

**CITY OF ALLENTOWN
HISTORIC ARCHITECTURAL REVIEW BOARD
FINAL REVIEW
MARCH 12, 2019**

ITEM #3 – Case #HDC-2019-00007– Proposal to demolish the building

Property located at: 428-440 N 6th Street

Agenda #3

Historic District: Old Fairgrounds

Case # HDC-2019-00007

Meeting date: March 4, 2019

Property Owner: Redevelopment Authority
of the City of Allentown

Owners Address: 245 N 6th St, Allentown,
PA 18102

Applicant: Kelly McEllroy

Address: same

Building description, period, style, defining features: This 3-story twin house, ca 1890 is a Victorian porch house. The structure has been greatly altered over time, its last use as a multi-unit dwelling (11 units). The 1st and 2nd floor has been brickoted. The roof is gable with asphalt shingles, projecting cornice with brackets at 2nd & 3rd floor, and a single chimney. There are multiple porches on the 1st and 2nd floor with gingerbread trim, wood turned columns, railings and multiple rooflines. The corner of the house has a 2-story bay window with 1/1 sash windows and siding, the 3rd floor also has siding. There is an octagon bump out on the 1st floor with 1/1 sash windows with flat lintels and a glazed door. There are two fire escapes on the building. Going around the building; the side has projecting lintels with brackets and projecting eaves. The rear porch on the 2nd floor has turned wood columns with fan shape and wood trim at the top. The other side has 1/1 windows with 2-story bay window with decorative wood trims, the windows are single sash with transoms above and there is a small porch on the 2nd and 3rd floors with turned porch, wooden railing and the top of the columns have fan shapes with gingerbread trim between them. There is a brick addition with a concrete/brick porch and concrete steps with wrought iron railing. The 2nd front corner has an octagon bay window to match the other corner. Lot 436 has a stone garage with a single glazed door, paneled wooden overhead garage door and boarded up windows.





Proposed alterations: It is proposed to demolish the buildings on the property. To include a discussion of alternatives and mitigation options under federal historic preservation regulations. Demolition of the buildings is a HUD funded project.

Staff Approvals: 12/11/2017 – Remove all fire escapes from building.

Violations: n/a

Background: HDC-2017-00001 2/28/2017 – Demolition of 11 unit building. Withdrawn.

Guideline Citation: SIS 9. New additions, exterior alterations, or related new construction shall not destroy historic materials that characterize the property. The new work shall be compatible with the massing, size, scale, and architectural features to protect the historic integrity of the property and its environment. **Allentown Guidelines for Historic Districts: 5.** Guidelines for Existing Buildings and Structures, 3. Demolition

Evaluation, effect on historic district, recommendations: It is not historically appropriate to demolish this structure; however it is an unfortunate reality that attempts to save/restore it have been exhausted. The cost to rehabilitate this “twin” is no longer feasibly mitigated by any end use. Three years ago, an HRS was performed, and at that time, the building was in terrible condition- it is safe to assume it has only gotten worse. The structure did however (at least three years ago it did), have salvageable details that could be saved, including trims, an elaborate staircase, and several fireplace surrounds. These elements should be removed by the APL as part of a demolition approval.

*From 3/6/17 meeting: **Discussion:** The demolition of the building was represented by Mr. Brodhead and the end user, Dave Evans of HADC. At the invitation of Mr. Evans, Mr. Frank Whelan, a local historian, gave a presentation of the history of the house and the original owners, Mr. Trexler and Mr Gangeware. He noted that Mr. Trexler, noted Allentown businessman of the late 19th century, had minimal involvement with the house and never lived there. Mr. Gangeware, noted builder of the same time period, lived there until 1 year before his death. He said major changes to the building were done by subsequent owners of the funeral home that was located there for approximately 30 years until 1975. Mr. Whelan concluded his comments saying the twin house has been greatly altered and is poor condition.*

Studies and cost estimates were done on the building about 5 years ago and the costs were so high that the conclusion was the property would need to be demolished. Mr. Evans explained that because NSP (Neighborhood Stabilization Program) money was used by the City to purchase the property in 2008 the end use will have to be low income housing. The HARB asked Mr. Evans what he planned for the site after demolition. He said HADC would construct 12-18 new housing units as part of a larger development with additional lots that they hoped to acquire. The units would be rental, and they would be architecturally consistent with the historic district. He understood that all plans would need to be reviewed and approved by the HARB. He said he hoped to be under construction and completed for summer 2018. The Historic Consultant recommended row house type infill and also recommended that the historic stone wall on the site be retained if the existing house demolished. Short term plans for the site were also discussed since the demolition would occur well before new construction started. Mr. Brodhead said they would be willing to “green” the site and install a low fence. A metal fence instead of his proposed split rail fence was suggested.

