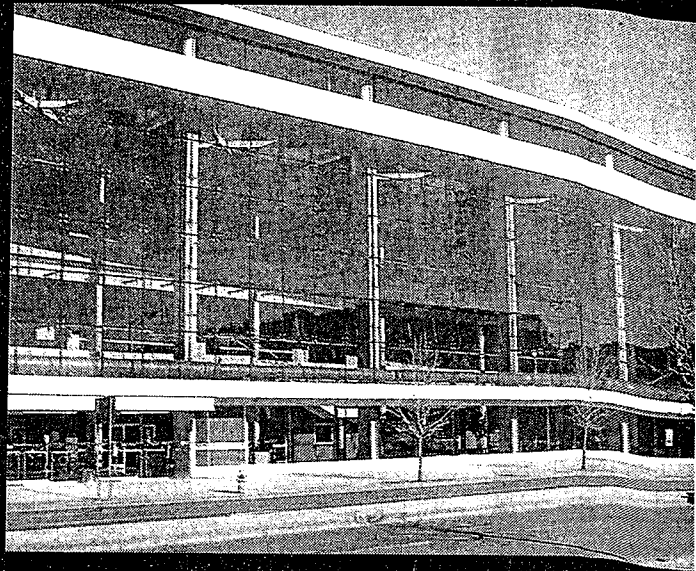
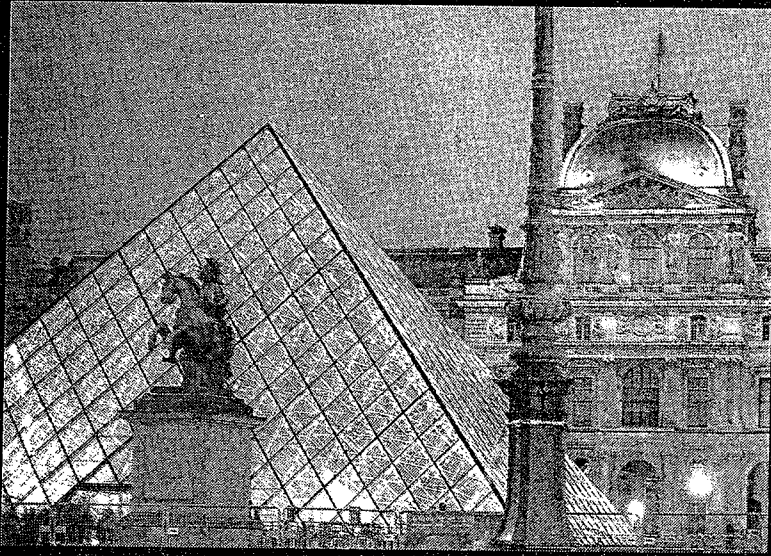
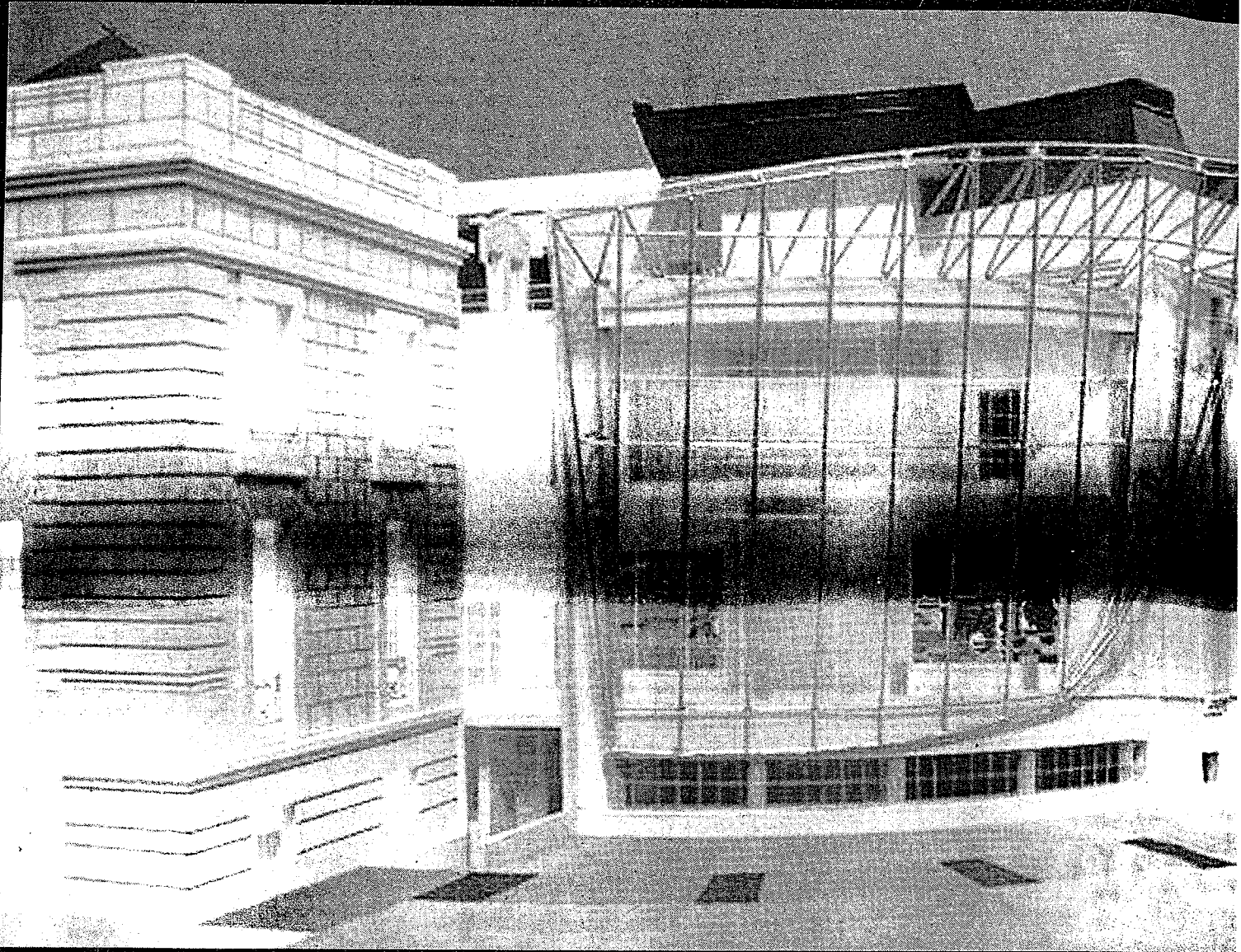


