

Good afternoon, I'm Paul Alessandro, Partner at Hartshorne Plunkard Architecture in Chicago and thank you for inviting me to speak today. As a preservation Architect, I consider myself an extreme advocate of how preserving our historic built environment can be a catalyst for neighborhoods and their growth. Conversely, lack of investment in our historic resources often leads to the opposite as aging resources crumble in disrepair. Having a preservation Commission that is actively involved in identifying and advocating for these buildings, as you do in Portland, is an asset that can't be overvalued.

Specifically for our work on the restoration and reuse of the First Church of Christ, Scientist building, we were presented with a multitude of costly challenges. In addition to restoration of the existing structure, windows, and roofs, the building needed seismic reinforcement, replacement of all the buildings mechanical systems and fire and life safety upgrades - all before we could begin the work of inserting the projects new program. As difficult as this list was, it all had to be completed while maintaining the building's unique character and spaces.

With this steep "on ramp", the new addition had to do much of the heavy lifting in terms of revenue generation for the development. One thing we all understand in preservation and development is it takes dollars to get projects off the ground, especially when the barrier to entry is often a neglected and deteriorating structure in need of millions of dollars of work. The commission was understanding of the development needs and actively worked with us to find historically appropriate solutions, including incentive programs like affordable commercial space and ground floor height bonuses, allowing height to make the hotel addition an asset not only to potential hotel guests, but to the neighborhood residents, at large.

This was the starting point for our interaction with the Commission. Their thoughtful, transparent, and collaborative engagement was instrumental in achieving not only our goals but the City and Neighborhoods as well. Through the Commission, and the public process they encouraged, we were able to arrive at a "North Star" set of objectives and work to find ways to achieve them. Also, beyond the work on the historic resource, the Commission was extremely helpful in assisting us to find opportunities to make the new hotel addition an integral element in the development of the neighborhood. The public process particularly for these discussions helped us focus on what was desired by residents, who will be able to utilize its many amenities, as well as what would be most appropriate for this historic district.

Historic commissions can make or break a project. Rigid rules and lack of transparent process often lead to unsuccessful outcomes and worse can lead to loss of the historic resource. In Portland however, this process works. Our project would not have gotten off the ground without the consistent and careful work of the Commission - and their assistance was instrumental in shaping the new building in a way that allowed for good design and for maximizing development opportunities consistent with the goals of all the stakeholders. Congratulations and thank you to all the members of the Historic Landmarks Commission.