

SPECIAL
Planning & Development Committee
Minutes of January 17, 2006
Room 2200 – 7:00 p.m.
Evanston Civic Center

Alderman Present: S. Bernstein, A. Hansen, D. Holmes, L. Jean-Baptiste, E. Moran, A. Rainey, E. Tisdahl, C. Wollin, M. Wynne

Staff Present: J. Wolinski, J. Carroll, D. Cook, H. Hill, G. Morgan, M. Rubin, C. Ruiz, J. Brownlee

Presiding Official: Alderman Rainey

DECLARATION OF QUORUM

Chairman Rainey called the meeting to order at 7:09 p.m.

ITEMS FOR CONSIDERATION

Ordinance 6-O-06 – 2100 Ridge Avenue (Civic Center/Marywood Academy) – Designation as a Local Landmark

Chair Rainey noted that Herb Hill, Assistant Corporation Counsel for the City of Evanston, will be representing the City. She recognized Mr. Chris Carey, Chair of the Preservation Commission being present and requested that he address the Planning & Development (P&D) Committee first in regards to the Commission's recommendation to designate the Civic Center at 2100 Ridge Avenue as an Evanston Landmark.

Mr. Chris Carey opened with acknowledging the presence of several other Preservation Commission members with him tonight. He informed the Committee that as a result in review of the application brought before the Preservation Commission originating from Ms. Barbara Gardner, that the Commission found the nomination met 3 of the 10 criteria for landmark designation. He noted that the nomination did not present strong enough evidence to support criterion 6 which refers to the significance of the architect Henry Schlacks. The 3 standards that the nomination met are: architecture of the building, unique location and distinctive physical appearance and it has sufficient integrity of location, design, and materials. Mr. Carey concluded his presentation by stating that the Preservation Commission is aware of the City's plans to move out from the Civic Center. However, the Commission would like to see the building preserved.

Chair Rainey stated that she found the Preservation Commission's report fascinating and commended them for a job well done. She said most people in Evanston love the Civic Center and she too would not like to see it torn down. She said perhaps the City could award points to developers who would be interested in rehabilitating the building. Ideally, the City would do nothing until the property is up for sale, and see what is out there.

At this time, Chair Rainey called on those signed up to speak in the order signed.

Mr. John Kennedy, informed all that he represents the “Friends of the Civic Center” group. He said that he has had discussion with several alderman regarding his group’s position and opinion on reviewing the economic feasibility of rehabilitating the Civic Center building for continued use, if not by the City, as possibly for some other developmental use. He has contacted at least three developers who are interested in determining the economic feasibility of rehabilitating the Civic Center and perhaps tap into some preservation incentives such as the use of tax credits or the Class L classification through Cook County. Mr. Kennedy stated that the developer’s reviews can be done over the next 2 to 3 weeks and additional time given to finalize their reports for presentation before this Committee. He said that a decision on the future of the building could wait until at least May 17, 2006, which is the deadline for the Council to act on the nomination.

Ms. Mary Brugliera, Preservation Commissioner stated that the issue of preservation is never simple and depending on the use or specific circumstances involved with a building, the issue can be intertwined with political association. Chair Rainey pointed out Ms. Brugliera’s significant testimony on page 23 of the transcript and in recognition of this, asked if her comments would be in addition to this. Ms. Brugliera responded yes and read a statement from Commissioner Jordan Cramer from the Preservation Commission transcript of September 13, 2005. She noted that Mr. Jordan said at that time that based on the statement of purpose of the Preservation Ordinance, the City is committed to its history, its culture, and the preservation of these items. He said the Civic Center is worthy of landmark designation because of its significant history and its sense of identity that embodies Evanston. She said that Mr. Cramer concluded his remarks by saying: “If the Ordinance is not good enough for the City, I don’t know who it is good enough for.” Ms. Brugliera added that she was surprised that the City did not have expert testimony to state its position about the building. She noted that the financial aspect of whether the Civic Center could be rehabilitated is not one of the criteria for landmark designation.

Ms. Leigh MacIsaac, an Evanston resident, expressed her support for designating the Civic Center as an Evanston Landmark. She said the building has a grand civic style and that she was proud to live near the Civic Center. She stated that Council should not let the money aspect persuade their opinion or decision on the outcome of this building and strongly urged the Committee to support the efforts on saving this building. She feels that Dave Cook’s argument in regard to the lack of significance of the building during the Preservation Commission hearings was not very persuasive at all.

Chair Rainey concluded sign-up comments at this time and yielded the floor to the City’s representatives for comments.

Ms. Julia Carroll, Evanston City Manager, wanted to clarify for the record in response to Mr. Kennedy’s previous statements, that City staff did not tell City Council that the Civic Center could not be rehabilitated. City staff’s main concern on rehabilitating this

building for continued use is the extensive cost involved to do so and how it would effect the taxpayers and the general fund to take on and complete such a constructional task.

