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August 10th, 2014, 10:50 pm

## ARB view on lodge building expected

**TAKE OUR POLL:** Should Fredericksburg demolish Prince Hall Masonic Lodge No. 61?

BY PAMELA GOULD / THE FREE LANCE-STAR

Fredericksburg's Architectural Review Board is expected to decide Monday night whether to support the city's request to demolish a former Masonic lodge to make way for Riverfront Park.

The city bought the building at 609 Sophia St. in 2011 as part of its plans to create the park on 3.6 acres overlooking the Rappahannock River. The park land is along Sophia Street between Hanover and Wolfe streets and next to Shiloh Baptist Church (Old Site).

The two-story lodge was built in 1921 and initially served as a home.

In March 1972, Prince Hall Masonic Lodge No. 61 bought the property for its fraternal organization, which is made up of African-Americans. The group put a brick veneer on the building, possibly as a result of Hurricane Agnes in June 1972.

The city has already demolished three buildings in preparation for developing the park, Senior Planner Erik Nelson noted in the request for a certificate of appropriateness from the ARB to remove the building.

The city hired Alexandria-based Rhodeside & Harwell in December to create a conceptual design for the park.

After evaluating options for the former lodge building, the park was designed with the expectation that it would be removed.

The design firm worked with the city's Riverfront Park Task Force in making that decision. The firm also gathered community input along the way, including a series of focus group meetings and two open houses where design options were presented.

Nelson has said the lodge building does not fit any of the city's guidelines for preservation.

However, at last week's ARB meeting, some members expressed concerns about removing it, specifically bringing up its role in the life of African-Americans in Fredericksburg.

ARB members Kenneth McFarland and Susan Pates said there could be repercussions from removing the building and they couldn't support demolition.

Before the meeting concluded, ARB Chairwoman Kerri Barile urged members to review ARB guidelines, criteria for demolition and the history of the building in preparation for Monday's meeting.

Seven factors are to be considered when considering demolition of a structure in the city's Historic District:

Architectural significance

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Historical significance

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Whether the building is linked—historically or architecturally—to other buildings

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The significance of the building or its proposed replacement supports the city's Comprehensive Plan

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The condition and structural integrity of the building

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The effect on surrounding properties

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Inordinate hardship.

In addressing those issues, Nelson noted in the city's request that the Colonial Revival building has "little architectural distinction" and the ground it sits on is "fill material."

Nelson also noted that the lodge's owners knew the city's plans for the building.

“The previous African–American owners also gladly sold the property, with the full knowledge that the building would be razed,” Nelson said in the application for demolition.

Nelson suggested a condition of removal be that the mound on which the lodge stands be considered a “historic reference point” as the park design moves forward.

Monday’s meeting will include time for public comment before the ARB deliberates the fate of the lodge.

As of Friday, the views of ARB members covered a broad spectrum, making the community’s thoughts a key part of the process, Barile said.

“Their input will be exceptionally important to our decision,” Barile said.

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## **WANT TO GO?**

Fredericksburg’s Architectural Review Board meets at 7:30 p.m. tonight in Council Chambers of City Hall, 715 Princess Anne St.

The meeting includes time for the public to comment before the ARB deliberates.

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**CalvinT** • 2 days ago

No architectural distinction. Building sits on fill material and was sold by the former owners who knew the future plans. This is what is commonly referred to as a "no brainer." However, the city should consider erecting a plaque in the park to Pates & McFarland for creating an issue where none existed.

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