



CITY OF CONCORD

New Hampshire's Main Street™

REPORT TO THE MAYOR AND CITY COUNCIL

FROM: Councilor Byron Champlin, Chairman of the Gas Holder Building Ad hoc Committee

DATE: January 8, 2021

SUBJECT: Committee's Findings and Recommendation

Recommendation

Accept this report and have the City Manager direct staff to move forward on discussions with Liberty Utilities as part of the report's "Immediate Action Phase" with the goal of entering into a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Liberty Utilities to accomplish the subsequent preservation and redevelopment phases outlined in the report as the "Opportunity Bridge Phase" and the "Restoration and Redevelopment" phase.

Background

In the summer of 2020, Liberty Utilities announced that it was planning to pull a demolition permit to raze the Gas Holder building by the end of the year unless a viable preservation alternative could be devised. This building, on the National Register of Historic Places, and one of only 14 remaining gas houses in the United States, holds significant meaning to many in the Greater Concord community. The New Hampshire Preservation Alliance proposed a \$20,000 study to determine viable alternatives to demolition. The Alliance offered to secure a consultant and pay \$4,500 of the cost if the City would cover the balance. The Mayor and City Council ultimately agreed to this investment and appointed a 5-member committee chaired by Councilor Byron Champlin along with Councilors Kenison, Kretovic, Todd and Werner to work with the Preservation Alliance on this effort.

In addition to the representatives from the NH Preservation Alliance (Jennifer Goodman) and Liberty Utilities (Huck Montgomery), the committee invited the following individuals to participate as auxiliary members due to their individual experience and knowledge of redevelopment and historical restoration:

- Benjamin Wilson (Division of Historical Resources);

- Tim Sink (Chamber of Commerce)
- Bill Norton (Norton Asset Management)
- Jon Chorlian (Local developer)
- Liz Hengen (Preservation consultant)
- Frank Lemay (Milestone Engineering)

The Preservation Alliance hired ADG, LLC, with principal Stuart “Stu” Arnett, as the consultant on the study.

The committee began its work on September 10, 2020 and met 7 times to date. As part of this effort, the committee secured testimony from local developer Jon Chorlian, Manchester developer Dick Anagnost, restaurateur/entrepreneur Alex Ray, and former Commissioner of the NH Department of Resources and Economic Development, George Bald. Historical background was also provided by Jim Garvin, former State Architectural Historian.

In addition to the committee’s sessions, the Preservation Alliance held two separate virtual forums each attracting over 90 attendees where they discussed the historical context of the Gas Holder building and the consultant’s ideas for potential re-uses.

Throughout the extent of the committee’s work, the overwhelming sentiment expressed by the committee members and the public that participated was that preservation of the Gas Holder building was imperative.

Discussion

ADG concluded that a historic preservation approach is the best solution for the building. They viewed a restored building, along with a concerted City redevelopment plan for the south end gateway, as providing a catalyst for surrounding development of the area generally bounded by South Main Street on the west and Water/Hall Streets to the east.

ADR retained the services of engineering firm and historic preservation experts Structures North to complete an assessment of the building in its current state. Structures North found that the building is in imminent danger of collapse unless immediate steps are taken to stabilize the structure. These steps include removal of the existing slate shingles from the roof to alleviate the tremendous weight on the structure, the installation of two layers of 30lb. felt roofing material to keep out the elements and the reinforcement of the structure with steel rods and cables. This work would cost approximately \$400,000 and would be an investment necessary for any future redevelopment of the building.

ADG ultimately recommended that Liberty Utilities facilitate this immediate stabilization to secure the building and buy time for the City and Liberty Utilities to commence discussions toward a goal of entering into a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) as to the future ownership/management of the site for redevelopment.

Committee's Recommendation

The Gas Holder Building committee voted to recommend that the City Council accept ADG's report and direct City staff to move forward on discussions with Liberty Utilities as part of the Immediate Action Phase with the goal of entering into a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Liberty Utilities to accomplish the subsequent preservation and redevelopment phases outlined in the ADG report as the "Opportunity Bridge Phase" and the "Restoration and Redevelopment" phase.

w/att:

ADG, LLC report "Preservation and Redevelopment Feasibility Options for the Concord Gasholder," January 4, 2021