

## **NFB BUILDING**

A Mixed-Use Residential and Commercial Building

1572 Barrington St., Halifax

David F. Garrett Architects

### **Site Plan Approval Application**

June 4, 2013

## **PROJECT DESIGN RATIONALE**

### General Description:

The project consists generally of a partial service basement including bicycle storage, a commercial main level, four upper levels of two three-bedroom units and two studio units on each floor, and rooftop tenant open space. Two light wells bring natural light to windows in side and rear units. All uses within the building are in accordance with permitted uses outlined in the HRM Downtown Plan. Barrier-free access to the residential levels will be provided by a ramped entry on the north side.

The building is largely prescribed by the existing front façade, saved from demolition by the then City of Halifax in the mid-1990's in consideration of its heritage value to the streetscape following a devastating fire to the original building. The front façade is protected both by heritage designation and a municipal easement. The existing façade masonry will receive a partial restoration and windows and doors will be replaced (see Heritage Impact Statement). A new addition will be built on top of and behind the existing façade and, of necessity, connected to it.

The height of the building is limited by View Plane #6 and by snow loading requirements on the adjacent existing buildings. The proposed building will be approximately the same height as the original building, which will be one level above the height of the existing façade. A future rooftop addition is allowed for in the design of the structural system, but is not part of this submittal.

### Heritage Precedent:

Prior to the fire, a mansard roof with two dormers and a central masonry tower existed above the façade. The upper portion of the central tower and the two dormers were removed in the early Twentieth Century. The original building and the building as it existed at the time of the fire are shown on the photographs attached to the Heritage Impact Statement, including a copy of the original front elevation drawing by J.C. Dumeresq.

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The exterior design of the new addition above the existing façade and to the rear of the north side is based on three assumptions: first, that the new addition must be differentiated from the existing façade, in part because of the substantially deteriorated nature of the existing brick and stone masonry; second, that the addition should be expressed as being of our time; and third, that the addition should be deferential to the existing façade and the living memory of the original building. With these assumptions in mind, the intent of the architectural design of the new portions of the building is to be neither overly derivative, nor overly idiosyncratic in its expression. The rough nature of the existing masonry and façade as a whole can best coexist amiably with the new addition only if the addition is distinguished from it, but at the same time mindful of its history.

To this end, the mansard roof, central masonry tower, and two flanking dormers are retained in simplified contemporary, but not historical form, and all are slightly set back from the existing façade. The new masonry is of a different shade of color, with accents of the original color. Finally, the roof of the central masonry tower, which is restricted in height by the Streetwall Height requirement of the Downtown Plan (see below), is given greater accent in size and shape, in part in consideration of the original dramatic tower.

#### Variations Required:

The following two Variations are required for the proposed project:

##### Streetwall Height:

The maximum Streetwall Height allowed under the Downtown Plan for this area of Barrington Street is 15.5m (50ft). Above that height, a setback of 1.5m (5ft) is required. This requirement includes additions to heritage buildings, which we consider this project. The heritage height and height of the proposed building are both approximately 54ft – 4ft above the allowable, and the roof of the central masonry tower extends to a maximum height of approximate 56ft. However, both the central masonry tower and the mansard roof areas are set back slightly from the existing façade, and begin to slope back at approximately 41ft. In addition modest “encroachments” into required heights for special features are allowed in the Design Manual. We therefore feel that the proposed addition should be allowed a Variance for Streetwall Height.

##### Main Level Height:

The Design Manual requires a minimum floor-to-floor height for the ground level of a building on Barrington Street to be 4.5m (14.75ft). The proposed building has a floor-to-floor height of 11ft - 3ft under the minimum. This reduced height is due to a need for additional residential density in the building. This is achieved by adding a level to the original four levels of the building. There are two considerations to be noted. First, the ground level of the proposed building remains raised above the sidewalk level by

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approximately 2.5'. Second, the apparent height of the first level as indicated by the façade fenestration is unchanged due to the fact that the heritage window masonry openings remain unchanged.

