

Public Hearing Minutes

Augusta Historic Preservation Commission

June 1, 2016

6:30 pm at City Center, Lecture Hall

Members Present: Lorie Mastemaker, Dan Stevens, Dale McCormick, Jerry Bumford, Phyllis von Herrlich, Andy Loman

Members Absent:

Others Present: Betsy Poulin-City Staff, Richard Bridges, Dan Wathen, Judy Wathen, Justin Frank, Bob & Candy Sloma, Scott Burrill

Subject: Wrecking and Demolition Permit Application for 378 Water Street, residential four unit apartment building with office, owned by Charlie Priest with an option to purchase by Penney Memorial Baptist Church, Map 33, Lot 264, approximately 167 years old.

Introductions

Lorie Mastemaker, Chair, gave a description of the purpose of the meeting, ground rules, and the format.

Betsy Poulin, City Staff, gave a description of the application and the May 10th Augusta Historic Preservation Commission meeting finding of the building's potential significance.

Dan Wathen – Moderator of the Church. The other attendants tonight are members of the church, as well as the pastor.

- The church is interested in the property as a buffer primarily
- Wants to speak to the important persons who lived in the building. He checked North and Nash's histories and did not see either Philbrook or Heath. He does not want to denigrate their presence on the property
- Met with the Mayor, City Manager and Betsy to see if there were other alternatives for the property
- Went to look into the feasibility of rehabilitation with his wife, co-chair of the Board of Trustees, Charlie Priest, another parishioner who owns rental properties, and Charlie Sprague. The estimates for rehabilitation ranged from \$200K to \$300K.
 - Windows and doors need replacement
 - Roof 32 years old, and leaking, shingles missing
 - Siding is in fair condition, could be scraped and painted, could be lead paint
 - Chimney needs to be repaired and lined to meet codes
 - Electrical system is outdated, there is no ground wire in the system currently
 - The walls are horsehair plaster
 - Plumbing is obsolete, there are 4 kitchens and bathrooms which need to be upgraded
 - Heating system is aged, would require replacement

- Basement shows signs of being wet
- Radon is possible
- Asbestos in the basement which needs removal
- House has very little insulation in the walls/attic
- If the building was kept in the present use, a second means of egress would need to be addressed on the second floor, as well as a fire system
- Unknowns such as lead abatement, opening walls, etc.
- Bill Sprague felt it was \$250-300K
- Charlie Priest felt there was a significant amount of work needed, and never got full occupancy. It is a hard neighborhood to attract people to, as Dan Stevens said, the best house in the worst neighborhood.

Commission Questions:

- Dale: Is the wiring estimate by a contractor?
 - Dan Wathen: No, by a property manager.
 - Dale: The building is probably grounded, just not the individual outlets. The walls probably don't need to be removed fully to insulate.
- Phyllis: Was an expert in historic buildings consulted? Someone such as Les Fossil. He sometimes has lower estimates.
 - Dan: No.
- Phyllis: How long has the building been for sale?
 - Dan: Probably about 2 years, the Church became interested when it wasn't selling.

Public Comments:

- Michael Hall: Executive Director of the Downtown Alliance: When a building within their jurisdiction comes up for demolition, it is of interest. He is gathering information about the process and building. It is a gateway to the downtown, looks nice. Would it be possible to save?
 - Dan Wathen: They have not looked into this specifically, as this is not their interest. Discussed the option with the Mayor and City Manager. About 15 parking spaces would be possible. Wants it to be attractive. They are buying it to have a buffer with properties across the street. The Church is not in the business of restoring historic buildings.
- Richard Bridges. Philbrook did not show up in North's history, because he was Mayor after publication. In respect to Nash, it is published as a draft, as Nash died before the publication was completed. When North was writing, Heath was finishing up being City Marshall then, so his life events were probably not included due to that fact.
 - Dan: Nash was updated by Edith Harry at a later date. The question is whether this is a historic figure which is worth delaying the demolition. Their deacon was a tower in the First Baptist Church in Augusta.
- Dale: Is the Downtown Alliance speaking in favor or against the project?
 - Michael: I am here on his own interest, the Downtown Alliance has not yet offered an opinion.

Public Hearing Closed.

AHPC Discussion:

- Andy: Would like to know if the Church would be interested in adding a plaque to the property, should the building be removed. Mention of Mayor Philbrook as deacon and predecessor to their church and Joshua Heath as a City Marshall, and for his fire service could be added. Phyllis acquired a number of pieces of information which were provided to members tonight. A plaque could provide history of the former owners of the building and history of the City. These are significant individuals in the City's history.
 - Dan Wathan: He understands that a commemorative plaque was placed for the Whitehall Home. He feels a commemorative plaque would be a good idea, particularly since Philbrook was a deacon. The buffer area could include a plaque.
- Phyllis: Would the church have a problem with another use being found for the building?
 - Dan Wathan: The Church did not get into the project with the thought of being a social service agency; they are serious about the buffering and the parking. There has been plenty of opportunity for it to be developed, but it hasn't. The church got into this because it was not selling and they wanted a buffer for their property and to add more parking. Changing the existing parking lot would be very expensive, especially due to the fill required.
- Andy: Feels the commission is limited by the delay process, as the building would come down anyway. Asking for the plaque is a good option for the future.
- Dale: The importance of the house to the streetscape is huge; it is architecturally and historically significant. Has sympathy for the position the church is in regards to the buffer. To tear down a historically significant building and put in a parking lot, is not where she is in sympathy with the church. It will leave a hole, right when the City Council is trying to improve the entranceways into Augusta.
- Andy: This is starting the demolition delay, so maybe someone would come forward to save the building.
- Dale: We have no tools, except this blunt instrument, to save the culture and architecture of Augusta.

Findings of Fact:

Motion made by Jerry to find the Building significant based upon criteria 4 and 5 (see findings of fact worksheet)

Second: Phyllis

Vote: 6:0 Motion passes.

Building is significant. Wrecking and Demolition Permit may be granted after the 90 day delay period, July 20th.

Public Hearing Adjourned 7:25pm at to hold Regular Meeting.

Minutes by Betsy Poulin, City Staff.