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A FAIR COMPARISON



SEE THROUGH Architects of the new Old Town Hall [directly above] addition compared the new design to the Louvre in Paris [top left] and the Uconn Stamford main building [top right].

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Old Town Hall plan compared to all



Contributed photos

SEE THROUGH Architects of the new Old Town Hall [directly above] addition compared the new design to the Louvre in Paris [top left] and the Uconn Stamford main building [top right].

Old Town Hall plan compared to other familiar structures that use glass

By **AMANDA PINTO**
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STAMFORD — When Director of Economic Development Michael Freimuth addressed the crowd gathered for the unveiling of plans for Old Town Hall, he lifted his necktie, which was dotted with golden dragons.

During a recent trip to Hong Kong, Freimuth said, he learned that dragons are believed to guard cities from harm.

“For me tonight, they are to protect me from everyone in this room,” Freimuth joked, drawing laughter from a seemingly apprehensive audience of about forty people at Government Center Monday night.

The Old Town Hall Redevelopment Authority and the architects responsible for the much-discussed addition didn’t face overwhelming opposition Monday night, but they weren’t welcomed with resounding endorsements either.

The crowd shared many varying opinions about the project in the

first public meeting regarding the city’s more than 100-year-old town hall structure.

Joseph Fuller, Jr. a partner with Fuller and D’Angelo PC, Architects and Planners, detailed the history of Old Town Hall, as well as his firm’s plan to construct a 6,000 square foot addition to the existing building. That addition will include a large glass sail which will extend from the western and southern sides of the building, facing Heritage Park.

“It’s a strong concept but it’s a strong building to begin with ... something more frail would look out of place,” Fuller said.

Freimuth said the sail is intended to jump the building into public consciousness, while preserving it’s original character.

According to national guidelines, architects cannot copy or cover any existing parts of the building, Fuller said.

“Any addition should actually be differentiated from old, enhancing the integrity [of the old building],” he said. “It should stand apart.”

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Old Town Hall

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line” in toward the building’s historic grand staircase. He presented a slide show depicting similar projects that include glasswork, such as the Louvre in Paris, and the city’s UCONN branch.

