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February 27, 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 February 21, 2019, the Township of South Orange Village Historic Preservation Commission conducted a second 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.

As you may recall, this matter was before the Commission at its January 17, 2019 meeting. At that time, based upon the plans presented to the Commission, the Commissioners were particularly concerned about the modern aesthetic of the proposed project, which they found wholly inconsistent with the surrounding houses in the area. The prevailing view of the Commission was that the plan posed a significant detriment to the historic character of the area.

Following that meeting, the applicants spent a month engaging with the community and developing new plans for the project. On February 21 they presented the new plans to the Commission.

Based upon the application package and the presentation, as well as the testimony of Mr. and Mrs. Cruz-Holder, 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 now proposes to construct a three-story building with four parking spaces in a garage, to be used for the building's residents, along with two parking spaces in the rear, for retail customers. There will be one retail space on the first floor of the building, the use for which is as yet undetermined, and one apartment on each of the second and third floors.

The property is located in the B-2 Business Zone. The applicants require site plan approval from the Planning Board. The applicants indicated they would require a side yard setback variance and other relief. The applicants have lowered the original proposed height of the building, which was conforming before, but is now slightly lower to address the Commission's concerns regarding height.

The building will occupy virtually the entire lot; hence the need for the variances requested. The building is 36 feet high at its highest point. Plans for an additional 8-foot tower for roof access have been eliminated, and the roof has now been gabled to conform with the neighborhood's character. The distance between the proposed project and the adjacent house is now a total of six feet, four inches, an addition of approximately two feet of space as compared to the former plan. The applicants have added a total of thirteen windows to the side adjacent to the neighboring property to address Commission concerns about the previously proposed blank wall which, the Commission believed, had not been in character with the neighborhood. The applicants have also altered their color scheme to include more browns and grays that better conform to the scheme of the neighborhood.

The applicants stated they had seriously considered the Commission's previous advice and had amended their plans accordingly. They had also worked diligently to ease the concerns of neighbors, reducing the scale of their project significantly to be more accommodating.

No members of the public offered any comment.

After considering the evidence, the Commissioners and the Trustee liaison each gave a brief statement. The Trustee acknowledged that the building had become significantly more conforming to the neighborhood's character, though she was still concerned about the size. However, the Commissioners were in agreement that they would support the revised application. The consensus among the Commissioners was that the applicants had largely addressed all the Commission's major concerns. The project as revised conformed with the aesthetic of the neighborhood, and the applicants had acted admirably in addressing the Commission's concerns regarding the project's size. The Commission finds that there are no 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 black ink, appearing to read 'A.J. Barbarito', with a stylized flourish at the end.

A.J. Barbarito

AJB/jw

cc: Ojetta Davis, Secretary
Jacob Levine, Chairman