Mr. Herb Hill, Assistant Corporation Counsel, spoke on behalf of the City and also the citizens of Evanston in their affiliation with the ownership of the Civic Center building. He referred to slide illustrations of the original design of the building by architect Henry J. Schlacks. In those renderings he pointed out a larger structure with more architectural details. Mr. Hill stated that this is not the building the Preservation Commission recommended for landmark designation, in fact, that building does not exist. He said that is not the same building built in 1901, and if it were, he would also recommend its landmark designation.

Mr. Hill went into further detail noting that the building has been described as American Georgian Revival, Georgian or Neo Georgian, etc.; clearly lacking a obvious definition of its architectural style. He said the nomination did not meet criterion 3 which is exemplification of architectural style. In regard to criterion 9, regarding unique location, he said the nomination failed to demonstrate the uniqueness of the building's location. The point specified regarding the location on Ridge because of the history of this path, is not valid. Mr. Hill agreed with Ms. Carroll's previous statement regarding the financial component being significant in the City's decision of what to do with this building. He noted that Mr. Max Rubin and Mr. David Cook were present to answer any further questions of the economic feasibility of rehabilitating the Civic Center building if the Committee so desired.

Ald. Moran asked staff if a nomination for landmark designation could be submitted again if the current nomination failed. Mr. Hill responded that the Preservation Ordinance has a 2-year time period before the Preservation Commission could consider a new nomination. Chair Rainey asked what if the City let the 120 day period to make a decision on the nomination run out. Mr. Hill answered the nomination then would fail. Ald. Bernstein referred to the Colonnade Building at 904 Hinman Avenue as an example and pointed out that the P&D Committee extended the time to make a decision on the window replacement indefinitely. Mr. Hill responded that provided a precedent for the P&D Committee to extend the 120 days limitation to make a decision on the landmark nomination of the Civic Center.

Chair Rainey stated that she would tend to agree with Mr. Kennedy's proposal of the "Friends of the Civic Center" group to a certain degree as far as getting an ideal of economic feasibility on rehabilitating the building. She suggested that the City could put the Civic Center for sale and wait and see what kind of offers come in. Ald. Bernstein agreed and noted that the City Council does not want to limit the options by either designating the building as a landmark or by not taking action on the nomination. Ald. Wynne raised the question of what parties should be involved into entering into an agreement if City Council were to hold on its decision of the landmark nomination. Chair Rainey's view was that Ms. Barbara Gardner would be one of the parties since she is the person who wrote the nomination, however she is not present at this meeting. Mr. Ruiz brought to the Committee's attention that the nomination lists the "Friends of the

Civic Center” as the applicant and acknowledged that Mr. Kennedy is present at this meeting on behalf of that group.

Ald. Wollin reminded that City Council has agreed to move the City Offices out of the Civic Center, however at the same time she agrees with Ald. Bernstein in not wanting to limit the options by designating the Civic Center as a landmark. She said the one option is to rehab the building for residential use. Mr. Hill noted that any adoptive reuse of the building would cause the need for much greater time than the 120 days for this Committee to make a decision.

The Committee discussed this at further length and came to a consensus that the 120 days to make a decision was too short a time period to put together a request for proposal that will include the rehabilitation of the building. Ald. Tisdahl raised a point that the question was not if the Civic Center could be restored, but whether developers will be interested in developing the site and how much money they will be willing to pay for the property. Chair Rainey noted that the City is estimating in the vicinity of \$20 million dollars for the property. Ald. Jean-Baptiste asked what the next step is for the P&D Committee and does the Committee have the authority to extend the 120 days, which Ald. Bernstein believes that the Committee does have the ability to do so. Mr. Hill responded that the City, as the building owner, could extend the deadline and they have established precedent to do so. Ald. Holmes expressed her concern with the P&D Committee making a decision with uncertain dates. Several Committee members addressed Ald. Holmes concern reiterating that the 120 days is not enough time to solicit responses to a request for proposals, therefore additional time tentatively would be needed beyond the time period. Ald. Moran stated that it appears that there is much work to be done still.

Ald. Jean-Baptiste made a motion to postpone indefinitely the decision on the landmark nomination of the Civic Center to allow the City to seek proposals from developers to rehabilitate the building for residential use. Ald. Bernstein seconded the motion and added that the Civic Center Committee must prepare a Request for Proposal for submission as soon as possible. The motion passed with a vote of 9-0.

At this time, Mr. Ruiz clarified for the record that the initial 120-day deadline is March 14, 2006.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 8:34 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Jacqueline E. Brownlee