
From: Jeffrey Gelles <jgelles@icloud.com>
Sent: Monday, March 25, 2024 9:09 AM
To: preservation
Cc: Laura Dipasquale; Courtney Disston; Ignatius Wang; Mike Stanton; Mike Gargiulo; Lori Salganicoff; Matthew Millan; Patricia Cove; Paul Toner
Subject: please distribute to PHC architectural committee -- with 2 attachments
Attachments: Mueller sketch Crefeld Sidewalks.pdf; Millan proposal for Belgian Block use.pdf

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To: Philadelphia Historical Commission architectural committee
From: Rex Avenue Neighbors Association

Re: 208-210 Rex Avenue development

Our group, a nonprofit association of Chestnut Hill residents, reached out to the Historical Commission in early February to urge that the How Group's project at 208-210 Rex Avenue be returned to your committee because of how much its site plan and other details had changed after your approval-in-concept in December. Because of our history of cooperative involvement, we wanted to provide your committee (and the Commission itself) with the following updates as well as address one new concern. As in the past, we have continued to work with the developer, and are copying the How Group on this update.

1) As you know, we expressed concern in February about the movement of the two new freestanding houses on the site, which was a significant change from where they had been located in August when we had reached a partial agreement with How Group, and in December when they submitted a package dated Dec. 5, 2023, to the PHC. Since then, we have reached a compromise on the new structures' locations that is acceptable to us, putting the front-most house about a dozen feet close to Rex Avenue than it was originally, but still within or very near to the back half of the property. That was among our stated goals, and consistent with the PHC's 2021 development guidance for the protected site.

2) How Group has agreed to use genuine Wissahickon schist for the siding on the addition to the Hirst-Duhring house, where the plans have said "natural stone veneer," and on the two freestanding homes where stone facades are used beneath the first floor sills.

3) How Group has agreed to reach a consensus with RANA on the color of the new homes' facades to make them more harmonious with the Hirst-Duhring house. We are currently discussing Hardie Board in Monterey Taupe or Khaki Brown, but would welcome the input of your committee's experience advising on historically complementary design.

4) We have continued to share with How Group our members' and architectural consultant's aesthetic concerns about the appearance of the driveways, including both the rebuilt circular drive, which was cited in the nomination for the property's historical designation, and the new rearward driveway that runs alongside the historic house. A primary issue was that the current gravel driveway was to be replaced with blacktop, which we believed would present a discordant and jarring appearance.

We are attaching a sketch by our consultant, Matthew Millan, where the red marks indicate how we believe Belgian Block could be used to soften the effect alongside the Hirst-Duhring house and tie all the driveways together aesthetically, without requiring the large expanse of Belgian Block or other paver stones previously considered. In Mr. Millan's conception, which was largely and independently echoed by Patricia Cove, chair of the Chestnut Hill Historical District Advisory Committee, when that committee reviewed the project on March 7, the blocks would border all the driveways; be used as an apron where the circular drive connects with Rex Avenue and Crefeld Street; and provide a transverse interruption in the paving roughly every 30 linear feet. Per the How Group's request, we are not asking that it be considered as part of a drainage plan, as they say that will not be necessary. But if the substrate is permeable, we would

welcome it as an additional source of drainage for runoff from major storms, since the site rises significantly from Rex Avenue.

We have also asked that something other than black asphalt be used for the primary paving, and have suggested products that would be more grayish or reddish from the start. We have also suggested that a tar-and-chip surface might be a good alternative. Your committee's further advice on the paving materials would be welcome.

5) We are concerned that while How Group's site plan calls for the current brick sidewalk along Rex Avenue to be rebuilt, it includes no plan for a sidewalk along the side frontage on Crefeld Street. We have urged the Chestnut Hill RCOs to consider working out a Community Benefits Agreement with How Group that would require the developer to continue the Rex Avenue sidewalk around the corner onto Crefeld, extend it the entire length of Crefeld, and connect it into a Hilltop Street sidewalk that appears to end a few feet before the 208-210 Rex property line. As there are no continuous sidewalks on the other side of Crefeld and Hilltop, and the sidewalk in the 100 block of Rex is oddly raised 2 to 3 feet above the street, we believe that providing a continuous sidewalk from the development to the top of Chestnut Hill would benefit both the development's seven new property owners and the broader neighborhood. This walkway would improve public safety and would make this historically protected building — especially the beautiful arched window facing Crefeld from the 1926 Duhring addition — more visible to the broader public. If sidewalks are not beyond your committee's purview, we would welcome your support in encouraging this outcome.

