Fire Fighters Museum Parking Court; St Clair Street Parking Lane

**Design Narrative**

This submission addresses two elements that support the purpose and function of the existing and proposed expansion of the Indianapolis Professional Firefighters offices and museum, and the related plaza at the intersection of College Avenue, St. Clair Street, and Massachusetts Avenue.

The proposed building expansion and its plaza were recently approved by the Indianapolis Historic Preservation Commission (IHPC), while review and approval of proposed modifications to St. Clair Street have been coupled to that of a proposed parking facility between St. Clair and Arch Streets. Both the parking court and the improved St. Clair Street parking lane for school bus loading and discharge will serve the overall building program.

**Element 1/St. Clair Street Improvements: the need**

St. Clair Street is approximately 27.5 feet wide between curb faces, which marginally accommodates two travel lanes in each direction and parallel parking along the south (eastbound) lane. . Larger vehicles such as school buses or fire department vehicles do not fit within the seven foot remainder lane after accounting for minimal ten foot travel lanes, without resulting in queuing action for opposing traffic, and intersection zone congestion.

School buses for museum visitation (Survive Alive program) currently unload and board on Mass Ave, causing congestion on that increasingly busy street. Additionally, perpendicular car parking along Mass Ave creates a poor control setting for 50-80 elementary school children boarding or leaving buses.

**Proposed design solution**

It is proposed that an approximately 87 foot long section of the existing parking lane, measured from 20 feet in advance of the College Avenue crosswalk stop bar, be indented three feet beyond the current curb line to allow a safe discharge and loading space for two 40 foot long school buses (buses are approximately 96-102 inches wide).

The proposed St. Clair bus parking space is contiguous with the proposed addition's plaza and new entrance, which provides a safe "corralling" of children discharging or waiting boarding. The intent and effect is not to increase traffic lanes or capacity, or to reduce pedestrian facilities, but simply to physically accommodate existing uses more safely within the existing right-of-way.

**Precedents**

First, no actual historic curbs exist in the area proposed for indentation.

Second, alterations from traditional curb lines have been approved for many Historic Districts:

1. Washington Street sidewalks Wholesale District) were widened to accommodate addition sidewalk width.
2. The Cultural Trail has been developed with various combinations of curb realignment and indents throughout the Regional Center and in several Historic Districts. (Wholesale District, CAMA etc.).

**Other Urban Design values**:

1. If the IHPC desires, this indent could be extended to the existing parking lot driveway on St. Clair Street, extending its clear benefit to that traffic generation point.
2. The remainder sidewalk exceeds ten feet in width, sufficiently wide for a future rain shelter.
3. A relative "bump-out" occurs at the end of the indent to provide improved pedestrian safety and comfort for those using crosswalks along the north side of Mass Ave to cross St. Clair Street towards the east end of the district. This anticipates greater pedestrian activity along that route as the East End is further developed in the future.

**Element 2/** **Fire Fighters Museum, offices, meeting rooms Parking Court: a permitted use, a demonstrable need.**

The 0.35 acre parcel bounded by St. Clair Street, College Avenue, Arch Street and a north south alley to the west, is Zoned C-4, for which parking is a permissible use, subject to required setback yards and transitional yards. The proposed development of a modest twenty car parking court fully within the required setbacks and transitional yards (without variances), a net area of 0.15 acre (6597 sf), is intended to:

1. Partially relieve the parking needs of the existing Firefighters Museum, offices and meeting rooms.
2. Partially reduce the impact of the Firefighters facility on both the limited residential neighborhood on-street parking resources as well as on increasingly scarce Arts and Entertainment District on-street parking resources.
3. Contribute to the viability of eliminating the existing surface parking lot gap on Mass Ave (a district plan objective) to allow construction of a commercial infill Firefighters Credit Union. That, in turn, facilitated eliminating an even larger gap on the Avenue, the Fire Department Station 7 and headquarters.

