

Village of Skaneateles
Planning Board Meeting
November 2, 2023
Skaneateles Village Hall

Preliminary and non-binding informal presentation by St. James' Episcopal Church regarding an outdoor columbarium on the lakefront at the property addressed as 96 East Genesee Street in the Village of Skaneateles. This is informational for the Planning Board. No application has been submitted or formally reviewed. The Code Enforcement Office has made no determinations.

Present: Stephen Hartnett, Chairman
Connie Brace, Member
Albert Giannino, Member
Melissa Komanecky, Member
Jeff Liccione, Member

Riccardo Galbato, Attorney for the Planning Board
John Crompton, Code Enforcement Officer
Ian Carroll, Municipal Planning and Development Coordinator
Beth O'Sullivan, Deputy Zoning Inspector
Dennis Dundon, Clerk to the Boards

Joseph Cavender, Architect, on behalf of the applicant
Ellie Krause, Architect, on behalf of the applicant
Doug Smith, on behalf of the applicant

Tyde Richards, Village Trustee
Doreen Simmons, West Lake St.
Dave Hempson, 1769 Shady Pond La
Jacqueline Jones, 1934 Masters Rd
Bill Murphy, 3 Fennell St

At 8:15 pm, Chairman Hartnett called for the St. James' discussion for 96 East Genesee Street.

Mr. Cavender said that the church had begun its consideration of creating a final resting place on church grounds, some ten years ago. It is in response to the increasing interest in cremation. The columbarium being considered is a free standing vertical wall assembly that stores urns in locked boxes. The location being considered is an unconditioned space located below the nave. Four walls would be constructed to receive boxes or urns. There would be approximately 168 storage niches.

Ms. Krause explained that the vertical wall is stacked with niches. It is a more sustainable, lower-land-use way to accommodate remains. The location was chosen for its access to the chapel via the breezeway as well as the access to the recently installed elevator, making the location handicap accessible. The walls extend outward surrounded by a lower seat wall and will have complementary plantings. Mr. Cavender stated that the church had invited the HLPC to informally visit the site months ago – the board members who attended seemed supportive.

Member Komanecky asked if this is being done at other churches in town? Mr. Cavender did not believe so, but is becoming a more common practice. Member Brace asked about the distance from the lake? Mr. Cavender replied that the location is well within the 50 foot setback zone; approximately 8 feet from the existing seawall.

Member Brace said that she liked the idea of expressing the back side of the church, which she called a somewhat unresolved space. While she likes the concept, she is concerned with the precedent of going into the lakefront zone. Mr. Cavender said the seat wall would be constructed on footings to transition the slope of the grade.

Chairman Hartnett said he is concerned with a location so close to the lake. He also noted that the use is not part of the permitted use chart, and speculated that it might be a cemetery under our definitions. Mr. Cavender replied that State law defers to the Health Department, and noted that the remains are inert material. Ms. Simmons mentioned to the Board that there is a state cemetery law. Member Brace asked how tall the niche walls would be? Mr. Cavender said they would average 3.5 feet tall and would be two-sided. Porous pavement would be used.

Chairman Hartnett raised a concern that were the church to cease operating, or wish to sell its parcels, would the columbarium preclude a different use? Could it be moved?

Mr. Smith said he has been working on this idea for ten years. There is a need for this solution and it would be open to parishioners and others not affiliated with St. James’.

Member Brace noted that they are maintaining the same distance from the seawall as the existing condition. Member Giannino said that he loves the church but has concerns about the legal issues attendant to the church going away. Ms. Krause noted that it is fitting as a bookend to Shotwell Park.

Chairman Hartnett stated that the church does wonderful things that help families and the community. All the projects that the church has undertaken have been top-notch.

Mr. Smith asserted that the church has a large and growing congregation, including many parishioners who participate on line.

Chairman Hartnett proposed that the Board will research some of the issues raised by the presentation and invite the church to come back to continue the discussion at a future date.

Mr. Cavender noted that the church has submitted a full zoning proposal.

This matter was concluded at 8:39 pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Dennis Dundon, Clerk to the Boards