

CITY OF CHARLOTTESVILLE, VA.

Minutes of the August meeting of the Board of Architectural Review.
Thursday, August 10, 1978.

Location of meeting: Basement Conference Room
City Hall

Members present: Mrs. Ruth Wadlington (Chairman), Mrs. Lloyd Smith (Vice-Chairman), Mrs. Charlotte Ramsey, Mr. Lucius Bracey, Mr. John Farmer, Mr. Joseph Keller (Alternate), Mr. Edward Lay, Mr. T. van Groll.

Members absent: None

The meeting was called to order by Mrs. Wadlington. The reading and approval of the minutes of the last meeting was postponed until all cases had been heard.

CASE: Mr. R. Stedman Oakey
411 North First St.

Mr. Oakey requested permission: (1) to paint the lattice enclosure around the base of his front porch, (2) move the access door from the front of the enclosure to one end, & (3) lay brick pavers between the porch steps and the house. Photographs of the porch and a sample of brown paint was presented to the Board. A motion for approval was made by Mr. Lay and seconded by Mrs. Ramsey. The request was approved by all members present and voting.

CASE: No. 78-68. C.F. Corporation of East Jefferson and 2nd Street.

Request for permission to demolish and remove the ruins of the First Baptist Church sanctuary and Education Building, together with two dwelling houses (most recently used by the Church for educational purposes) and any out-buildings located on this property.

Mr. Bracey withdrew from the discussion of this case because of a potential conflict of interest.

Mrs. Wadlington read letters to the Board: (1) Mr. Thomas Martin, Attorney-at-law, representing Mr. Carl Fisher, requesting permission to demolish the structures. (2) The Charlottesville Development Group endorsing the concept of the proposed development of the property, and urging approval of the demolition permit. (3) Charlottesville-Albemarle Chamber of Commerce in support of the proposed development.

Mrs. Wadlington made several comments of a general nature regarding the case, and then welcomed a sizable group of interested citizens and City officials who were in attendance at the meeting.

Mr. Thomas Martin, speaking for the applicant, presented the case and then introduced Mr. Bernstein, his consultant civil engineer, and Mr. S.B. Cox, his demolition contractor. Mr. Cox presented the demolition plan as follows: (1) the buildings will be demolished and removed from the site, (2) the land will be graded, sloping down toward Jefferson St., (3) the site will be seeded with rye grass, (4) the remaining basements of the dwelling houses will be drained to the lower part of the lot in order to avoid having them fill up with rain water, (5) a buffer of straw bales will be placed on the Jefferson Street boundary line.

Mrs. Wadlington asked about the existing retaining wall on the property near the corner of 3rd St. and Jefferson St. Mr. Cox stated that it would be removed, and the site graded down to Jefferson St. to avoid soil erosion and puddling. Mr. Muse pointed out that the retaining wall is somewhat of a hazard as it now exists. He stated that the contractor must prevent water and mud from washing across the Jefferson St. sidewalk.

Mr. Lay asked about saving trees on the property. Mr. Muse answered that one tree near the retaining wall and one tree near the ruined church would probably be lost. Mr. Bernstein, speaking for the applicant, stated that, in so far as possible, all trees will be saved and the site will be left as near to its present condition as possible.

Mrs. Wadlington asked if the houses could be used until construction of the proposed new building(s) is begun. Mr. Martin answered that major renovation would be necessary to make the buildings habitable.

Mr. Bernstein stated that a single demolition project would be more economical for the developer than phased demolition. Over all coordination of the project would be aided by clearing the site at one time, he said.

Mrs. Wadlington asked when plans of the proposed development would be available. Mr. Martin answered, as soon as possible. However, he stated that an architect had not yet been employed.

Mr. Myron Tremain, formerly of the Central City Commission, spoke in favor of granting the demolition permits. He stressed the need for new residential opportunities in the downtown area.

Mrs. Wadlington read from HUD Guidelines regarding demolition of buildings in Historic Districts. She took particular note of several things to avoid in these cases, one of which was making changes by removal of structures before a thorough evaluation of the property had been undertaken. She spoke of a forthcoming Handbook for Historic District Review Boards, to be published by the National Trust for Historic Preservation. Mrs. Wadlington then invited further participation in the discussion by members of the public.