Some residents were not convinced that the shape of the glass design was appropriate for Old Town Hall.

“It looks like Noah’s Ark coming out of Mount Ararat,” lifelong resident Phil Peluso said before the meeting.

Other residents thought the addi-

tion was distinctive, and that the glasswork would be aesthetically pleasing, especially in the evening.

Bob Karp said he liked the new construction, and considered it a “spectacular effort in the right direction.”

“I think the glass introduces a ‘wow’ factor that will help market the building,” Karp said.

State Rep. Jim Shapiro disagreed with Karp, and said he’d like to see the city decide on a project that was more in-keeping with the Old Town Hall that many people already know and love.

“I don’t want to over-reach when we already have a jewel,” Shapiro said. “The ‘wow’ I would suggest,

is already in this building, we just need to enhance it.”

Others discussed the need for community involvement in design decisions, and stressed that plans should not be finalized until the public needs are assessed.

“Public input cannot be underestimated and alternatives should not be discounted for the sake of convenience,” said former City Rep. Brian O’Neill.

Still others questioned the use of space, a bulk of which will be taken up by tenants who are expected to pay about \$4 million toward the project.

“Using the building for office space is a misuse and it’s a waste,” adding that many tenants may flee the location because of inadequate parking, “I don’t like the idea of using tenants to finance it.”

The city is considering renting parking spaces for tenants at the Bell Street Garage, Freimuth said.

While many audience members praised the architects for a “magnificent” floor plan, several people also called for further discussion about the buildings “bland” Bank Street entrance, the use of cement rather than limestone, and the inclusion of a more comprehensive museum or heritage center.

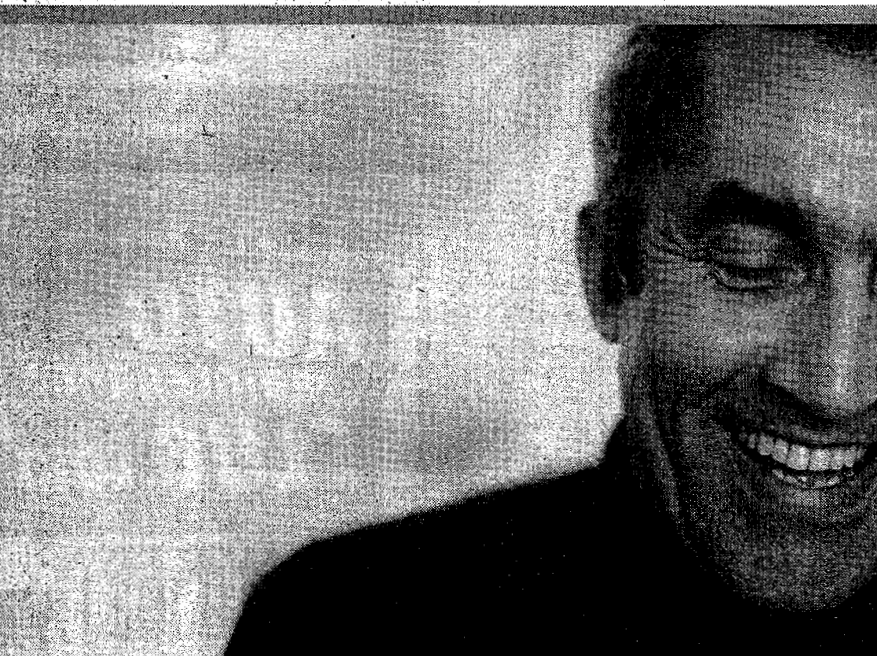
Freimuth said the city welcomes written comment, and suggested that the current model, or a more comprehensive model showing the existing structure as well as the addition, be displayed in the Government Center lobby so the public can comment on the design.

This could be helpful to some residents like Peluso, who said he hated the design when he first saw it in the newspaper, but now thinks it only needs some “outside adjustments.”

“From the picture ... the angle, originally it looked worse than it is,” Peluso said while viewing the three-dimensional model, “Now, it doesn’t look so obtrusive.”

This kind of sentiment, Freimuth said, mirrors the way in which the project was discussed at board meetings. First members were “taken aback” by the design, but gradually came to appreciate it, Freimuth said.

“I think the room was very anxious [on Monday], and as we went through the plan they became more understanding,” he said. “Still, some need to be convinced.”



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