

## **Frequently Asked Questions about the Bermuda National Trust and the HSBC Proposal for Redevelopment of the Trimingham's site.**

### **Why did the BNT agree to provide input in the early stages of the development of the HSBC proposal for the Trimingham's site?**

The Trust is charged with the preservation of buildings and lands of beauty and historic interest. For decades the main avenue for achieving this end was to file objections to planning applications that the Trust felt ran contrary to that goal. A few years ago we took stock of our approach to objections and, feeling alarmed at the pace of development in Bermuda, the Trust felt obliged to seek additional means of affecting the planning process.

Dialogue with architects and developers during the design phase has been one of the most successful of these new strategies. They allow the Trust to set out its concerns at a point in the process when they can be more readily accommodated in the final design. This has been Trust policy for several years, and is spelled out on our web site in the following language: "In all cases, we would encourage developers and owners to contact the Trust at the conceptual stages of a project to discuss ways to resolve matters that may conflict with the Development Plan and environmental issues that arise out of the proposal." That is what happened in this case.

### **What benefit did the Trust achieve by agreeing to provide input to the design charrette consultation?**

Most significantly the landmark west side of the old Trimingham's store has been saved. This enables the retention of retail activity in this section. The Trust has been satisfied that the east side of Trimingham's will be replaced with a frontage that meets the scale and character of Front Street, continuing the veranda frontage. The creation of a walkway to Reid Street on the west side of the site provides for a finished side wall on the multi-storey section avoiding a blank wall to the Smith's site. The walkway provides through access to Reid Street providing spaces for public art and community activities and a future opportunity for openings and access into the Smith's development.

### **Isn't that an historic area?**

The Front Street frontages are designated as an Historic Area, with guidelines spelled out in the City of Hamilton Plan 2001, developed by the Department of Planning and approved by the Legislature in 2002. They generally provide that "The design of new buildings in Historic Areas will be encouraged to reflect the character and appearance of the area and Bermuda's architectural traditions." The only two aspects of the Front Street Historic Area's character that the Plan mentions are verandahs and the appearance of individual or double lot development: "Verandahs are a particularly important characteristic of Front Street and therefore they should be incorporated into new development on the street. The design and appearance of new development will be expected to reflect the character of traditional individual or double lot development as is characteristic of the area." The HSBC concept design meets both of these.

### **Are there any seven-storey buildings on Front Street?**

The new A. S. Coopers building now under construction will be seven storeys. While the general limit is six storeys, the Development Applications Board has the discretion to approve greater heights.

### **Who decides what position the Trust takes on major development issues?**

In this case, the decision was made by the full Trust Council. The Council was given a detailed presentation by the Chairman of our Historic Buildings Committee, Charles Tatem, about the results of the charrette and the plan as it was, in concept. The elements the Council regarded favourably were the preservation of the Front Street frontage with the old Trimmingham's store, the creation of a pedestrian walkway, the commitment to public art and the inclusion of shops and other non-banking retail space at ground level. (Under planning law a banking hall is considered retail space, so the bank is not obliged to provide any space for shops or other "real" retail use.) The Council adopted a resolution which concluded "While it remains the Trust's policy not to endorse projects, we can heartily endorse the concept and the process which has resulted in this design and we await the proposed building with interest."

### **We keep reading about a "charrette"; what is it?**

A design charrette is a process whereby design professionals and those with an interest in the development of a site gather to become part of a consultative process and offer recommendations for the reuse or redevelopment of buildings. The process usually takes the form of an open discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of the site, the planning regulations restricting development and the building owner's needs. The important aspect of a charrette is that the major issues important to all parties are discussed at the earliest stages of the design process so that where possible they can be accommodated in the design to reflect a shared vision with community involvement for the site. Charrettes are generally an intensive short term work session to meet a specific deadline and are offered as a collaborative approach to solve difficult design problems.

The traditional approach of the Bermuda National Trust in objecting to planning applications after the design has been finalised has not always been successful and in this case it was decided that, because of the lack of legal protection of the buildings and the significance of the character of Front Street, it would prove more effective to accept an invitation to be a stakeholder to provide input to the design process. Therefore, the Trust's Executive Director and the Chairman of the Trust's Historic Buildings Committee took part in the exercise.

### **What, if any, historic Hamilton buildings are protected?**

The Cathedral is the only historic building in Hamilton which has legal protection, and that was done at their own request. The Trust began lobbying the City of Hamilton in 1992 to give buildings in Hamilton protected status. The City of Hamilton Plan 2001 notes a number of buildings which "contribute to the special character of the City", and notes that "it is the intention to have each one formally listed", but so far, only the Cathedral has actually been listed. The Trimminghams building is not one of the buildings noted in the 2001 Plan.

### **Is there anything that can be done to protect the remaining historic areas and buildings in Hamilton?**

First, the Minister for the Environment's Historic Buildings Advisory Committee must identify buildings as having special architectural or historic interest and then the Minister can formally list the building. Listing is not total protection: it simply means that special planning permission is required to demolish or substantially change the building.

**The Front Street cityscape is iconic - is there no way to preserve it?**

The Hamilton Plan identifies two qualities that make up the iconic look of Front Street – verandahs and the appearance of small lot development. Beyond that, there is no mechanism to keep buildings small or heights lower than allowed in the Plan. Many argue that the character of Front Street with which we are concerned is really the street level streetscape, and that is what will be preserved.

**People are saying that the Trust didn't take a stand on this development because it receives funding from HSBC. Is that true?**

No. The Trust has received funding from the Bank of Bermuda Foundation in past years, but never from HSBC. The Foundation was set up by the Bank of Bermuda long before HSBC took the bank over, and is very much a separate entity from HSBC. The Foundation funds charities throughout Bermuda very generously, and gave the Trust a large grant for historic building restoration in the 1990s. Generally the Trust receives about \$10,000 per year from the Foundation. This year we applied to the Foundation for funds to renovate a building in St George's and were turned down, and we have also been told that we will not be getting the usual \$10,000 grant to our general fund this year. Funds directly from HSBC itself have never been either sought by nor offered to the Trust.

Bermuda National Trust  
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