Mr. Paul Grady, a general contractor who specializes in historic preservation, spoke against demolishing the two dwelling houses. He asked if the houses could be offered free to anyone who would move them. Mr. Grady pointed out that, as no plans for the new development were available, there was plenty of time to sell the buildings before new construction was under way. At the very least, he said, an offer to salvage usable parts of the buildings could be made.

Mrs. Wadlington noted that the ordinance allowed the Board to require the developer to offer the properties for sale.

A general discussion of moving older buildings followed. Mr. Stevens, a Charlottesville realtor, stated that moving the houses was not realistic. Mr. Keller and Mr. Grady disagreed.

Mr. Martin, speaking for the applicant, stated that his client had delayed hiring an architect until such time as a demolition permit could be obtained. He stressed the economic advantages of performing all required demolition at one time. Feeling that the proposed demolition was a minor matter, he asked for approval of the permit so that work could move forward.

Mr. Farmer stated that the lack of a demolition permit shouldn't deter the employment of an architect for the project. He said that an architect could be hired to start preliminary studies and, in this way, perhaps a use for the two houses might be found.

Mr. David Byers, a resident of Charlottesville and a general contractor, asked that salvage by others be permitted if the demolition permit is approved. He felt that this would delay the start of construction only slightly, if at all.

Mr. Cox stated that some salvage had been scheduled in his proposal for demolition. Mr. Stevens questioned Mr. Cox about the possibility of establishing a sales yard on the property to dispose of used building material. Mr. Cox pointed out that any sales yard would have to be of limited duration under the terms of his proposed contract. Mr. Stevens concluded his statement by saying that none of these buildings had any historical significance.

Mr. Byers disagreed with Mr. Stevens on the significance of the buildings. He again pointed out the value of the building materials contained within the structures. Mr. Stevens disagreed with the value that Mr. Byers was putting on the building material.

There being no further discussion by the general public, the Board members presented their positions.

Mr. Farmer pointed out that the Zoning Ordinance allowed the Board sixty days to consider the Case. He stated, however, that he would favor making a decision today. Several other Board members agreed.

Mr. van Groll said that it was the Board's task to encourage preservation of buildings in the Historic District. To applaud this demolition, he felt, would violate the very goals set up by City Council for the Board to follow. He asked the Board to deny the permit.

Mr. Keller pointed out that there are three parcels in question -- the ruined church with its education building attached, and the two dwelling houses. He spoke in terms of historic conservation -- preserving and using today the best examples of the past. He said that he didn't necessarily favor saving everything, but any building should be carefully evaluated before a decision as to its future is made. While noting that these houses are excellent examples of past residential styles, he felt strongly that the Board must insure the replacement of good buildings with good buildings, or see to it that good buildings are not destroyed. He asked for a schematic plan of the proposed development and voiced the opinion that the demolition permit should be denied. To do otherwise, he said, would be to assist in the creation of negative space.

A general discussion about retaining the houses followed. Several Board members offered comments, as did Mr. Martin for the applicant, and Mr. Roger Wiley, the City Attorney. Mr. Martin said that he was somewhat surprised at the comments made by Board members. He stated that the City Manager had assured him that the buildings were of no historical significance. He then asked Mr. Muse to read the letter ordering his client to demolish the church ruins. Mr. Muse read the letter in question which informed Mr. Martin of the City's position in this matter, and further informed him of the procedure required for obtaining a demolition permit.

Mr. Roger Wiley pointed out that the church ruins were not in question here since Mr. Muse had already ordered its demolition. Mr. Muse's order stands, he said. The two other buildings are the proper subject for the Board's consideration, according to the City Attorney. Mr. Wiley stated that the City is concerned about leaving properties vacant. He said that vacant properties have a serious adverse impact on the community. Mr. Muse pointed out that the city could order the two dwelling houses to be boarded up if they are left standing vacant. Mrs. Wadlington asked the Board if anyone would like to reconsider his opinion in this light. Mr. Farmer felt that this point was not worth considering. He noted that the Levy Opera House and, more noticeably, the house behind the Levy Opera House also stand vacant. Since neither of these buildings have been boarded up, he felt that the possibility of selective boarding up of the dwelling houses in question at this hearing should not be a matter of concern. Mr. Wiley said that the Levy Opera House is probably outside the jurisdiction of the City of Charlottesville.

