



Village Planning Committee Meeting Summary

Z-117-23-7

Date of VPC Meeting	March 11, 2024
Request From	DTC-Van Buren
Request To	DTC-Van Buren HP
Proposal	Historic Preservation Overlay for the Phoenix Laundry & Dry Cleaning Company
Location	Approximately 450 feet north of the northeast corner of 7th Avenue and Van Buren Street
VPC Recommendation	Approval, per the staff recommendation
VPC Vote	7-6

VPC DISCUSSION:

Three members of the public registered to speak on this item, one in favor, two in opposition.

STAFF PRESENTATION

Kevin Weight with the City of Phoenix Historic Preservation Office provided a presentation regarding the history of the building at the subject site, highlighting the age, integrity, and significance criteria required for the Historic Preservation Overlay and stating that the staff recommendation is approval.

QUESTIONS FROM COMMITTEE

Committee Member Greenman asked if the building was still in operation. **Mr. Weight** replied that the business closed in 2019. **Mr. Greenman** asked if the lamella roof was visible from the right-of-way. **Mr. Weight** replied that it is not.

Chair O'Grady asked about the vote count at the City Council hearing on the demolition request. **Mr. Weight** replied that the vote was 8-1.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Donna Reiner introduced herself as representing Preserve Phoenix and spoke in favor of the proposal, stating that it is important to save buildings that are symbols of our history, including commercial properties, and that developers have been interested in the site, which could be repurposed.

Committee Member Olivas expressed concern about how to pay for the rehabilitation of a building like this, highlighting that HP zoning requirements can deter someone from purchasing a property.

Marilyn Milum introduced herself as the property owner and provided a presentation in opposition to the request, highlighting the poor condition of several aspects of the building, including safety concerns with the lamella roof, and the lack of success in working with potential developers to buy the site for rehabilitation.

Committee Member Rachel Frazier Johnson commented that Proposition 207 is an option for the property owners and asked about compensation. **Mrs. Milum** replied that this is a quality-of-life issue, and they have tried to work with the City on a solution.

Faith Burton asked about the history of the building, including ownership, the last time the roof was insured, and environmental testing. **Mrs. Milum** noted that they owned the property for 60 years, the roof was insured six years ago, and they have a “no further action” from the EPA. **Ms. Burton** asked whether developers discussed maintaining the Art Deco features of the building. **Mrs. Milum** noted that the focus has been on the ceilings.

Committee Member Martinez asked about the potential agreement if a developer agreed to purchase the property. **Mrs. Milum** stated that the developer would use an 8-year tax abatement from the City for adaptive reuse. **Ms. Martinez** asked if there was only one developer interested. **Mrs. Milum** confirmed there was only the one developer. **Ms. Burton** asked when the discussions with the developer took place. **Mrs. Milum** replied it was last year.

Committee Member Olivas asked at what point the structural assessment happens. **Chair O’Grady** stated that question could be directed to staff.

Chair O’Grady asked if there was a developer offer for the land if the building were demolished. **Mrs. Milum** stated there was no offer.

Committee Member Starks asked if a developer was interested if the site had the HP overlay. **Mrs. Milum** stated that it would be if it did not have the overlay.

Committee Member Panetta asked about the costs to have a structural assessment done. **Mrs. Milum** replied that it would be \$60,000.

Craig Milum introduced himself as the property owner and spoke in opposition to the request, highlighting safety concerns with lamella ceilings.

Ms. Martinez asked about the age of the lamella ceiling. **Mrs. Milum** replied that it was 90 years old.

STAFF RESPONSE

Mr. Weight stated that there are examples of lamella roofs being used today in gymnasiums in Arizona, the Historic Preservation Commission felt strongly about preserving this history, and that a structural assessment had not been done.

Ms. Burton noted that the examples of lamella roofs in operation are all publicly-owned buildings and asked if there were any privately-owned examples. **Mr. Weight** replied that he wasn't aware of any.

Committee Member Greenman stated that the zoning at this site would allow 600 feet of height and asked if HP zoning would permit a building to punch through the roof to construct a tower. **Mr. Weight** replied that such a building would not be allowed under HP zoning.

Ms. Olivas stated that the determination so far has not factored in a structural report and asked what the economic hardship decision was based on. **Mr. Weight** replied that the applicant must demonstrate the rate of return based on cost estimates. **Ms. Olivas** stated that if the property owners can't afford to rehabilitate the building, it will simply sit vacant after HP approval.

Committee Member Burns asked if there is anything keeping the building from being used now. **Mr. Weight** replied that from a regulatory perspective, there is nothing preventing it.

Ms. Martinez asked for clarification on the economic hardship hearing. **Mr. Weight** replied with a detailed description of how economic hardship is determined.

Ms. Johnson asked if the City has a planned use. **Mr. Weight** replied that there is no planned use.

Chair O'Grady asked if a GPLET was considered for the site. **Mr. Weight** replied that a GPLET was part of the discussion regarding the site.

COMMITTEE DISCUSSION

Ms. Burton stated that the property owners are arguing a very complicated case and that this is a difficult building, considering insurance and other requirements.

Committee Member Sonoskey asked about a façade easement, which was done at a site in the Warehouse District. **Mr. Weight** stated that the HP overlay was removed in that case.

Ms. Olivas stated that there are no comparisons in Arizona, no structural report, and the Committee doesn't know details about the negotiations to this point.

Ms. Johnson stated that there needs to be a creative solution to move forward that acknowledges both sides of the issue.

Mr. Panetta asked if HP designation would make funding available for an assessment. **Mr. Weight** replied that it would.

Mr. Burns asked for clarification that the HP designation is only effective for one year. **Mr. Weight** replied that the HP zoning delays demolition for one year, after which there is nothing preventing demolition.

Ms. Martinez noted that the HP overlay could provide funding for the assessment.

Mr. Panetta stated that even if the HP overlay is approved, it only delays demolition by one year, and the property owners would still end up demolishing the building.

Mr. Burns stated that he understands the hardship, but the purpose of the HP overlay is for preservation. **Mr. Panetta** replied that the property owner doesn't have any interest in pursuing preservation of the building.

Committee Member Vargas asked how common it is for buildings to be demolished after receiving an HP overlay. **Mr. Weight** stated that multiple buildings have been demolished with HP overlays.

Committee Member Starks stated that the property owners had options that they haven't pursued.

Mr. Sonoskey stated that if the HP overlay is approved, it gives time for experts to document the building before the building is demolished.

Chair O'Grady stated that historic preservation requires a property owner to go along with it, which is not the case here.

MOTION

Zach Burns made a motion to recommend approval of Z-117-23-7, per the staff recommendation. **Vice Chair Gaughan** seconded the motion.

Mr. Burns stated that the HP overlay would allow additional time to find a preservation solution and could allow funding for the structural analysis.

Mr. Vargas stated that the HP overlay could allow additional archiving of information.

Ms. Olivas stated concerns about the funding. **Mr. Weight** stated that there is funding in the budget to use for property assessments.

Ms. Johnson asked if funding is contingent on HP zoning approval. **Mr. Weight** stated that it is not.

VOTE

7-6; Motion to recommend approval of Z-117-23-7, per the staff recommendation, passed; Committee Members Burns, Panetta, Sonoskey, Starks, Vargas, Gaughan, and O'Grady in favor; Committee Members Burton, Greenman, R. Johnson, Lockhart, Martinez, and Olivas opposed.

STAFF COMMENTS REGARDING VPC RECOMMENDATION:

None.