

A meeting of the Historic District Review Board was held on December 12, 2012 at 2:00 p.m. in the City Hall Planning Conference Room, 1911 Boundary Street. In attendance were Chairman Joel Newman and board members Mike Rainey, Inez Neal, and Erica Dickerson, and city staff Lauren Kelly.

Bill Chambers was absent.

In accordance with the South Carolina Code of Laws, 1976, Section 30-4-80(d) as amended, all local media were duly notified of the time, date, place, and agenda of this meeting.

CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Newman called the meeting to order at 2:02 p.m.

MINUTES FOR THE MEETING OF NOVEMBER 14, 2012

Mr. Rainey made a motion, second by Chairman Newman, to approve the minutes as submitted. The motion passed unanimously.

PUBLIC HEARING

2822 Depot Road – Major Demolition of Structure.

Chairman Newman opened this public hearing. W. Thomas Logan said his grandfather had helped construct this building in 1906. He showed original drawings for the power plant and other railroad buildings. He explained why the power plant was on the railroad and how it worked. The city has interest in the Kinghorn Building, he said, and he feels this building could complement what's going on in the Depot area, thanks to the rail trail. It's a physical buffer to the substation, Mr. Logan said, and the building could be used.

Robert Burrows, project manager, said that it is a safety hazard and has to be remediated; doing so will cause problems with the structure. Mr. Logan asked if he would consider selling it. Mr. Burrows said he would ask at the office about that possibility. Mr. Logan said he would like to see the city buy it or find someone who might buy it and then "convert it."

Jay Weidner supported what Mr. Logan said and added that this building "has issues like any 100 year old abandoned building." Its solid brick, not brick veneer, and is very well designed. It has a raised floor and a substantial useful size, Mr. Weidner said. All the buildings in the Depot area are terrible except for this one and the Kinghorn building. It is inexpensive to secure the building, Mr. Weidner said, though he said there may be circumstances related to its proximity to the substation. **Chairman Newman closed this public hearing.**

REVIEW OF FULL BOARD PROJECTS

2822 Depot Road – Major Demolition of Structure, Final Review

Applicant: Robert Burrows, SCANA (HR12-49)

Mr. Burrows said SCANA is committed to building preservation and has done so elsewhere

when the buildings have historical significance. This building, though, is right on top of the substation, and when the substation expands, they will need the land that the building sits on. The building is also in very poor condition, he added. SCANA doesn't have the funds to restore it, he said.

Brad Samuel said this land is needed for future substation operations. He said this building could be moved somewhere else, and SCANA would consider a screening of the substation. The operations side of the business needs that land, he said, and this is an unsafe building and difficult to secure, much less restore. There have been break-ins through the concrete and "illicit activity" in the building, so they feel it should be safely demolished and the area stabilized and re-grassed.

Maxine Lutz said Historic Beaufort Foundation opposes the demolition of the building because it's historically significant. She said Historic Beaufort Foundation doesn't agree that the building can't be stabilized. Mr. Samuel said they need to expand the substation for line trucks and this building "has been hindering us for years." They have made improvements and this substation absolutely needs to be expanded, though there are no plans imminent.

Ms. Lutz said she didn't know if that area is zoned for substation expansion because SCANA owns the land. **Lauren Kelly** said it is zoned R-2, and that would have to be looked into. Ms. Lutz said the master plan hasn't been vetted for Sector Two and Sector Three yet, but that building being retained is part of the city's master plan for that area. Therefore, to demolish it would not be in keeping with the proposed master plan.

Mr. Rainey said they can't lose sight of the fact that this is a singular building in a neglected area in Beaufort. It's historically significant in that it is the first power station. In regard to stabilization, he has seen buildings in worse condition than this "that are up and running." The expansion of the substation is not in the HDRB's purview and is at this point only speculative, Mr. Rainey said he said they could divest the property to another entity. He'd like to see the application denied and this put on hold for possible sale and restoration of the building. He feels the city would be losing a lot if it's lost; "it's the only one there is."

Ms. Neal said she agrees with Mr. Rainey, and losing this building would mean losing another part of Beaufort's history. If it can be saved, she would love to see that. Ms. Dickerson said it's "a cool building" in a terrible position with the poles around it. She would like to see it saved, too.

Mr. Rainey said they can't plan on what will be there in the future; in 20 years area around the property could be different than it is now. The area around it "should evolve the way it will evolve." The back looked "very shaky."

Chairman Newman said he's lived in that area for 18 years and passes the building every day going to work. The wooden building that used to be next to it burned down, he said, "but it was

cool, too.” With the rail trail, the clean-up of the area where there’s landscaping makes the area look viable now. “It recalls the earliest phases of River Street in Savannah,” Chairman Newman said. This is “one of the rare pieces of fabric in that area.” The problem with engineering reports, Chairman Newman said, is that they can be made to sound however one wants them to. He said “buildings like this one get restored every day.” To remove it is not a good idea at all, he says. The power station hasn’t changed in any way in 18 years, and they have been through the biggest building expansion in our lifetimes. This sounds like a liability that the company wants to get out of the way, Chairman Newman feels.

Mr. Logan said 5-10 years ago, he acquired property behind the power company. He knows of someone who bought land near the substation, and he told him to consider that the substation might expand, but SCANA sold it to them anyway. He said if property is an issue, they could sit down and use some of the property he has for their expansion needs in the future.