B.A.R.
August 10, 1978
page 5

Mr. Stevens spoke again about the insignificance of the dwelling houses in question and said that, after all, they are not landmarks.

Mr. Farmer, quoting from the Zoning Ordinance, pointed out that the Board was not just concerned with individual buildings, but spaces, neighborhoods, environs and settings, as well. Mr. Wiley said that he was sure that Mr. Stevens was familiar with the Zoning Ordinance.

Mrs. Smith asked that the developer explore all options, pointing out that there was a richness of options. She listed the possibilities as follows: (1) the buildings might be saved and incorporated into the development (2) the buildings could be moved (3) the option of saving materials from the buildings (4) clearing the entire site.

Mr. Martin said that the only option his client had considered was clearing the site completely.

Mrs. Ramsey, taking note of the article in the Zoning Ordinance about offering the properties for sale, said that the dollars just don't add up. She said that all of this discussion was a delaying tactic, a roadblock. She then spoke in favor of the request for a demolition permit.

Mr. van Groll stated that we should leave all options open for saving the structures. He again asked the Board to deny the permit.

Mr. Farmer felt that demolition of the structures was premature at this time. He pointed out their importance in the streetscape of High St. Taking note of the vacant land now found in the middle of town, including Vinegar Hill, he said that the public would be ill-served by condoning further demolition in the center of Charlottesville without any plan or schedule for rebuilding. He noted that the history of inner city development is filled with stories of demolition followed by parking lots, and maybe a building years afterward. While admitting that demolition might eventually come to pass, to do so without a thought as to other alternatives would be an unconscionable act. He asked the Board to deny the permit.

Mr. Lay stated that he had received many calls from people who supported the demolition. In each case, he said that he would listen to all sides before making a final decision. He noted that the decision was a very difficult one to make. Mr. Lay then reiterated many points made earlier by other Board members, and said that he could not support the demolition of the two dwelling houses in question.

A motion by Mrs. Ramsey to grant the permits died for lack of a second.

B.A.R.
August 10, 1978
page 6

Mr. Keller then moved to approve the demolition permit for the church ruins on Parcel 203, and to deny the demolition permit for the two dwelling houses on Parcel 201 and 202. Mr. van Groll seconded the motion.

VOTE: Yes - Mr. van Groll, Mr. Keller, Mr. Lay, Mrs. Smith, Mrs. Wadlington, & Mr. Farmer.

No - Mrs. Ramsey.

Abstained: Mr. Bracey.

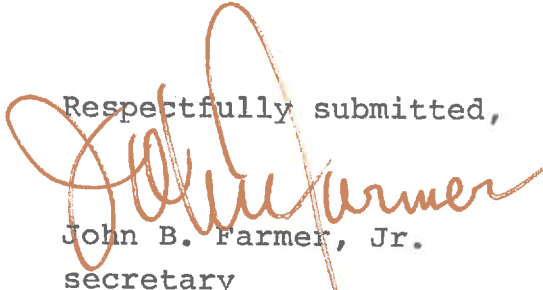
CASE: United Way construction at the Redlands Club building.
Subject: paint colors, sign.

Paint samples presented: (1) white (2) off-white (3) cream. The Board suggested "Nicholson Shop Red," in lieu of the colors presented, for inset siding between the columns. The columns and trim should be white to match other trim on the building.

Approved sign: size - 18" x 24".
design - as presented, except delete "T.J. Area".
location - vacant bay, aligned with windows.

A motion for approval was made by Mr. Lay, and seconded by Mr. van Groll. The paint color and sign were approved unanimously.

Meeting adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,

John B. Farmer, Jr.
secretary