



Historic Preservation Board

Minutes

Location: Lower Level Council Chambers – 57 E First Street
Date: March 03, 2020 Time: 6:00 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Greg Marek, Chair
Brandon Benzing, Vice-Chair
Laura Schaffer-Metcalf Ed.D.
Benjamin Ayers
Barbara Bingham
Jim Babos

MEMBERS ABSENT:

None

STAFF PRESENT:

Nana Appiah
Arianna Urban
Alfred Sm
Dawn Dallman

GUESTS:

Vic Linoff

1. Call Meeting to Order.

Chair Marek called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

2. Approval of the minutes from the February 04, 2020 Historic Preservation Board meeting.

Chair Marek asked for discussion on the minutes or a motion to approve.

It was noted that Ms. Urban made a spelling error under item 10.

As no Members of the Board raised any comments, Board Member Schaffer-Metcalf moved to approve the minutes with such changes and Board Member Benzing seconded the motion.

Vote: 6-0

Ayes: Greg Marek, Brandon Benzing, Laura Schaffer-Metcalf, Barbara Bingham, James Babos, Benjamin Ayers (Board Member Zingoni absent)

Nays: None

3. Items from citizens present*

Vic Linoff highlighted Tempe’s Hayden’s Ferry Days’ first annual film festival, and hopes to do something similar in Mesa in the future.

4. Recap of the discussions from the February 15, 2020 Historic Preservation Board retreat, including but not limited to, plans for neighborhood outreach and a future historic preservation seminar.

Dr. Nana Appiah described the Historic Preservation Board retreat as a healthy,

constructive conversation, which assisted staff in prioritizing historic preservation functions. One of the major discussion points to emerge from the retreat was public outreach, to make an effort to educate people who live in historic districts and future historic homeowners. To begin outreach, it was proposed to conduct several neighborhood meetings in the historic districts, advertised via postcard. The Historic Preservation Office (HPO) is working together with several other city offices that conduct neighborhood outreach to gain the appropriate contacts. Following the neighborhood meetings, the greater goal is to hold a citywide historic preservation seminar later in the year.

Ms. Urban that the HPO is working with the city's Neighborhood Outreach Office to establish dates for community meetings. It was planned to advertise and attend those meetings in spring of 2020.

Dr. Appiah continued that another outcome of the retreat was to organize and review the existing Mesa historic preservation plans and documents. Ms. Urban was able to locate 21 such documents. They will be reviewed in attempt to consolidate their information and determine which are still current and applicable.

Chair Marek asked if HPO staff would like to have Board Members involved in the community meetings. Dr. Appiah noted that it would be beneficial to have Board Members attend the meetings in order to be visible to the community, especially those who live in the historic districts. Ms. Urban commented that it may also be beneficial for historic district residents to see Board Members, as fellow community members, participating in the historic preservation discourse.

5. Review and discuss the existing City of Mesa 2002 Historic Preservation Plan.

Dr. Appiah explained that the 2002 Historic Preservation Plan is included as one of the aforementioned documents. The document was distributed to all Board Members in order for them to read and prepare to discuss the relevancy of the document in the future. This document may be able to provide context for the forthcoming historic preservation design guidelines update. As this document was adopted by resolution the City Council, HPO staff is investigating whether the 2014 Mesa General Plan repealed this 2002 document, or if it was addressed separately.

Board Member Benzing proposed that the Board assess the 2002 Historic Preservation Plan alongside the Downtown Redevelopment Plan, to understand the relationship with preservation and future growth in Mesa. Dr. Appiah concurred, as new construction continues to become more prominent in historic districts.

6. Hear a presentation and discuss the rehabilitation of the City of Mesa Information Technology Building (59 E. First Street), referred to as the Mesa City Studios project.

Board Member Ayers declared to Chair Marek and Board Members his conflict of interest, as he is an architect on this project, and recused himself from discussion on this agenda item.

