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January 21, 2019

Harold Colton-Max, Chairman
Planning Board
Township of South Orange Village
76 South Orange Avenue
Suite 302
South Orange, New Jersey 07079

**Re: South Orange Historic Preservation Commission
Request for Non-Binding Advice
Case 2019-01 Jeremiah and Amelia Cruz-Holder
184 Valley Street, Block 2003 Lot 3
Our File No. 12485.1000**

Dear Chairman Colton-Max,

Please be advised that on January 17, 2019, the Township of South Orange Village Historic Preservation Commission conducted a hearing on a referral by the Planning Board of the above-referenced application for non-binding advice, pursuant to Section 7 of Ordinance No. 2012-09.

The applicant was represented by Daniel Roma of the firm of Artek Studios, LLC, architects for the project. In addition to the Planning Board application package that was presented to the Commission, Mr. Roma presented several photographs of the area in its current state as well as renderings of various approved and recently constructed projects in the area. He also presented a rendering of the project under review.

Based upon the application package and the presentation, as well as the testimony of Mr. Roma, the Commission made the following findings of fact and developed the following comments. The property in question is a vacant lot, currently used as parking. The applicant proposes to construct a three-story building with five parking spaces and two retail spaces on the first floor, and one apartment on each of the second and third floors. The property is located in the B-2 Business Zone. The applicant requires, from the Planning Board, site plan approval, as well as a minimum lot size variance, a minimum lot width variance, a parking variance, a rear yard setback variance and a side yard setback variance. The applicant proposes a physical therapy business in one of the two retail spaces on the first floor, and intends to lease the second space, for which the applicant

has had inquiries from a florist and from a leasing agent. The Ordinance requires retail use on the first floor in this Zone if residential units are proposed for upper floors.

The building will occupy virtually the entire lot; hence the need for the variances requested. The height of the building is in compliance with the Ordinance. It has a flat roof. The building is 36 feet at its highest, with an additional 8-foot tower for roof access. However, the building is significantly taller than the other buildings on the same block. Roma estimated that the residence adjacent to the property is 27 feet in height, while the proposed project, with the tower, would reach approximately 44 feet in height. The distance from the property line to the house next door is 3 feet 3 inches, and the project as proposed would present a blank wall with no windows and electric lights aimed downward facing the adjacent residence.

Roma presented samples of the materials to be used, including brick of a slate color and fiber cement of imitation vintage cedar. Rivet panels are proposed with a light mother of pearl color, and there will be black canopies emphasizing the entrances.

The applicant spoke briefly, relating that he and his wife are lifelong South Orange residents interested in contributing to the community.

Several members of the public spoke. Two who spoke occupy the residence in the lot adjacent to the property. They objected to the size of the building and commented that it did not conform stylistically with the residences on that block, would essentially block all the light to their residence, kill their gardens, and eliminate the view from the right side of the house. The neighbor to the rear also testified and expressed concern about the size of the structure. All were concerned about the effect on parking.

After considering the evidence, the majority of the Commission was concerned that the proposed building, while it is in character stylistically with the most recent construction in the area, was too dramatically different in character from the houses on the block, and felt it was "shoe-horned" into the lot. They stated that the significant difference between the proposed project and other similar structures in the neighborhood was that other structures were contained on lots suitable in size, while the proposed building was on a lot too small, thus causing it to contrast negatively with other buildings on the block. While the building as proposed is aesthetically pleasant, it will appear out of place and out of context with adjacent residences.

The Chairman of the Commission expressed concern for the imposing appearance of the structure and proposed that it might be lowered in various ways, like removing the tower for roof access and, instead, installing a hatch for access to the roof. He also suggested that it might contain only one residence rather than two, or that the height of the individual floors could be lowered. He expressed that, in the interest of economic development and land use, something would have to be built in the lot, and this proposal, because it was an attractive building, was acceptable to him from a historic preservation perspective.

The predominant view among the other Commissioners was that the proposed structure was not consistent with or in scale with the buildings closest to it and, because of the limited space on the lot, appeared cumbersome and out of character for that block.

In general, the Commission advises that the structure will be significantly larger than other structures in the area. The Commissioners were particularly concerned with the aesthetic as compared to the buildings closest to it. The project, while attractive in its own right and similar to the kinds of projects being built in the area, is contextually inappropriate from a historic preservation perspective. The majority of the Commission, with the Chairman expressing the only primary dissent, finds that there are significant detrimental historic impacts associated with the project.

A representative of the Commission can be available for your hearing at your request.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of a large, stylized 'A' followed by a series of loops and a long horizontal stroke.

A.J. Barbarito
For the Firm

AJB/jw

cc: Ojetti Davis, Secretary
Jacob Levine, Chairman