

Alfred Street Baptist Church

Since 1803

ASBC Building Committee COMMUNITY MEETING

Work Product for Official Use Only

Date/Time: Wednesday, March 16, 2016, 7pm

Location: ASBC Multipurpose Room

The meeting was called to order at 7pm by Deacon Garrett, the opening prayer was given by Deacon Garrett.

Introduction of Panel and Guests

Guests included:

Dirk Geratz – Department of Planning and Zoning

Michael Swidrak – Department of Planning and Zoning

Helen McIlvaine – Director of Housing, City of Alexandria

Jon Frederick – Alexandria Housing Development Corporation (AHDC)

Allison Silberberg – Mayor, City of Alexandria

1. Agenda

- a. Deacon Jim Garrett, Chairman, ASBC Building Committee provided an introduction of speakers and guests.
- b. Video greetings from Pastor Howard-John Wesley.
- c. Deacon Al Wallace, ASBC Historian, provided a brief history of ASBC.
- d. Trustee Bordes, Chairman, Affordable Housing sub-committee, provided an overview of the ASBC affordable housing mission and partnership with AHDC.
- e. Mary Catherine Gibbs, Land Use Attorney, provided an overview of the zoning process.
- f. Kerns Group Architects provided a preview of drawings and plans.

2. QUESTIONS

- a. More than ½ the parking for the church is off site and you don't have a lease for more than a year for off-site parking. If ASBC loses their lease, what will you do about parking since the church "vacuums up" on street parking? **Answer: Our goal is to get long term leases. We are working on making sure we meet the City's requirements. Our expansion will alleviate parking on the street during the week. We will continue to work through these issues.**
- b. Would ASBC be agreeable to supporting an agreement with the city to have "resident only" parking on the street 24/7? **Answer: That is something we are exploring.**
- c. We commend the architect on the plan, it is beautiful for the space, however I have a problem with the garage entrance on the corner of Alfred and Wolf – it is very "industrial looking" and inappropriately designed for the neighborhood. Can anything be done about this? **Answer: We can look into that.**
- d. How many congregants attend the church and are you planning to expand? **Answer: We don't have plans to expand, however we cannot prevent new members from joining. Our largest service is the 10am service and it's about 1200 people; our expansion is because we want to worship together. Deacon Garrett: Our total membership is about 7000 people however you never have 100% attendance. A good number is about 40-50%; there is never 7000 attending at one time. The whole weekend's average attendance is about 3300, including all for services. Our plan is to go to 2 services once we complete the new sanctuary, so that would create less disruption.**

- i. How many congregants are from Alexandria? **Answer: A recent count shows approximately 900.**
- e. The way the below ground parking is designed does everyone enter on route one and exit on Alfred Street? **Answer: This plan is in flux; initially the entrance and exit were both on Patrick Street; we will now study the option of an entrance and exit on Patrick Street and Alfred Street.**
- f. Are there any other structures in Alexandria that take over a city block? **Answer: There are many structures in Alexandria that cover over a block in scope and scale. Our architects developed a very thoughtful design to ensure each façade aligns with existing neighbors. The goal was to be respectful of the town houses around the church. I think it meets historic guidelines.**
 - i. What other structures cover a block? **Answer: We will provide a list of other structures that do so.**
- g. Tom Kerns stated that the new structure provides sight lines all the way through the building from Alfred Street to Patrick Street. Question in response to that statement: Wouldn't it be more connective to have the alleyway go all the way through... You could still maintain covered walkway? **Answer: We can look into that.**
- h. Has there been a Geotech report done? **Answer: Geotech is an exploration of underground soils and yes that has been done. The report is what drove the parking as low as we could without going under water.**
 - i. Where was bedrock found? **Answer: We can find out.**
- i. I heard Pastor Wesley intends to go to 8 services? **Answer: That was a joke...I guarantee he would be worn out! We plan to go to 2 services, on Sunday and one on Saturday.**
- j. The plan is amazing except for Alfred Street...It looks very industrial and we are very distressed about that. Can anything be done about that? **Answer: We can look into that.**
- k. We are concerned and upset by the sermon where Pastor Wesley goaded the congregation and spoke with contempt about us as rich, disaffected homeowners. I wrote to him personally... he is supposed to see us as brothers and sisters in Christ. **Response: He regrets he put it like that, that is not his heart; he loves this community we ask you to forgive us for that language.**
- l. The grand approach from south on route 1 is done very well. It's very magnificent and makes a statement. Can you look at redesigning the east façade because it seems out of place with the neighborhood and says we want to impress the people coming into the city but are not concerned about the people here 365 days a year? **Answer: We can look at that.**
- m. When you bought property in 2009 below market value, what did you pay for it? **Answer: (Helen McIlvaine answered) It was owned by a national company and it was a market value sale, the company was not a non-profit, but the sale of old town property was subsidized.**
- n. What is the cost to the neighbors of removal of the 22 units; is the total future cost absorbed by the residents? **Answer: No, it is not put on backs of the city of Alexandria. The church will support the cost of the moves as necessary.**
 - i. **There is nothing preventing the church from buying more property in the future? Affordable housing is an Alexandria wide initiative. AHDC's mission is affordable housing. What happens in the community is based upon what city planners would like to see.**
- o. The figures I have say the size of the building is 180,000 sq. ft. That's half as large as the Atrium and The Torpedo Factory? **Answer: We will have to look into that since I don't have the size of those structures.**
- p. There is a garage intro and exit on Alfred Street and now we have parking on both sides of the street. Can we now get rid of it? **Answer: we are looking at this and looking at moving curbs back.**
- q. Is the green roof for social events? **No it is only used for green space.**
- r. Is your current capacity 1200? **Answer: No it is 900. The seat capacity in new sanctuary is just under 2000 and the historic church chapel was another 160 seats.**
- s. I am disturbed by Pastor Wesley's comments and you fast tracked community meetings to address them? **Answer: That is not true. We spent a lot of time talking about what we needed with the congregation. Once we reached that point, we reached out to the community. We already planned meeting with the tenants to let them know we have their best interests at heart and in order to be responsive and respectful of their needs. We don't usually go out to the community until Concept**