Dr. Appiah recounted that this project had previously gone before the Planning and Zoning Board, which gave direction for staff to seek advice on the following condition:

Prior to the approval of the Certificate of Appropriateness to approve the wave canopies, the Historic Preservation Officer shall solicit input and advice from the

Historic Preservation Board regarding the removal or repurpose of the canopies through a regular public hearing.

He continued that though approval for the project is administrative, the Planning and Zoning Board wanted to ensure that the Historic Preservation Board was involved to provide their advice.

The ordinance that approved the building as a local Mesa Historic Landmark included two conditions relevant to the wave canopies. Condition E states:

The wave-shaped structures covering the sidewalks on the south side of the building are to remain. Any work, other than routine maintenance and repair that affects these structures shall be approved by the Historic Preservation Officer.

In communication with the planners who composed this ordinance, Dr. Appiah explained that the intent of this condition was to require a Certificate of Appropriateness for work done to the canopies, and that they are not altered without the consent of the Historic Preservation Office.

Condition G qualifies this further:

Exterior modifications, alternations, or additions to the south side of the building will require review and approval by the Historic Preservation Office, only if the change will affect the wave-covered sidewalks.

HPO staff has been in conversation with both the State Historic Preservation Office and the applicant.

Chair Marek asked if any Board Members from the time that the Landmark overlay ordinance was written were consulted as to the meaning of the conditions, as it was they who placed the conditions in the ordinance. Dr. Appiah proposed that they may be able to be contacted, but he, as the Zoning Administrator, as the authority to interpret the content of the ordinance based on what he believes to be the intent and purpose of the included conditions. Chair Marek offered that it would be a good idea to consult the then-Board Members and, for the record, understand what their intent was regarding the conditions.

The applicant, Gensler Architects, was invited to present their proposal to the Board.

Jay Silverberg and Lindsey Fiola of Gensler Architects, structured their presentation to walk through their approaches to the historical components of the project. They included their overall design strategy to give Board Members, as they recognize the significance of the building.

Constructed in 1959, the building is an excellent example of the Mid-Century Modern style and desert modernism. The applicant has adopted a “less is more” strategy in attempt to restore the building back to its “natural” state. They intend to “peel back” the building from an interior design perspective to expose the building’s architectural aspects, and heighten the quality of the user experience. The exterior breezeblock is an inspirational asset to highlight. Gensler’s pursuits in the project intend to center on the modern essence of the building, and introduce daylight, color and texture to the building.

The building has three main historical components: the breezeblock assemblies, the interior spiral stair, the wave profile concrete canopies. Both the breezeblock and the spiral stair will be left intact, with new glazing to enhance these features.

Under the premise that the canopies will be removed for this project, the discussion

turns to how they can be used as inspiration for a connection to the historic features. Several ideas were proposed:

- Recreate the canopies to provide an outdoor shaded environment on the east side of the building. Additionally, it may be possible to use some of the historic canopy remnants.
- Make an effort to capture the history and story of the building's canopies and integrate them into the overall project.

The proposed outdoor shaded area is a significant location and can be experienced from many programmatic angles. Inspired by the existing concrete canopies, Gensler proposed a series of two glass-reinforced serpentine canopies on the east side of the building to provide shade and a respite area. They will be significant, visible, and a part of the front entry sequence of the building.

When the canopies are removed, there is an opportunity to use the surviving historic material that could be reestablished in an artistic component to the overall project. An artistic, interactive art piece using canopy remnants was proposed for the north lawn of the building.

Visual documentation of the building's "story" was also proposed. Along with the interactive art piece, this may look like interpretive signage and/or digital art.

Dr. Appiah asked the applicant to explain why the canopies could not be moved to another location. The applicant shared that the contractors they consulted said that the minimal amount of rebar in the canopies and the antiquated construction techniques do not allow for any kind of successful relocation, that they would effectively disintegrate when an attempt to do so may be made.

