

Thatchmont Board Meeting – Aug.4, 2008

Trustees: Ann Lammers, Neil Golden, Arthur Mattuck, Rosemary Trainor
G&G Management: Peter Deforge Absent: Lifei Guo, Lars Liebisch, Paul Tempest

This was a brief meeting to decide how best to proceed with the masonry issue, since e-mail discussion was proving to be impractical, and time was moving on. Since it was called on just a few days notice with no choice of dates, several trustees could not make it.

Decisions were based on two formal reports and one informal opinion, from three engineering firms.

RMX (the company that inspected our roofs) was first consulted; they studied our walls from both below and from the roofs. The RMX report called for a total masonry overhaul: 100% repointing of all mortar, replacement of all deteriorating stone sills, replacement of all steel lintels in front and many in rear, etc. This would be a very expensive one-time project, but it presumably would guarantee the long life of the buildings for many years to come.

The trustees wanted a second opinion. We obtained a contact at The Beal Companies, a large investment property firm, who offered to have their chief and structural engineers look at our property. They came, inspected the masonry, found it in essentially sound condition, and felt that just spot repair would be adequate. This was an informal opinion, but unbiased since Beal only supervises work on Beal buildings.

They recommended a commercial engineering firm, Thompson and Lichtner, as appropriate for giving a detailed second opinion and report on our property. William Haddad of T&L came with an assistant, and concurred that only spot repair was needed. They examined all the masonry from below (with binoculars), took a complete set of photographs, and marked on them all the areas which needed non-cosmetic work: repointing, and badly cracked stone sills mostly. The steel lintels over the windows, though bowed, were judged to be structurally sound: the bending was the result of too stiff a mortar having been used when they were first installed. Replacing a lintel, or replacing the mortar above it, would be essentially a cosmetic job.

Thompson and Lichtner was then sent the RMX report, and asked to comment on the differences. Mostly it came down to the choice between spending a large sum of money for a one-time complete repair, or the obviously more manageable spending of a smaller sum for repair of what certainly needs to be done, with perhaps some additional cosmetic work as money permits, but with the downside expectation that masonry will continue to be an ongoing concern as new spots develop in the future.

Beyond this, T&L said that some additional bad stone sills that RMX had observed from the roof should be added to the immediate repair list; other discrepancies (bad wood in some of the window sills, etc.) were of cosmetic rather than structural significance.

Based on their assessment, Thompson and Lichtner prepared a scope of work and specifications we could send out for bids. Peter thought it was lacking in the usual numerical detail in such documents — each bidding company would have to make its own estimates from the photographs of the work required (linear footage of repointing, etc.), and did not provide for any estimates of what cosmetic work would cost. He also felt it would be best to replace some of the lintels, and perform pointing above them. Short of that, the engineer should suggest some course of action for the lintels, and include that in the scope of work. (There is clearly some disagreement in the reports about whether the lintels pose only cosmetic problems, or structural as well. He will try to get clarification on this.)

Accordingly, the trustees adopted the following plan:

1. Ask the T&L engineer (William Haddad) to add the numerical calculations to the scope of work, as well as the additional broken sills requiring immediate repair that were noted in the RMX report.
2. Add to the scope of work an "a la carte" menu, listing the cosmetic items, and non-cosmetic items discovered during the course of the work, and for each the cost/unit of carrying them out :

- a) additional repointing (per linear foot)
- b) removal and replacement of brick
- c) resealing of capstone bricks over the parapet
- d) replacement of one lintel, with ancillary work needed
- e) replacement of one stone sill (using concrete, not limestone)
- f) repair or reconstruction of one wooden window sill

3. Timeline:

a) Mid-August: altered scope of work goes out for bids to two masonry firms used by T&L and to two used by G&G;

b) Mid-September: bids back, trustees meet late September to compare bids, and compare overall costs of spot work with very rough RMX estimates of a one-time complete job;

c) October: decisions made, financing discussed, budget for next year prepared. In the event that the decision is made to go with spot repair, we would create a special fund within the reserves earmarked for future masonry work, with a regular contribution made to it each year, to spread out the costs of masonry repair over the years on a pay-as-you-consume basis.

Arthur Mattuck
Recording Secretary