An additional need is to *continue* to provide the Firefighters' active and retired public-service constituency, as well as neighborhood and Cultural District constituencies with space for celebrations and cultural events (such as Fringe Festival) as it has historically done over the years. Those events are an intrinsic part of the community, a unique component of the residential/arts district interface between Mass Ave and Chatham Arch. They have been and will continue to be carefully managed (and spaced in frequency) in consultation with the neighborhood. They would occur mostly in the new Point plaza, but occasional events would utilize this mixed use *parking and events* court. The currently vacant lot would be transformed into an open space, appropriately buffered and landscaped along its edges to restore a sense of place within, to create and extend a sense of place along its neighborhood streets, and to establish a sense of neighborhood entry.

**Urban Design considerations**

1. This project will remove overhead utilities and a power pole and guy cables within the alley, which will allow placement of street trees along that important edge and pedestrian way (a CAMA Preservation Plan objective).
2. This project will restore now-vacant edges as a designed landscape counterpart and bookend to Chatham Commons at St. Clair and East Street.
3. This project will establish an alley curb line as a basis for possible future brick alley program collaborations (a CAMA Preservation Plan objective).
4. This project will provide space for future public art collaboration along College Avenue as a gateway to the Arts District and the neighborhood.

**Neighborhood Plan guidance**

1. The CAMA Historic Preservation Plan *recommends* that this specific site ideally be down-zoned for development as single-family residential, as it did for several other parcels including the 900 block of East Street. That recommendation considered a commercial building alternative as undesirable though permitted by zoning. It did not envisage other viable *non-building* alternatives such as now proposed.
2. The proposed plan does facilitate neighborhood plan objectives of overhead utilities removal, and removal of Mass Ave surface parking gaps.

**Parking Court development details: hardscape**

1. Crosswalk: Street print similar to Cultural Trail crosswalks, leading towards Mass Ave East End.
2. Screening walls: Low rock-face limestone blocks to reduce headlight trespass on Arch Street residences, while providing an events constraining edge and seat wall.
3. Alley utilities: removal of overhead utility pole and cables/wires to allow street tree edge.
4. Alley curb line: to functionally widen alley for improved neighborhood garage access while protecting landscape buffer planting. Creates a framework for future brick alley implementation.
5. St. Clair Street sidewalk: new sidewalk offset from travel lane adjacency to allow street tree placement and buffering space.
6. Asphalt paving with consideration for enhanced material if budget allows, or if building storm drainage system requires a pervious paving location.
7. Drainage: per above or as rain garden within College Avenue setback yard.
8. Gateway Art: TBD; open to future discussion with potential agencies or funders, as a collaborative process with the neighborhood, the district, and IHPC.

**Parking Court development details: landscape**

Plant Materials are selected to provide function, seasonal interest and beauty, while establishing place-defining edges and neighborhood buffers. The character is intended to bookend with Chatham Commons, three blocks to the west as a coupled *gateway set* along a neighborhood through street.

**Screening and Alley Edge**

The Hornbeam hedge tree is planted along the existing alley to screen the parking lot and provide an edge to the view of the property from College Avenue. The Hornbeam are low-branched, deciduous trees with a narrow, columnar silhouette. Their twigs will also provide screening in winter. They will dramatically change this currently barren edge of the residential neighborhood.

**Shade**

Red Oak shade trees have been selected to provide shade, red fall color, and provide stature to the property along its street edges. Red Oaks can reach 50’ or higher at maturity, forming a Bosque around the parking lot. A double row of Red Oaks are planted along College Avenue to enhance the sidewalk experience.

**Flowering**

The spring season will begin with redbud trees flowering on the north edge of the lot. Next will come the viburnum, followed by the Sweetspire. During the summer, native Feather Reed Grass, Daisy’s and Coneflowers will brighten the landscape. In August, the Plumbago groundcover will bloom.

**Fall Color**

The Red Oaks will turn a deep red/scarlet in the fall, contrasted with the bright clear yellow of the redbud fall color. The viburnum will showcase its blue berries that persist until spring. The Sweetspire and Plumbago will have brilliant red fall color.