Chair Marek asked the applicant to explain the reason why the canopies must be removed at all. The applicant shared that the canopies impede the development of the adjacent ASU project, and the way it was designed does not allow the canopies to remain in place. Dr. Appiah continued that the Planning and Zoning Board made the determination for the ASU project with the understanding that the canopies would not be able to remain. Chair Marek offered his understanding that the area where the canopies currently stand will serve as the "back lot" to the ASU development, and that the canopies impede access to this area. Dr. Appiah's understanding is that all options have been weighed, and it was practically not feasible for the canopies to remain. Ms. Fiola responded that the site plans for the new building depict the edge of the proposed structure overlapping with the existing canopies.

Board Member Benzing appreciated the design and that the canopies would not be replicated but reinterpreted. From his background on a previous downtown master plan design team, the new building could not be moved to accommodate the canopies due to issues with landownership of the southernmost parcel at the site. Additionally, the canopies would interfere with the necessity to establish an accessible entrance at the south side of the building, and in general contention with the overall development of the site.

Dr. Appiah commented that the State Historic Preservation Office concurred with the content of Board Member Benzing's comments.

Board Member Babos inquired as to the ownership and use of the Mesa City Studios Building. Ms. Fiola remarked that it will be a coworking space, a community event space,

and an “innovation incubator.” Board Member Babos commended the design but proposed to shorten the original canopies rather than removing them entirely. He remarked his disappointment in the canopy removal, as it is a major exterior distinguishing feature of the building. He also commented about the challenge of bringing the interior stair up to code.

Ms. Fiola remarked due to occupancy and building usage requirements, that the two other stairs in the building can be brought to modern code standards and the primary entrance stair does not have to be relied on for emergency egress. As such, the rail elements can be tightened but the stair or rail itself does not need to be modified.

Chair Marek expressed his appreciation for the efforts of the applicant, and asked if any documentation is planned for the canopies before demolition, as it is standard to perform some kind of documentation when a character-defining feature may be removed. According to Mr. Silverberg, their intent is to provide a visual documentation through video. As the original construction drawings are extant, the structure’s dimensions are available. Ms. Urban remarked that staff may be able to provide some of that documentation as well.

Board Member Schaffer-Metcalf inquired if it is at all possible for the canopies to remain. Dr. Appiah remarked that through a great deal of investigation, it is structurally not possible to relocate the canopies, but that the new canopies will be highly functional. Ms. Fiola replied that the concrete will lose its compression and fail upon attempt for removal, according to several contractors. As Chair Marek has had personal experience in the matter, the acquisition of the parcel necessary to move the new building is prohibitively challenging, but again commends the design team for their efforts.

Board Member Benzing posed the challenge of the best way to continue to develop the downtown area in similar contexts and situations. He offered that the new project in fact leaves the subject building in a better state than its current one, as it will be accessible and utilized in a much greater way.

Chair Marek articulated his desire for a visual interpretation of the building’s significance to be incorporated into the overall project.

Dr. Appiah expressed the Historic Preservation Office’s understanding of the importance of revitalization and responsible infill development, as an issue that will continue to evolve over time.

7. Historic Preservation Officer’s Updates:

- a. Update on the Certified Local Government grant from the State Historic Preservation Office and the status of procuring quotes or proposals for the drafting of Mesa’s historic design guidelines.
 - Mr. Appiah recounted the finalization of the historic preservation design guidelines Request for Proposals and that it will be issued in the forthcoming weeks. Only three responses are necessary.

8. Hear reports form Board Members on museum, exhibits, committees, and/or events related to historic preservation.

Board Member Schaffer-Metcalf mentioned that the Board tour of the Lehi School led by the Mesa Historical Museum was fascinating and encouraged Board Members to visit the museum.

9. Future agenda items.

Retreat summary

Ongoing challenges for new development in historic contexts

10. Adjournment.

Board Member Benzing motioned to adjourn the meeting at 7:01 p.m. and was seconded by Board Member Babos.

Vote: 6-0

Ayes: Greg Marek, Laura Schaffer-Metcalf, Brandon Benzing, Benjamin Ayers, Barbara Bingham, James Babos

Nays: None