Mr. Samuel said he doesn’t know why that land that Mr. Logan referred to was sold, but it “has hemmed them in.” Restoration is not the issue, he said, it’s the land. The substation is where power is distributed, and the expansion of that is critical. Mr. Logan’s land to expand in a different direction is something he hasn’t heard about. He said he thinks there’s confusion about the issue: the building needs to be removed so that the land can be used for expansion. They have no problem with the building being moved. Mr. Samuel reiterated several times that the substation WILL be expanded. Sub stations are now under federal control and the Department of Homeland Security, so there’s a layer of federal government under all the sub stations in the country. “This level will come into play in the near future,” he said. Mr. Samuel said the building “might offer opportunities for the rail trail,” and it could be moved so that SCANA can use the land for the substation. They are not going to repair the building, Mr. Samuel said, and they need a nice stabilized piece of land for the substation. If the HDRB could make a recommendation, maybe from the rail trail group to move the building and renovate it, SCANA will consider that.

Chairman Newman asked why this is coming up now after 18 years. He said the police park there routinely, so he is suspicious that it’s “a den of criminal activity.” Mr. Samuel said they are doing a better job on long-range planning on transmission issues, and this building, other than being stabilized, has not been used since 1950. There are a lot of structural issues according to architects who looked at it, and it’s “a major liability.” Mr. Burrows said it’s going to fall because of the compromised brick. To supply power, he said, they have to expand and do so “before the power is needed.”

Ms. Kelly asked if they have operations in this area, and Mr. Burrows said yes, the Beaufort call center. Ms. Kelly asked if they had considered using this building instead of building a new one. Mr. Burrows said with the nuclear facility expanding, it makes more sense for them to build rather than to renovate, which will cost half a million dollars, and the brick would all have to be replaced to bring it up to building code.

Chairman Newman replied that this is a brick building, not a brick façade, and as an architect, he knows “it won’t blow down anyway soon.” All brick buildings have cracks in them. He reiterated that the reports can be made to sound however one wants them to. The building was over-engineered, not under. He asked what part of the land SCANA owns. Mr. Burrows showed him the SCANA property line. There was a discussion about ownership of various parcels in the area

Mr. Samuel said this is “a key transmission sub” and they “have very little control over it.” The shed could come down and additions put on the side toward the railroad, Mr. Logan said. Mr. Samuel will see if it were away from the substation access and growth area. Chairman Newman said he doesn’t think that building is moveable.

Mr. Rainey said “the eminent demise of this building is far over-stated.” He and Billy Keyserling have restored buildings with worse issues on Carteret Street and now they are a contributing part of the downtown area. It’s “not in the HDRB’s purview to move buildings and place them out of context,” Mr. Rainey said. He thinks it’s buried in the ordinances that they can’t do so. Mr. Logan said there’s no question it can be moved, but if that’s done it would leave no money left to renovate.

Mr. Weidner said they should know how SCANA plans on getting the trucks into the site and what the percentage is of the property that this building occupies. Then, if the lot to the north is empty, they should investigate who owns it, and if they can acquire it for their expansion. Mr. Logan said there has been interest in the Kinghorn Building for snacks and a bicycle shop along the rail trail, but no one can borrow money because the ownership is in question. This building would have a clear deed, and he feels that there would be people interested in this building for similar purposes. As a public service entity, Mr. Logan said, they probably have the power to do anything they want to do.

Mr. Burrows said they are open to suggestions. They “need to expand one way or another.” They don’t want to destroy historically significant buildings. Mr. Rainey said if they have no expansion plans now, they could hold off, sell the building, and use the money to buy other land for expansion. Mr. Samuel said they have no idea what is being planned on a federal level. He said if the HDRB puts what they would like to do in a letter, they could get it to the people at SCANA who it needs to go to. Chairman Newman said the HDRB’s responsibility is in approve or deny, not make recommendations.

The city can expand on this conversation and put it in a succinct form for the applicants, Mr. Rainey said. Mr. Samuel said he’s “not looking for an official response,” and this would go to the relevant departments. He said the rail trail has changed the context of the area. The “people in Columbia don’t know a lot about what’s going on down there,” he said. He doesn’t need an official recommendation, but a communiqué that they can get to the right people.

Ms. Kelly said the HDRB can choose to approve or deny the application, and if they want to

make recommendations to the applicant, they can do that, too. When she writes a letter, it's assumed to be what the board says; there's little legal distinction between them.

Ms. Lutz said a letter from the city might have more impact, but Historic Beaufort Foundation would be happy to write a letter. She thinks the first thing that needs to be done is "mothballing the building for safety." She said several people have mentioned taking down the addition. Mr. Samuel said operations wants this site and needs it, and this dilapidated building is preventing that. This was an application to demolish the building for necessary operations. Since the trail has gone in, they have to go back to Columbia "to give them information on a yes or no vote."

Chairman Newman said they can write a letter or Historic Beaufort Foundation can. Mr. Samuel said Historic Beaufort Foundation can do an attachment letter, and they will get it to where it will be reviewed. Mr. Burrows said they could take 45 days entertain the recommendations, then come back to tell whether those recommendations were successful. That way Beaufort is keeping the dialogue open and it seems more positive, Mr. Burrows said. There may be a way to trade so that everyone gets what they want. Mr. Samuel said they could talk to BES again.

Mr. Rainey made a motion that the application as submitted be tabled for 60 days in an effort to stabilize the historically significant building, rather than demolish it, to allow the applicants to explore other avenues of expansion and possible divestiture of the building to a third party, and to encourage the applicants to work with Historic Beaufort Foundation on a list of possible recommendations to pursue future reclamation plans while simultaneously maintaining the historical fabric of the city. Ms. Neal seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Ms. Kelly said in regard to training that all commission and board members have to do 3 hours of training every year. The city offers monthly 1 -1.5 hour training sessions. Those in the field who have to do continuing education requirements can count those for this, and they can fill out a form with documentation as to what the class was. The training needs to be completed by the end of this year, she said.

There being no further business to come before the board, the meeting was adjourned at 2:58 p.m.