Therefore, we feel that the intent of the Design Manual floor-to-floor ground level height requirement, for practical purposes in this case, is moot, and that the proposed project should be allowed a Variance for floor-to floor-height on the ground floor. Note that the reduction in floor-to-floor height is discussed further under the Heritage Impact Statement.

**Additional Elements:**

Entrance systems, signage, lighting, and other elements of the exterior design of the proposed project will meet the requirements of the Design Manual.

END

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## **HERITAGE IMPACT STATEMENT**

### **General:**

The original St. Mary's Total Abstinence & Benevolent Society Hall and its later addition on Argyle St. were both largely destroyed by fire in 1991. The building was known at that time, and since, by the name of its last tenant, the National Film Board of Canada. In consideration of the importance of the surviving masonry façade of the building to the Barrington St. streetscape in general and particularly the grouping of the "Three Sisters", the Khyber, City Club and NFB buildings, the City of Halifax invested in stabilizing the façade for future inclusion in a reconstructed building. This façade is being retained in the proposed building.

### **Earlier Modifications:**

At the time of the fire, the original building had previously been substantially compromised by an early Twentieth Century removal of the dramatic upper portion of the central masonry tower and the two elaborate dormers on the mansard roof to the sides of the central tower.

The original building and the building as it was at the time of the fire are shown on the attached photographs, including a copy of the original elevation drawing by J.C. Dumaresq. Also, in the early 1980's the masonry of the façade was severely damaged by sandblasting in a misguided attempt at cleaning.

### **Masonry:**

The masonry is currently stable, but heavily compromised. The proposed building envisions a limited restoration of the masonry with surface reconsolidation, re-pointing, repair, replacement of existing brick where required, and replacement of selected elements of the deteriorated stone masonry. The existing masonry on the north elevation will be maintained and removed only enough to provide a clean vertical line to allow a slight setback to the new masonry, which will be a slightly differing shade to the existing. A full restoration of the existing masonry cannot be supported by the proposed uses of

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the building. The poor surface quality of the existing masonry contributes to the assumption discussed further in the Design Rationale that missing areas of the original façade above and to the side of the existing façade be reconstructed in forms similar to, but not identical to, their original form.

#### Windows:

All existing window masonry openings in the existing façade will be maintained. Two currently bricked openings on the ground level, one at the southeast corner and one at the northeast corner will be reopened. The southeast corner opening will be returned to a door (see original drawing), and the northeast opening will become a window. With the exception of the windows on the third level, all windows will be operable, wood, single hung, heritage color, aluminum-clad windows.

The windows on the third level will differ due to the inclusion of a new floor level interrupting the existing masonry openings on this level. In order to increase the building density and make the building economically viable, the original very tall floor-to-floor heights of the building were reduced and a new floor added. The new floor at the third level will be off-set into a window seat (see building section) to align it with the mid-point of the window opening. The window areas on the existing third level will then be separated by what will appear on the exterior to be a larger 4" mullion at the mid-height of the window. The exterior material of this mullion will be the same as the windows. The windows above this mullion will be hopper-style and below will be awning-style. Both sets of windows will be interior opening.

#### Entrances:

The entrances on the front façade will continue to be at their existing raised height, approximately 2'6" above the sidewalk, and accessed by granite steps. These steps will be reconfigured slightly to meet building code requirements for maximum 6" rise and 11" run for barrier-free accessibility to limited floor areas in the downtown core. New granite steps will be added for the new entrance at the southeast corner. The main entrance to the residential floors on the north side will be accessed by ramp to a new opening and entrance system in a corner of the existing north façade. Steps to continue to rise a few risers to the Neptune second level exit. Entrance systems will be commercial, aluminum clad, wood systems in a heritage color.

#### Addition:

The design of the addition above and to the side of the existing façade will be differentiated from, but deferential to the existing façade. This is further discussed in the Design Rationale.

