduction of café seating. He stated that this request was not such a dramatic change to the façade that anyone would look at and question.

Motion made by Mr. Krecicki, seconded by Mr. Dick to approve the appeal subject to Mr. Amick attempting to negotiate a solution with the existing tenant (Kilwin’s Chocolates) as to color or style. If a solution is reached with the existing tenant, they are to bring it back to staff for approval. Motion carried with a 4-1 vote. Mr. Swisher voted against the motion.

Staff was encouraged to bring the Central Business Facade Design Guidelines back to the Planning Commission for further discussion and updating.

New Business:

There were no items of new business.

Upcoming Meeting Schedule:

Regular meeting – April 5, 2011 at 7:00 pm

There was no further business. The meeting adjourned at 1:20 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Lisa Smith
Recording Secretary