

Thatchmont Board Meeting – Jan. 5, 2009

Trustees: Neil Golden, Ann Lammers, Lars Liebisch, Arthur Mattuck, Rosemary Trainor
Absent: Sarah Leaf-Hermann, Paul Tempest, G&G Property Manager

Peter Deforge, our property manager, left G&G at the end of December. A new G&G property manager, Jay Bailey, has been appointed, starting Thursday Jan. 8. He has been familiarizing himself with our problems by reading recent minutes and planned to be at this meeting, but was called away by a family funeral.

Almost all of the meeting was devoted to evaluating proposals from five engineering firms for dealing with our masonry problems. Comparison was not so easy, since the proposals were not uniform in scope – some frankly preliminary, others varying from a description of the problems to a highly detailed account of the masonry work required, with a timetable for doing it. Some offered cost estimates, others not.

To aid in comparing, three stages for the project were identified:

1. A **Basic Report**, based on an onsite survey of the buildings or in some cases a study of a set of photos, or a **Comprehensive Report**, which would include closer inspection and testing of the masonry. The proposals generally estimated the cost of such testing to be around 5K – it could involve drilling and/or brick removal to assess the condition of the interior layers, and lifts to access the upper stories.
2. After selecting the engineering firm to manage the project, the next stage would be for it to prepare the **bid specifications**, evaluate the bids and advise us on the selection of the masonry firm. The trustees would then decide how much of the project to undertake, the timetable, and how to finance it.
3. The third stage is the **supervision of the masonry work** by the engineering firm, while it is ongoing.

The general type of problems we have are those in what is called the **building envelope**, and we look for firms or engineers which have experience or specialize in this. Here are the five firms which submitted proposals, together with comments from the discussions of them. The first two should be familiar from previous minutes.

1. **RMX Northeast** The firm that prepared our roof report, subcontracted the work, and was subsequently asked to evaluate our masonry. The masonry report was a Basic Report, with two follow-up on-site meetings with Tony Chiarelli, its President. Total cost: 5K. It contained an estimate of 16K for a Comprehensive Proposal, Bid Specifications, and advising on the bids received.

The report was felt to be inadequate; Neil prepared a list of questions about it, which a subsequent letter tried to respond to. Both in the report and on-site discussions, a single point-of-view (do a complete job, and now) was pushed. A cost estimate of 1.5-2M was given, which some felt was deliberately high. The firm is relatively young (7 years old), small (two engineers plus four others), with its roots in roofing, branching out to building envelopes, but with some indication on its website that its president would like to re-specialize in roofing.

2. **Thompson and Lichtner**, recommended by Beal, a large Boston firm which only works on its own construction projects. Mike Vielmetti, who has many years practical experience with building envelopes and was Bill Haddad's supervisor, spent two hours on-site with some trustees. He gave us his impressions orally, with a rough timetable of what we had to do now, what could wait and for how long, plus a cost guesstimate of 500K, which seemed very low. Neil sent him a summary of what he said, and asked him to flesh it out in a written report, and explain the basis for the estimate. We got a timetable, with a detailed technical specification of the exact work to be done at each stage (not specifically mentioning testing), and no estimate. Both too much, and too little. (Total cost of the report: \$750.)

The trustees were disturbed by the non-responsiveness and poor communication. Another condominium association had started a similar project with T&L, but switched in midstream to RMX Northeast, because they felt ignored – as it turned out, T&L had gotten heavily involved with another project, stinting on its service to them.

3. **Gale Associates** A national company with a Boston branch, recommended by the architect-principal at Rosemary's school. Jon Lindberg is a building envelope man there; he studied photos of our property, but did not come on site. His preliminary proposal outlined the sort of testing he thought would be needed to produce a Comprehensive Proposal. Cost: 25K + around 5K for the testing.

This seemed expensive. The proposal dwelt on the leaks that would be found, but which for the most part we don't seem to have. (One explanation offered was that these firms only see leaky properties, since associations wait until so many expensive leaks have developed that they are convinced of the need to do something.) There was some feeling of disconnect between the proposal and our actual situation.

4. **D.M.Berg** Tom Heger, a principal there (and formerly of Simpson, Gumpertz, and Heger, a large respected local firm) was very highly recommended by a reliable friend of Neil's who had substantial work done by them; Heger submitted a very brief preliminary proposal without details, based on our photos and others taken by an engineer from the firm, with a projected cost of about 12K for a Comprehensive Proposal: 7K + around 5K for testing.

5. **Cubellis**, a large engineering firm (Berg is smaller); among those used by G&G. Dan McLaughlin there has worked with Peter, and took a quick look (a "drive-by") at our property several months ago. He sent us a Basic Proposal, estimating 13.5K for a Comprehensive Proposal (8.5K + around 5K for testing).

As a supporting document, we got his basic (or comprehensive?) proposal two years ago for similar work on the building envelope of the Jefferson School; it was a brusque two-page survey of the needed work, but impressed the trustees by its focus and clarity. (At the time Dan was with a different firm, and his proposal didn't win the contract; he has since moved to Cubellis.)

Conclusions: The trustees decided to pursue the last two as the best possibilities (the two principals in particular seem impressive, perhaps in part because we haven't met with either of them: heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard are sweeter.) They will be asked (by phone probably):

- a) How much experience have you had with similar projects?
- b) Who at the firm would be assigned to our project; how experienced would they be?
- c) Can they give assurances our project will not get lost in the shuffles that go on at larger firms?
- d) How soon could they give us a Basic and a Comprehensive Report? (with recommended priorities and timelines, if possible, to give us maximum flexibility with financing)
- e) What's the hourly rate charged for the reports?

Brochures of their previous work, or previous clients we could speak to would be helpful. The trustees will look at their websites, which should contain names at least of their satisfied clients, as well as give a general impression of the firm and how much expertise it has in building envelopes.

Other Business

1. **Financials.** It's too early to see how we came out in 2008. Ann (our Treasurer) commented on:

a) A car in one of the lower end Thatcher rental spaces had not been paying parking rental for a while; it may have been simply abandoned (windows down, wet inside), and has now been towed.

b) The six Nstar monthly electric bills for the house currents in the six buildings vary from \$193 at 14 Egmont to less than a quarter of that in the lowest bill. Contributing factors could be whether energy efficient bulbs are being used, and whether or not basement lights are always left on.

2. **Winter tandem-parking** If no snow is predicted, overnight center parking will be allowed for guests of unit-owners at the upper end who cannot tandem-park because of the snow pile. Such cars **must have notices** visible through the front windshield with the name, unit number, and phone number of their unit-owner host; otherwise they will be subject to towing.

Ice-melt/sand In the past we have usually had buckets available in the rear; perhaps in front hallways as well? (maybe too messy given the once-weekly cleaning). Will be looked into.

3. **Next meeting** Tentatively set for Tuesday Jan. 27, to pick an engineering firm.

Recorded by Arthur Mattuck (Substituting for Sarah Leaf-Hermann, Recording Secretary)