Two but we went out at Concept One. We were very careful about taking this public. We have two business meetings each year, in December and June. That is when we discussed it with our members. Once we discussed this with the congregation in December, then we had to move fast because we did not want to surprise our tenants through the media, but our members had to know first. Coincidentally the article came out around the same time.

- t. The Patrick street entrance was to be a gateway, but it looks like you'll see a row of busses and delivery trucks. It doesn't look like that you'd want that, so can you be more creative? I was told it was the City's idea to structure the building like an industrial design? **Answer: The comment from city was "make it look like a church if it's a church." Tom Kerns: The busses and vans are tucked under the raised terrace. The picture doesn't show all the trees that make the vehicles hard to see. We agree it's important to make it look beautiful.**
- u. We really wonder if the church is going a bit too far with this expansion. Does it now become the largest meeting space in the old town historic district? If you look at full block, if there is something like this in Alexandria, we'd like to know what it is. **Answer: We can look into that.**
 - i. It's not just parking...traffic is a huge deal and the congestion because of cars, the people. The loading dock, this is a significantly huge. We ask is this really respectful? ... Maybe you can look at expanding somewhere else?
 - ii. I have an info request: I would like to see preliminary charts to see specifics around what you intend to apply for and when. **Answer: We would be happy to provide that type of information however it is fluid and not cast in stone because those timelines change.**
- v. Pedestrian traffic and maintenance goes through Thurman alley. There is a lot of walking and where do they walk? Thurman alley. How do we keep the alley open and passable? **Answer: This is something we can try to address.**
- w. Sometimes we have to park 5 blocks away, the size and intensity of use and the footprint of 2000 people attending at one time, it doesn't fit in... where is there any facility like this in the historic district? **Answer: Just because there hasn't been one before, doesn't mean one doesn't fit in.**
 - i. I would like to see comparisons of buildings this large and show how it works. **Answer: We can look into that.**
- x. The main entrance on Alfred Street will be the ceremonial entrance (for weddings, funerals, etc)? **Answer: Yes.**
 - i. Twenty-five years ago Alfred Street was widened, so can we look at how to manage the ceremonial entrance so that it won't impact traffic? **Answer: We are currently looking at that.**
- y. The issue is one of scale within the old historic district. There is nothing else like this found here. Would it be a fair thing to ask the board to consider a more scaled down, smaller structure, or maybe buying other properties in old town? Is that a fair thing to do? **Answer: The church is committed to taking into consideration everyone's comments and seeing how to best address them.**

3. COMMENTS:

"It is frustrating to locate parking during the week and it is a concern; I applaud the community service of the church and was proud of Pastor Wesley's sermon following the Zimmerman verdict."

"We are extremely impressed by the charisma of Pastor Wesley, but he is creating a mega church in the footprint of a neighborhood church."

"I have been here many times and appreciate being here, but I was hurt by Pastor Wesley's comment. We are talking Christians here and it really was hurtful. He mentioned "affluent neighborhood"...you are affluent – you gave 1 million dollars to a museum, so for us to be called affluent is not fair and not nice."

"I am glad someone brought up YouTube. Pastor Wesley took a dig at the community when he referenced "and people say all we do is cause parking problems." Ask him to stop because that is not how the community feels."

“The footprint is large - larger than the courthouse and city hall. If it is to go forward, I think you need to provide more landscaping. The loading dock should be internal to the structure and should not be able to be visible from Patrick Street and vehicular traffic should be on Patrick Street and not Alfred Street.”

“If this was Safeway I would be against it, I am opposed to the size of the church.”

“I am a resident of Alexandria and have lived on Gibbons Street since ‘62. I can’t see anywhere in Alexandria that you can find parking. I see this as a good project. This was a black neighborhood and this is a good project and worship place. We have people come in from different parts because we can’t afford to live here. If we ever left, we can’t afford to come back, so I think this project is good and were going to support it.”

“I support the man who had to leave. We live here and the entire block that is Burgess square was black owned. The area was dilapidated then renovated and is now Burgess square; I also think the design is excellent, it’s not one solid structure... it’s not as bad as it could be. Also the black community and congregants deserve this church; as it is and always has been a black church and it needs to stay where it is because of its history.” (note: “the man who had to leave” refers to the comment directly preceding this comment).

4. The meeting was adjourned at 9:00pm by Deacon Garrett. The closing prayer was also given by Deacon Garrett.

Prepared by Donna Scott