

SPECIAL MEETING - CITY COUNCIL – MAY 26, 2018

A special meeting of the Lancaster City Council was held on Saturday, May 26, 2018 in the Commission Room, 120 North Duke Street, (Rear Annex) Lancaster, PA, at 9:00 a.m., with President Reichenbach presiding.

Present – Chris Ballentine, Faith Craig, Janet Diaz, John Graupera, Pete Soto and President James Reichenbach – 6

Excused – Ismail Smith-Wade-EI - 1

LEGISLATIVE AGENDA

Consider the following application and recommendation from the Historical Commission for improvements to properties within the Heritage Conservation District:

1. Water Street Mission, owner of 201-237 Conestoga Street, proposes demolition of a brick warehouse at Conestoga and South Water streets and installation of privacy fencing to screen surface parking.
(This is a proposed motion to rescind Council action taken on May 22, which approved the Historical Commission recommendation and allowed a building permit for demolition.)

Mr. Graupera made a motion to rescind Council approval granted on May 22. Ms. Diaz seconded the motion.

Tom Simpson, State Street, questioned why the engineering report provided by the applicant, Water Street Mission, was being accepted without question.

Gene Aleci, West Orange Street, cited the extensive experience of the structural engineer he commissioned to estimate the costs to stabilize the structure. He contended the \$2.36 million estimate provided by Water Street Ministries was misleading and inflated. During the previous month, he examined the interior of the building three times and the exterior multiple times. He contended that he and his associates took an integrated approach to the study of the structure. He contended the condition of the structure in Water Street Ministries' application was not supported by the evidence. Further, he stated that the degradation of the building was due to neglect on the part of the owner.

Responding to a question from Ms. Diaz, Mr. Aleci said the \$400,000-\$600,000 estimated cost he had cited would stabilize the structure, but wouldn't restore it to human occupancy.

Responding to a question from Mr. Ballentine, Mr. Aleci confirmed that he estimated a cost of about \$5 million to rehabilitate and renovate the building.

Jerry Greiner, Race Avenue, commented that Lancaster's historic buildings are valuable and unique. They are the only thing of real value in the City except for its human resources. He said there is no compelling reason to tear the building down.

Tom Hooper, East Orange Street, recalled demolition in the 100 block of North Queen Street. He said the City is still trying to recover from that misguided demolition.

Danny Whittle, West Walnut Street, contended Water Street Ministries should be considering stabilization of the building until it has a plan for reuse of the site, rather than moving forward with demolition.

Tony Dastra, North Plum Street, commented that this could be a case in which adaptive reuse doesn't work. He stated his concern that Water Street Ministries does not have a plan for reuse of the site. He said new construction on the site may cost more, but may also be the best option. He contended that every \$1 donated to the organization must have the greatest effect in support of programs addressing homelessness and poverty.

Mr. Graupera clarified that this discussion pertains to stabilization of the structure as an alternative to demolition, rather than adaptive reuse.

Linda Aleci, West Orange Street, contended that demolition is not allowed to occur per the City's ordinance. She contended that the Historical Commission review improperly applied the standards of the secretary of the U.S. Department of the Interior for rehabilitation in making its recommendation in support of demolition. She contended that Historic Commission members had violated the intent of the ordinance.

Marty Hulse, business owner on North Queen Street, questioned President Reichenbach's statement on May 22 that Water Street Ministries already has permission to demolish the building.

President Reichenbach explained that in 2017, City Council voted unanimously to approve a Historical Commission recommendation of demolition for the building. That approval included the condition that the building wall be retained along the street. Water Street Ministries returned with the current application after determining retaining the wall unfeasible and the cost was excessive.

Mr. Hulse commented that in the last 10 years, many buildings have been torn down in the name of progress; for parking garages, hotel expansions and parks. In those cases, demolition was approved when a plan existed for reuse of the site. In this case, there is no plan for reuse of the site. He questioned whether the application was reviewed by the Historic Preservation Specialist and whether that review had been presented to Council members.

President Reichenbach clarified that a historic review was presented to Council members. He further stated that this issue has been discussed in six separate public meetings and is the most discussed issue to come before Council in the seven years he has served.

Steve Murray, a City resident, asked Council members if they were familiar with the document "Adaptive Reuse in the City of Lancaster." He stated that the document is City policy and faulted Council members and the City administration for failing to uphold the policy. He said Council members have not done their elected duty to be watchdogs on behalf of the citizens nor to uphold City law.

Scott Paden, a practicing architect in the City, contended the City was fortunate to have professionals willing to give of their time for the sake of the City. Additionally, he stated that he found it ironic that Water Street Ministries is an organization committed to rehabilitating people, but it is unwilling to rehabilitate a building. He contended that if the Council allows the

demolition, it will set a terrible precedent that will encourage further demolition. He also stated that a decision to allow demolition is in opposition to Lancaster's "City Authentic" slogan.

Ms. Craig exited the meeting.

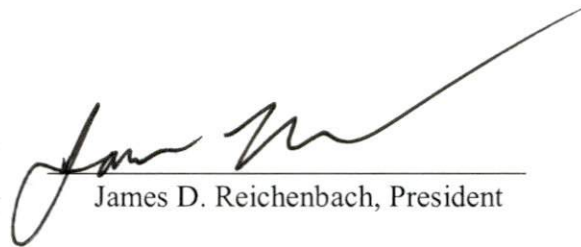
President Reichenbach closed the public comment portion of the meeting and responded to the question posed earlier by Mr. Simpson. Because there was no claim of economic hardship made by Water Street Ministries, there was no requirement in the ordinance for a second opinion. There was only a requirement for one estimate.

He commented further that this issue has been difficult for Council members. He said that email messages and other information presented to Council members was read and considered. He noted that Council members were invited to tour the building and information provided by Mr. Aleci was considered.

President Reichenbach clarified that the motion on the table was to rescind City Council's action taken at the May 22 meeting to approve the Historical Commission recommendation and allow a building permit for demolition. A "no" vote would be a vote not to rescind that action and upholding the May 22 decision. A "yes" vote would be a vote to rescind the May 22 decision.

The motion failed by a 3-2 vote, with Mr. Ballentine, Mr. Soto and President Reichenbach voting "no," not to rescind the May 22 action. Ms. Diaz and Mr. Graupera voted "yes" to rescind.

President Reichenbach adjourned the meeting at 9:56 a.m.



James D. Reichenbach, President

Attest:



Bernard W. Harris Jr., City Clerk

Approved by Council: 6/12/2018