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# Will former lodge fit in Riverfront Park?

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A concept design for the Riverfront Park in Fredericksburg calls for demolishing this building at 609 Sophia St., which served as the Prince Hall Masonic Lodge #61 starting in 1972. PETER CIHELKA /THE FREE LANCE-STAR

BY PAMELA GOULD / THE FREE LANCE-STAR

Fredericksburg's Architectural Review Board is grappling with the future of a two-story structure on land where the city plans to create a Riverfront Park.

The design concept for the park that was supported by the city's Riverfront Park Task Force calls for demolishing the structure at 609 Sophia St.

But two of six members at Monday's ARB meeting—Kenneth McFarland and Susan Pates—said they didn't support demolishing it, and others weren't sure about the best solution.

Member Sabina Weitzman suggested maintaining the foundation of the structure and incorporating it into the design as one possibility.

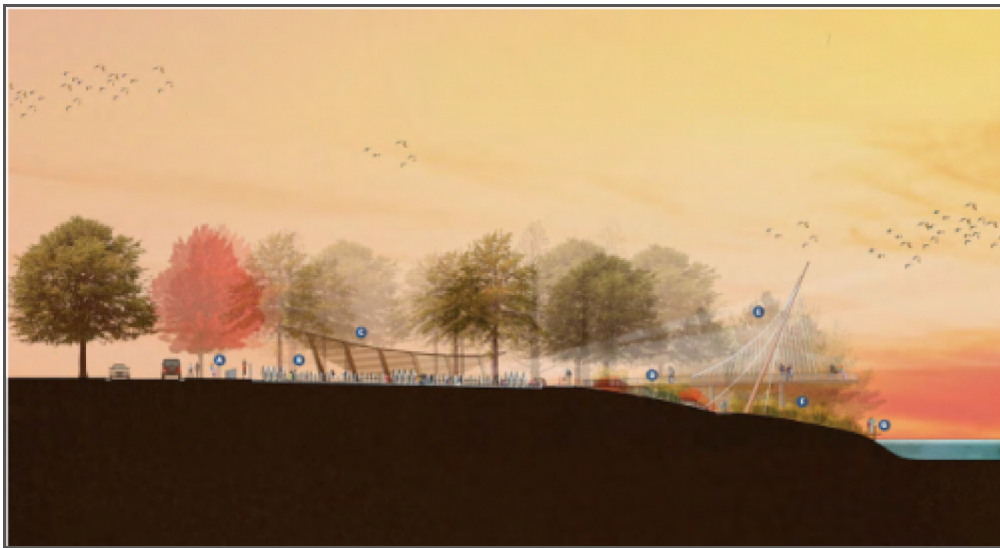
The structure was purchased by the city of Fredericksburg as part of a plan to build a park along the Rappahannock River.

The building previously served as the Prince Hall Masonic Lodge #61, whose members were African-American. The group bought the house in March 1972 and covered it in a brick veneer, presumably as a result of Hurricane Agnes in June 1972.

The structure dates to 1921. Celia H. Goolrick, widow of William B. Goolrick, hired local builder E.G. "Peck" Heflin to construct the house on property adjoining her own, according to research by Dovetail Cultural Resource Group. Goolrick's house no longer stands.

Kerri Barile, chair of the ARB, is one of Dovetail's principals and one of the authors of the report.

The Masonic lodge was the focus of Monday's ARB meeting. Next week, the ARB will hold a public hearing on the Riverfront Park design, and members are expected to give their thoughts on the future of the lodge.



The park would be located on 3.6 acres along Sophia Street adjacent to Shiloh (Old Site) Baptist Church.

Alexandria-based urban design firm Rhodeside & Harwell was hired in December to produce the concept design for the park, which it presented to the ARB on Monday.

If the lodge must be preserved, the design will need to be changed.

Elliot Rhodeside, who represented his firm, said he could look into adjusting the design to incorporate the foundation or preserving the mound on which the lodge sits. However, he has not been asked to do that.

ARB members said they liked the design, and several called it “beautiful.”

The most dramatic of the plan’s 22 elements is a tall mast that leans toward the river. It also has several walkways, some leading directly to the water.

There are two entry points along Sophia Street, as well as a tree-lined promenade, a history wall and history walk.

There is an aquatic play area with water that bubbles up from the ground and a children’s play area with an interactive sculpture, boulders for climbing, shade trees and areas for seating.

The lodge building is located in the proposed play area.

McFarland and Pates expressed concern about the impact of removing a structure that played a role in the life of African–Americans in the community.

McFarland feared a backlash from outside of the Fredericksburg area and Pates noted that the ARB had an all-white membership and said there aren't many preserved sites with African-American history.

ARB member Jamie Scully said he hadn't heard any concerns about it despite information on the park design being publicized and available to view online.

Barile encouraged members to review ARB guidelines, criteria for demolition and the history of the building prior to next week's meeting so they could better discuss the future of the structure.

Senior Planner Erik Nelson has said the lodge doesn't meet any of the city's criteria for preservation and should be demolished.

In response to a question from Barile, Nelson said city staff would appeal to the City Council if the ARB did not support demolition of the lodge.

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## WHAT'S NEXT

The ARB will hold a public hearing on the Riverfront Park at 7:30 p.m. on Monday Aug. 11 in Council Chambers of City Hall, 715 Princess Anne St.

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