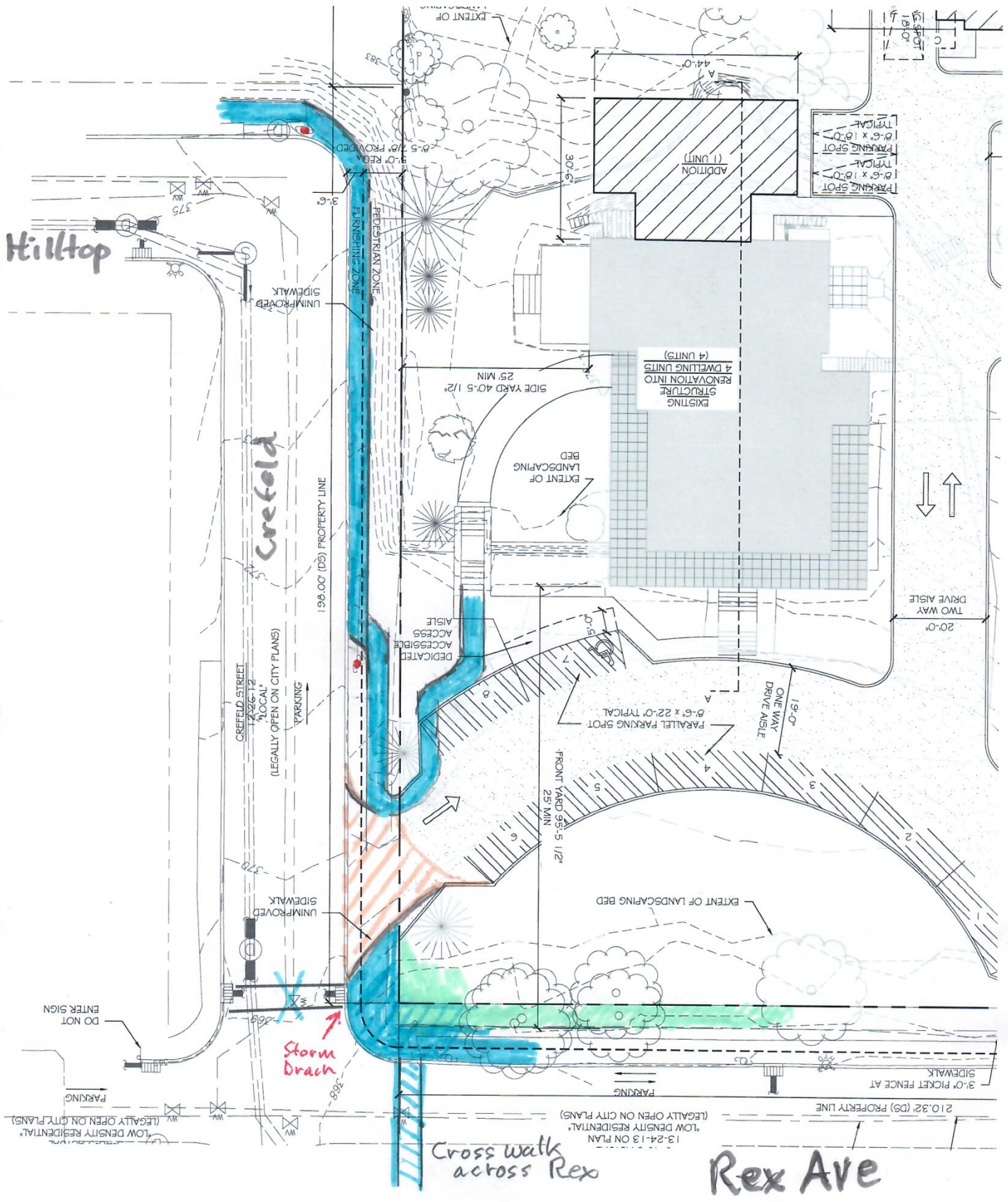
Best,

Courtney Disston
Chair, architectural/aesthetics committee

Ignatius Wang,
Chair, site/environs committee

Jeff Gelles
Chair, steering committee

For the Rex Avenue Neighbors Association





ARCHITECTURAL SITE PLAN
SCALE: 1"=40'

208 REX AVENUE
Philadelphia, PA