Council may delay decision on lodge

BY PAMELA GOULD / THE FREE LANCE–STAR

The Fredericksburg City Council is expected to delay a decision on razing a former Masonic lodge building that stands on land planned for Riverfront Park.

The council had been scheduled on Tuesday to consider the appeal of the Architectural Review Board’s refusal to grant a certificate of appropriateness to demolish the building.

However, with no pressing need to decide the issue, the council is expected to table the matter. In fact, the building will be used for another year by contractors renovating the former General District Court building.

The two-story structure at 609 Sophia St. was built in 1921 and last served as home to Prince Hall Masonic Lodge No. 61, which has an African-American membership.

The city bought the building and lot in 2011 as part of the plans to create Riverfront Park.

Officials are in the midst of crafting a plan for the park on 3.6 acres between Sophia Street and the
Rappahannock River. It stretches from Shiloh (Old Site) Baptist Church to the lodge property.

Elliot Rhodeside of Alexandria-based Rhodeside & Harwell presented the conceptual design to the council during a Sept. 9 work session.

He revealed then that the estimated price was between $14 million and $18 million, including 22 proposed features such as a climbing structure, shade structure, water element, multiple walkways and a mast element that leans toward the Rappahannock River. It also included the preferred materials for aesthetics.

Rhodeside also told the council that when his staff went through a “value engineering” process for the design, the cost was reduced to a little more than $9 million.

The reduced estimate used less-expensive materials, reduced the size of some features and eliminated the mast.

The mast, the most dramatic feature of the design, would cost a few million dollars, Rhodeside said.

The next step is for Rhodeside’s staff to meet with the Riverfront Park Task Force on Oct. 1 to look at ways to cut costs, said task force Chairman George Solley.

As part of that, the group will take a look at how each cut would impact the overall design, with an aim at preserving its character.

The group also will discuss ways to create the park in phases. The idea is to spread the cost by, possibly, taking an incremental process to the park.

At the council’s work session, the idea was also floated of pricing certain items and identifying them as things philanthropists might want to contribute.

The task force meeting was timed so that its recommendations would be ready for the City Council to consider during a retreat on Oct. 17 and 18 at the Fredericksburg Police Department.
This year's city budget includes $225,000 for the project, which could be used for detailed design planning of the park.

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WANT TO GO?

The Riverfront Park Task Force meets at 5 p.m. on Oct. 1 in a second floor conference room of City Hall, 715 Princess Anne St.
CPTMarkoRamius · 8 hours ago
How many tourists is the historic building projected to bring into the city? Will additional parking spaces or a new visitor center to accommodate the masses who are coming to see the historic building need to be built? How will the curator choose the history to highlight? Will the focus be on the daycare that operated there, the goolrick who lived there or the masons who had meetings there? Should a museum also be built, if so it will need to be massive to contain all that history.

Kilgore · 10 hours ago
Yet another case of utter fraud waste and abuse of taxpayer money.

rufus12345 · 10 minutes ago
Why not convert it into a Burger King or Wawa? All the people catching the VRE could stop and buy lotto tickets and burgers, and eat in the new park.