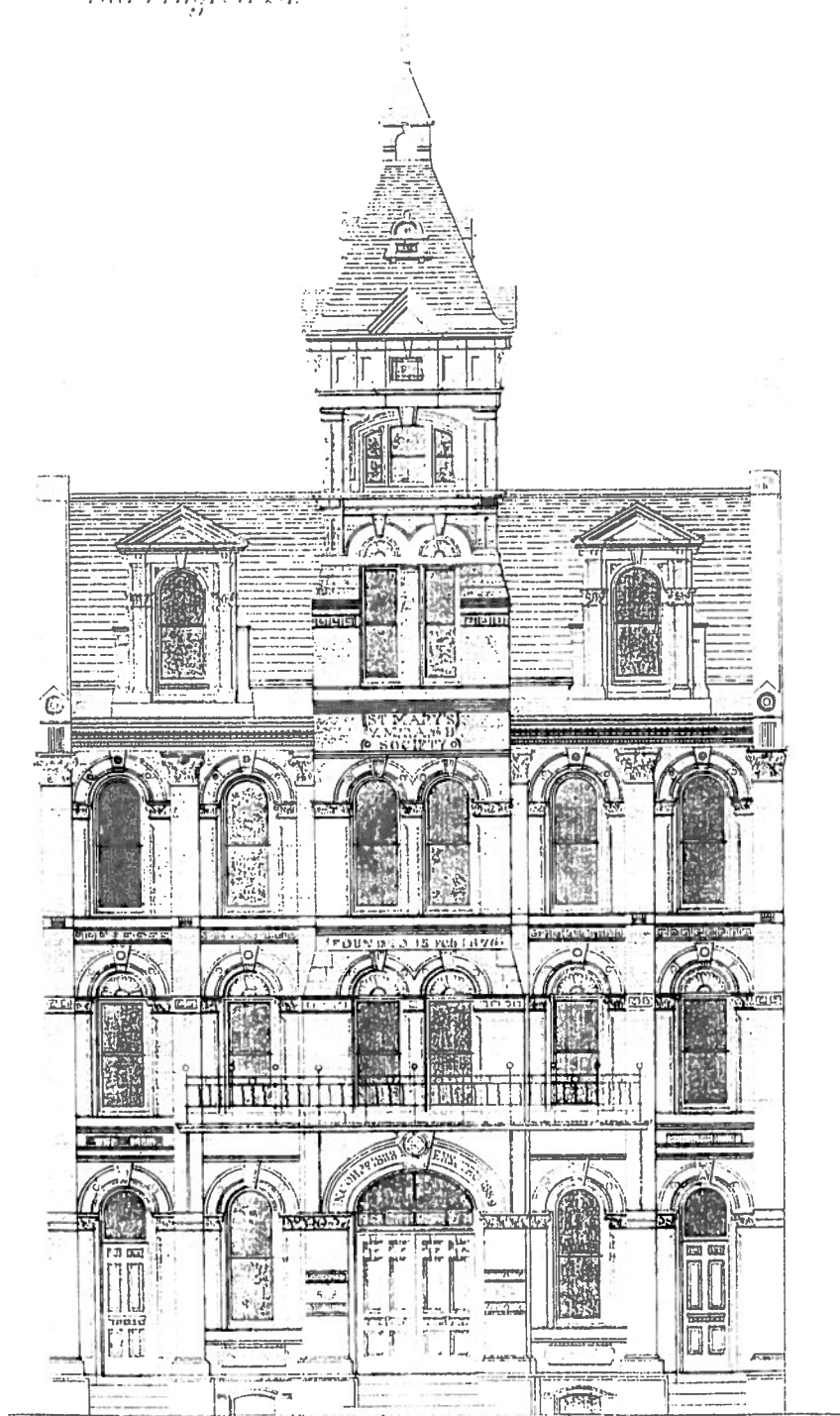
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**Additional Elements:**

Signage, lighting, and other elements of the exterior design of the proposed project will meet the requirements of the Design Manual.

END

ST. MARY'S Y.M.T.A. & B. SOCIETY  
*Barrington St.*



*Frank J. Allcock*  
*John Burns, President St. Mary's Y.M.T.A. & B. Society*  
*Geo. A. Brown*  
*William Martin*  
*James F. Schreyer*

Front Elevation

*J.C. DUNN*  
*Architect*

