

MINUTES OF THE COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE
November 24, 2020
Online Broadcast Meeting

Present: Councilmembers O'Malley, Bullock, Kepple, Litten, Neff, Rader, & Shachner

Also Present: Mayor George, Director Rancatore, Director Corrigan, Director Dillinger, Chief Dunphy, Director Ducu, Director Leininger, Jessica Eddy of the Finance Department, a couple members of the public, Clerk Bach, & Deputy Clerk Lascu taking minutes

Start time: 6:30 p.m.

AGENDA

Communication from Mayor George regarding Curtis Block Update. (Referred to COW 11/16/20)

President O'Malley opened discussion, deferring to Mayor George for details regarding a structural engineer's report on the Curtis Block Building. Mayor George noted that the status of building is extremely concerning and big decisions will be needed to be made quickly, as water damage has been causing further deterioration of it. She stated that she is an advocate of historic structures, adding that the cost estimates for repairs are staggering. Lastly, she added that she is open to solutions on how to keep the Curtis Block building.

Bud Griffith, the structural engineer who authored the report, gave a presentation and overview of the building conditions. Large swaths of the building's multiple roof systems are no longer water tight, resulting in water-damaged joists, window wells, and sections of interior flooring and subflooring. The chimney and roof parapet also need to be replaced. The subtotal estimate for a roof replacement is \$605,000. Water leaks have also caused significant damage to the residential and commercial units in the building. Black growths were found present in the basement. Most notably, it appears that the concrete retaining walls in the foundation have shifted. The engineer determined that repairs need to be made within 12 months and that the building is not to be occupied, according the previous engineer of record's report. Repair of the foundation, joists, and retaining wall is estimated to cost \$1.68 million, resulting in a gross budget of \$2.285 million for total repairs on the building. This estimate does not include masonry work, window replacement, or door replacement. The figure serves as a number to just make the building safe again.

Director Leininger stated that the Planning Department does not have a recommendation for the building at the time, highlighting the importance of first gaining an understanding of changes in the building's condition and getting the information in front of City Council. He noted the goal to preserve the building, along with the significant challenges to its restoration. He put emphasis on the need to explore options quickly as water continues to come into the building.

Councilmember Litten inquired whether the building sits in a low-moderate income census tract. Director Leininger indicated that it is not, however its location on Detroit Ave., a commercial corridor, makes it eligible for certain federal funds.

Councilmember Bullock stated his support for retaining and restoring the property. He highlighted the building's historic designation status and proposed making efforts to stop the water flow to allow for more time to explore the building's options.

Councilmember Kepple asked how the city became aware of the urgency for action on the building. Director Leininger indicated that the property management company monitoring the building noted a shift in the Detroit Ave. wall.

Mayor George stated that historic preservation is a priority, but also emphasized the need to identify funding sources for the project's staggering cost. Mr. Griffith stated that razing the building on the south side of the structure likely affected the Curtis Block building's foundation. He added that the city should not want any major construction around the building unless the foundation is repaired.

Public Comment

Heather Rudge – Ms. Rudge voiced her opinion that the city needs other estimates on the scope of work items. She added that a team went through the building in 2009 and described the past conditions. She concluded that she would like to see a working group to be formed to save the building.

Greg Palumbo – Mr. Palumbo echoed Ms. Rudge's sentiments and added that it is not the worst case that the region has seen as far as building deterioration. He noted its designation as a historic structure and the downtown historic district's status on the national register. He noted the opportunities for federal and state funding for the restoration.

President O'Malley expressed his disappointment that the plumbing, heat, and lights were shut off, despite the city taking the time to give the building a historic designation, noting that many of the issues could've been prevented with basic stewardship. He pointed to a comment that Councilmember Litten made in the chat – "(Side note, but we also have a number of surrounding residents concerned about (past) demo & (future) construction causing seismic damage to their homes (mostly plaster)." President O'Malley asked if the Lakewood hospital demolition might have affected the Curtis Block building. Bud Griffith and Heather Rudge concurred that it did affect the building.

Ian Andrews of Lakewood Alive stated the his organization has long supported historic preservation and would appreciate the ability to engage on the conversation regarding what to do with the building.

Rick Sicha – Mr. Sicha stated that when the property was declared historic in 2015, there was community wide intense support to do so. He provided history and background on the

building's condition, noting that the interior damage was not present in 2015. He advocated to not tie the property into the hospital site's development and suggested federal and state tax credits could cover 40% of the cost of rehabbing the building.

President O'Malley requested that the administration prepare a communication as a docket item at the next Council meeting so the community could continue to submit public comment.

Councilmember Rader commended the administration for involving the community and Council, and also stated his desire to save the building.

Mayor George thanked councilmembers and members of the public and stated her administration would begin to structure an approach and make decisions regarding the property.

Approval of the minutes of the November 2, 2020 Committee of the Whole.

President O'Malley made a motion, seconded by Vice President Litten to approve the minutes from the committee's previous meeting.

A roll call vote was taken as follows:

Yeas – Bullock, Kepple, Litten, Neff, O'Malley, Rader

Nays – None

Abstain – Shachner

Motion passed. The minutes were approved.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:12 p.m.