

# Glass sail stays on design for Old Town Hall

## *Minor alterations made*

By Doug Dalena  
Staff Writer

STAMFORD.— Architects displayed subtle design changes last night on a planned addition for Old Town Hall at a sparsely attended meeting of city elected and appointed boards.

The design for the new addition, which city officials say is needed to add elevators, bathroom space and support equipment to the 101-year-old building, features a controversial glass sail surrounding the new elevator shaft, stairwells and additional floor space.

Critics have said the modern glass curtain-wall veers too radically from the character of the building. But the architects and supporters say it enlivens the building, opening it to the city and meeting both practical needs and federal mandates for additions to historic buildings.

One critic said the design, despite changes made to address feedback received, would not satisfy the National Park Service, which will decide on about \$4 million in tax credits needed to complete the addition and interior renovations.

"I don't know if it will fly, and whether we like it or not is not going to matter," said Renee Kahn, a local preservationist and expert on Stamford's historic architecture.

Kahn called the glass sail a "charming folly" that doesn't have enough in common with the Beaux Arts-style of the building. That would spur the park service to deny the tax credits, she said.

"It's an amusement. It's fun," she said, "but they don't like fun."

Architect Joe Fuller said the Connecticut Office of Historic Preservation has approved the design, and he thought the park service also would.

The changes include different materials for parts of the more traditional-looking Bank Street facade of the addition, features that would ease the visual transition to the existing building structure facing Heritage Park, and alterations to a roof deck that could become part of a museum or sculpture garden.

Fuller said the design must have an element of boldness to complement the original building's powerful design elements.

"An addition that was not very strong on its own would look very frail," he said.

The presentation, designed to familiarize city leaders with a project they will vote on in several forums, was attended by 10 city representatives, a finance board member and a member of the Zoning Board, some of whom are on the steering committee planning the building's future.

### Pro and con

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# Design

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City officials responsible for the project, other members of the steering committee and a few residents also attended.

The city is doing a \$14 million, multistage renovation of Old Town Hall, which replaced an older Town Hall that burned down in 1904. Exterior renovations to windows, the building facade and the grand steps facing Atlantic and Main streets are done. Complex interior renovations are in design and could be affected by the tenants.

The steering committee is working with consultants to find private tenants and public uses for the 38,000-square-foot building.

"We've had some conversations with people who want the entire building; we've had some conversation with people who want pieces of it," Economic Development Director Michael Freimuth said.

Christina Haskins, a resident

who called Old Town Hall her favorite building, said she attended mostly to urge city leaders to open the building to the public. She said it should not be used just by private businesses or nonprofit organizations that might tightly control access.

"It can't have the feeling that it's prohibited against the ordinary people of the town," Haskins said.

Steering committee members said nearly half the building would be open to the public in some form but said renting out the rest would help pay the \$500,000 in annual operating costs and subsidize public art exhibits and other public uses.

Haskins, who called Old Town Hall the "jewel of Stamford," said she could live with the new design, especially if it means restoring public activity.

"I was disturbed originally with the plan, but the new pictures look pretty good," she said.

"I would rather have it be all park," Haskins said of the addition, "but if it means the building can come alive, then it has to be done."