

REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON FINANCIAL HARDSHIP PHILADELPHIA HISTORICAL COMMISSION

Scott Wilds, Acting Chair
Commission Conference Room
Room 576, City Hall

8 October 2002

Present

Scott Wilds, Assistant Director, Office of Housing and Community Development
Vincent Rivera, AIA
Harris Steinberg, AIA

Diane M. Hughes, Executive Secretary
Laura M. Spina, Historic Preservation Planner
Richard Tyler, Historic Preservation Officer

Also

John Andrew Gallery, Preservation Alliance for Greater Philadelphia
Inman Jones, Church of Christ
Clarence W. Norman, treasurer of the Church of Christ
The Reverend Willie Rupert Jr., Church of Christ
William G. Schwartz, Esq., attorney for Church of Christ
Alfred D. Whitman, Esq., attorney

Prior to the commencement of the meeting, an executive session with the staff, Committee and legal counsel convened.

The Committee recognized the presence of a quorum and called the meeting to order at 1:45 P.M. Mr. Steinberg suggested that the Committee elect an acting chair. Mr. Steinberg moved that Mr. Wilds be elected as Chair. Mr. Rivera seconded the motion. The Committee unanimously elected Mr. Wilds as Acting-Chair.

300-18 North 63rd Street, aka 6301 Vine Street

Owner: Church of Christ
Applicant: William G. Schwartz, Esq.
Architect: T.P. Chandler
DATE: 1884, parish house and bell tower; 1897, sanctuary
PROPOSAL: Complete demolition based on financial hardship

Mr. Wilds introduced the application to demolish the historically significant church for reasons of financial hardship

Ms. Spina of the staff summarized the application. She stated that the church was designed by the important Philadelphia architect T.P. Chandler and constructed in

sections in 1884 and 1897. She continued that the Department of Licenses & Inspections declared the church unsafe and that the congregation applied for a demolition permit in 2001. In 2002, a demolition permit application based on Financial hardship came before the Commission which voted to defer any action for a period not to exceed six months and to refer the application to the Committee on Financial Hardship and an Ad-Hoc Committee on the property. The Financial Hardship Committee was delayed several times at the request of the applicant. She said that the Ad-Hoc Committee met at the site. And at that time it thought that the greatest concern is the tower and the parish house; however, it believed that a further study to determine the exact condition and possible remedial measures is required. Mr. Tyler noted that the west wall is distressed as well as the trusses in the roof and believes that there maybe a less expensive way of stabilizing the parish house than estimated in the submission. Ms. Pentz recommended remediation for the distressed areas. Ms. Spina informed the Committee and applicant that the Philadelphia Intervention Fund has agreed to fund a grant to sustain the cost of the study, by a structural engineer. The Ad-hoc Committee met on 30 September 2002. The focus of its discussion was the historical importance of the property, existing conditions, the costs represented in the hardship submission for stabilization and, possible re-uses for the complex. However, owing to the absence of the applicants, viable reuses were not discussed.

When asked by the Chair if he wished to comment Mr. Schwartz, counsel for the church, stated that it is his belief that anything said by him or his client at this point will not be given any consideration.

Mr. Wilds noted the importance of the church's willingness to allow the engineer's access into the buildings. Mr. Schwartz thought that a right of entry waiver relinquishing liability of the church, should be a requirement. Mr. Copeland thought the waiver appropriate. Mr. Wilds opened the floor to questions from the Committee. Mr. Steinberg said that with the acceptance of the waiver, he believed that any further consideration should await the findings of the engineer. Mr. Tyler inquired about an earlier offer of \$800,000 and the cost which will be incurred for the demolition. Mr. Schwartz said that a perspective buyer has reinstated his offer, which will gross the church \$400,000 after the cost of demolition. He reiterated his concern about the existing dangerous conditions. When asked, Mr. Schwartz stated that the church does not have a signed agreement of sale and refused to name the potential buyer.

John Gallery, Preservation Alliance, stated that he believes that there is no justification for demolition, owing to the sanctuary's condition. He believes that the tower is repairable and that facts about the parish house are not consistent as submitted.

Mr. Wilds pointed out that, while passing the church, he noticed that little effort is being made to keep pedestrians from the distressed area and inquired about the church's use of this area. Clarence Norman, the treasurer of the church, responded that the parish house is used because the restroom facilities are in this location. Mr. Rivera recognized the structure's deteriorated condition and stressed that the approach of inclement weather will worsen the condition, therefore some type of stabilization should be considered. Mr.

Schwartz stressed that stabilization would present an enormous financial burden on the applicant.

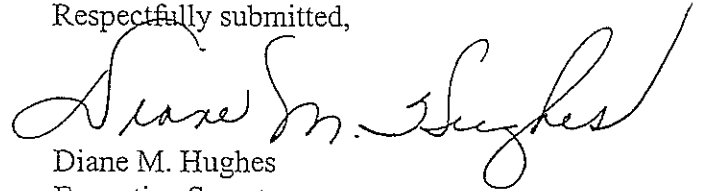
Recognizing the decrease in the congregation, Mr. Tyler suggested the possibility of interest by another congregation for the site. Mr. Schwartz said that at least eight congregations have been contacted, but to no avail. Mr. Gallery recommended that the applicant contact Partners for Sacred Places, which could have a broader listing of perspective congregations. Mr. Wilds urged that the matter of the study be expedited as soon as possible, which will allow the proposal to be heard at the November's Commission meeting. Mr. Tyler concurred and said that he will ask the engineer to move with dispatch and then set up a special meeting of the Committee.

Mr. Rivera made a motion to recommend the tabling of the application until the receipt of the engineer's report. Mr. Wilds asked that the recommendation be amended to include for a period not beyond 1 November 2002. Mr. Steinberg seconded the motion which carried unanimously.

Mr. Schwartz asked that the records reflect his objection to the tabling of the application.

The Committee adjourned at 2:35 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Diane M. Hughes". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the printed name and title.

Diane M. Hughes
Executive Secretary