HARB member, Ms. Jackson, said the property is being used by homeless and is a public hazard. She said she was also worried that environmental conditions such as mold will also make the costs to rehabilitate too high. She made a motion to permit the demolition which was seconded by Mr. Berner but withdrew the motion after Ms. Frederick from the SHPO said that perhaps the HARB should wait until the Section 106 review process is completed. At that time the HARB would have better documentation on which to make their motion to permit the demolition. The City said they would waive the 75 day HARB review period, and Ms. Jackson made a new motion to table the case until 106 documentation received on the project.

Motion: The HARB upon motion by Mr. Berner and seconded by Mr. Renault adopted the proposal to table the project for 106 review documentation to support the demolition.

1. The proposal to table was unanimously approved. (6-0; motion carried; Berner, Huber, Jackson, Renault, Roberts, Sell)

Discussion 4/2017: Mr. Kimmerly updated the HARB on the demolition request. He said the May 1st deadline for demolition by the City is no longer an issue, and he is currently drafting a rationale for the demolition. Mr. Kimmerly pointed out the time period HARB has to act on the demolition application will expire soon. If no action taken it will be approved by default. Mr. Kimmerly recommended either denying the demolition or having the case withdrawn.

Ms. Golden, attending the meeting as a concerned citizen, said she understood that interior photographs of the property existed. She thought it would be good to have the HARB see the photographs. Mr. Kimmerly pointed out that the HARB only has authority on the exterior of properties and therefore thought it was not relevant that the HARB see the interior photographs. Mr. Kimmerly also told the HARB that a Phase 1 Environmental Assessment was to be done on the building.

Motion: The HARB upon motion by Mr. Huber and seconded by Ms. Jackson adopted the proposal to table the project for a withdrawal of the case or an extension to the COA time period for action.

1. The proposal to table was unanimously approved. (6-0; motion carried; Brobst, Huber, Jackson, Olson, Roberts, Sell)

Discussion: The discussion of the proposed demolition started with a report on the current condition of the building. Ms. McEllroy, Redevelopment Authority of the City of Allentown (RACA) informed the HARB that the mold conditions in the building were extreme, so bad that salvage of materials was no longer possible. Only a few materials were not affected by the mold such as the historic tile. The applicant reviewed other problems with the property – a recent fire and the high number of police responses to the building. She also reviewed the number of RFPs that have been issued and responses. The responses were few and the cost of renovation very high. The potential income did not support the cost to renovate. Mr. Lightner, the Director of Community and Economic Development, reinforced Ms. McEllroy's explanation of the need to demolish the building. He said all efforts to find a developer for the building had failed. Going forward RACA would be putting roofs on all buildings they control. He explained that RACA was in disarray for the last 5 years and that, rather than put all its resources into renovating this building, the plan was to put that money to better use to save other buildings, some of which are in the historic districts.

Mr. Renault was concerned about the precedent that would be set if the HARB approved this demolition. He said the HARB should apply guidelines equally to all applicants. He was not sure there was enough information on which to make a decision. Mr. Kimmerly read through the requirements in the Allentown Design Guidelines for demolition. It was realized that RACA had done most of the required actions. Ms. Jackson said she accepted the condition of the building was very poor and she and Mr. Brobst were very concerned about the mold levels. Ms. Jackson and Mr. Huber asked the applicants to describe their intent with the lot after demolition. The applicants said the historic stone retaining wall would be retained, the lot graded, seeded and fenced. RACA would issue an RFP for development of the lot and would maintain the lot until development was underway. The proposed development would need to meet income restrictions and fully comply with HARB guidelines for new construction and be reviewed.

Ms. Solomon from the State Historic Preservation Office reviewed the 106 process that had been initiated on the building. She said there was still some submission that were needed to move the process along, and that the HARB could still be involved in the process, in particular, with possible mitigation requirements.

Motion: The HARB upon motion by Mr. Fillman and seconded by Mr. Brobst adopted the proposal that City Council issue a Certificate of Appropriateness for the proposed work described herein:

1. The proposal to demolish the house and garage at 428-440 N 6th Street was presented by Kelly McElroy and Leonard Lightner.
2. The house and garage will be demolished.
3. The historic stone retaining wall must be retained.
4. After demolition the lot will be graded, seeded, and maintained.
5. A fence and lighting will be installed to create a safer condition on the site. The fence will be an aluminum, vertical picket style fence and not a chain link fence.

The proposal to recommend a COA was approved. (7-0; motion carried; Brobst, Fillman, Huber, Jackson, Renaut, Roberts, Sell)