

MINUTES

HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION

Subcommittee on Alternatives to Demolition of the Historic First Congregational Church

February 10, 2021

Minutes of the regular hearing of the Board of Adjustment, of the City of Tempe, which was held Virtual.

Subcommittee Session 5:04 PM

Present:

Chuck Buss, Chair

Chris Garraty

Joe Nucci

Staff:

Alex Smith, Dep Com Dev Dir – Spec Project

Ryan Levesque, Dep Com Dev

Steve Abrahamson, Principal Planner

John Southard, Historic Preservation Officer

Brittainy Nelson, Administrative Assistant

- Election of subcommittee chair

Motion by Commissioner Nucci to elect Chir Buss as the Chair of the Subcommittee; second by Commissioner Garraty. Motion passed on 3-0 vote.

Ayes: Chair Garraty, Joe Nucci, Chuck Buss

Nays: None

Abstain: None

Absent: None

- Discuss and consider the significance of the Kemper Goodwin-designed First Congregational Church buildings(1948 / 1953) and alternatives to demolition of same
 - Mr. Southard provided background information on the church. The church was designed by Temper Goodwin. Portion of the building was constructed in 1948 and 1953. It is listed as the first landmark property to be listed prior to being 50 years of age. The Congregation folded two or more years ago. The property was required by Wexford Development. At the end of 2020 Wexford Development applied to demolish all the buildings on the property. The application went before the Historic Preservation and the commission denied the request which initiated a six month stay. The six-month period is to be used to discuss alternative demolishing. To ensure that the resources are not lost. In the motion to deny the application the commission task the chair to appoint a subcommittee to discuss alternatives to demolition.
 - Subcommittee Discussion

Chair Buss asked what day the denial was set.

Mr. Southard answered that it was November 18, 2020.

Commissioner Garraty wanted to point out that the site was part of a rather large archaeological site till a few month ago where they revised the site boundaries. ASMLA revised the site boundaries to only include the known areas of investigating have occurred. This does not mean that there is not an archaeological site there it just has not been verified. ASMLA would expect for the areas to be tested or monitored. The area should get some archaeological attention. For test in the area it is in a facility of a prominent village site at the south base of the Butte. It is also in the historic original town site of Tempe. Where the committee could make a case for testing.

Mr. Southard stated that there were plans for a parking garage that was to be at least partially underground.

Commissioner Garraty stated that there would be ground disturbance if they are going to be digging to put in a parking garage which would require testing/monitoring. The builder would have to grad the parking garage and do it slow enough so that the archaeologists can see what they are digging.

Commissioner Nucci stated that he is worried about the wording in the Ordinance where it talks about alternative to demolishing. With a project such as this the developer is clear that it's a total demolish of the property. Looking for ways to mitigate the adverse effect of demolishing. In order to do that the Committee should look beyond this site. Developers own other properties in the Downtown where he does not have specific plans disclosed to the City. Would hate to see a repeat complete wholesale demolishing along Mill Ave and other locations. There should be a more holistic approach.

Chair Buss stated because this a first it is a little more difficult to do. During the meeting he tried to figure out if the developer sees the properties as being sacred.

Chair Buss asked once the 6 months are over the developer can do whatever they want.

Mr. Southard answered that after the 6 months stay there are no other Historic related restriction to obtaining a demolishing permit. In theory there will be other permits that the developer will need such as Hauling, Traffic and Safety. The developer is allowed to take out the demolishing permit the first day after the 6 months stay.

Chair Buss would like to know how the committee feels about Mr. Southard talking to the developer about preservation on other properties before demolishing the church. Would hate for the building property to site empty. There is nothing more painful then watching a historic structure go away to

see it then sit as a vacant lot.

Mr. Southard stated that there are means of mitigate adverse effects that can be very creative. There is nothing that can replace a historic resource that is lost but there can be discussions related to how to mitigate the adverse effect of the demolition.

Mr. Smith stated that roughly speaking Mr. Southard is charged with protecting assets that a large portion of them are listed in private sector hands. A proposed exchange of the developer would be a very creative way of mitigating the demolition of the property and if there was some agreement that called for the first congregational property to remain standing as long as possible up until the point a building permit was issued to help preserve it as long as possible.

Commissioner Nucci stated that the developer that did not seem to really get the value of the historic property. In the developer's mind clearing the site adds more value to the property. The downside is that the developer does not need anything from the commission they are not in a strong bargaining position. The postponement of the demolition of the property is a great idea.

Mr. Levesque stated that he has some hypothetical routes that he would like to point out. One route would be to see if the developer can do a partial demolition. The developer has some long-term goals to redevelop the property as a high-rise development on the site. Whether it is for all of the property or part of the property those are tools on hand to use as leverage. If the developer does do the demo without an agreed upon negotiation the Commission still has purview of the site. The developer may be seeing it as now the Historic Preservation Commission won't have any concerns because there is no historic property on the site it sets a bad example that they can demolish the site and move the site forward without a serious conversation about the history. There is an opportunity to have the conversation with the developer. If they do not agree with the decision the developer will have to appeal that decision before Council to review the full project. If the Committee can review those two options in the initial phase of the development demolishing process. Then second thing that the Committee should strategize might be for a development review process type of conversation with the applicant.

Chair buss agreed and feels that is the best move to go forward with now.

Mr. Levesque stated that the developer only has the entitlements on the site for what the zoning is for property which is 50 feet height. So, anything beyond that the developer would have to get permission from City Council.

Chair Buss stated he is grateful that Mr. Levesque pointed that out because the site is not set on 2 acres of land where one can build on the grassy lawn

and parking lot and leave the building.

Mr. Levesque stated that there is some surface parking that could be sought for development and some of the other portions of the property sought for preservation. There is a public negation tool that a public alley exists and that is a tool at could be used at the City discretion. They can not build over the City Alley without permission.

Chair Buss asked Mr. Southard how the committee would proceed with distributing the ideals to the developer.

Mr. Southard stated that the committee mentioned earlier that the Historic Preservation Officer reach out the developer. If Mr. Southard was to receive direction to initiate conversations he would do so and report back to the Subcommittee regularly with progress updates and seek their input.

Commissioner Garraty stated that he was not aware of the limited negotiation power that they had. The monitoring option would be less expensive, and they would be more agreeable to that. Testing if going to discovery is very expensive. Test would be the better way to go with if they are thinking about clearing the lot because if they test and don't find any intact archaeological resources would clear the lot of archaeological issues.

Commissioner Nucci stated that he concurs with the committee. He shares with Mr. Levesque concern with the developer's long-term plan and precedence this would set to wait six months and then demo the property.

Chair Buss asked if they would need to present a motion or not since everyone agrees.

Mr. Southard answered that the consensus providing direction to staff will do and he will report back on the progress.

Subcommittee adjourned at 5:40pm

Prepared by: Brittainy Nelson, Administrative Assistant
Reviewed by:

Steve Abrahamson, Principal Planner

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