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DATE: August 5, 2020

TO: Clark County Historic Preservation Commission

FROM: Sree Thirunagari, Chief Building Official

RE: Update on Unfit Building Determination for Laundry and Boiler Buildings at the Providence Academy

Background

On December 13, 2019, the Historic Trust (property owner) made an official request (Exhibit 1) of the City of Vancouver to determine whether the Laundry and Boiler buildings located at the Providence Academy site was in fact unfit per the provisions of the Vancouver Municipal Code (VMC) Ch.17.32 Unfit Buildings and Premises Code (Exhibit 7).

The primary purpose of the “Unfit Building and Premises Code” is to provide a just, equitable and practicable method, for determining if buildings, structures and/or premises are unfit for human habitation or other uses, and are inimical to health and welfare of the general public and may be required to be repaired, vacated or demolished.

The main Academy building is the major historic asset in the area, but the outbuildings and the grounds of the Academy are also important historical and architectural features because of their relationship to the main building. Both the Laundry and Boiler buildings are brick structures that are over 100 years old. The Laundry building was constructed c. 1884 and is in a dilapidated condition due to severe water damage and decay. Portions of the structure have already collapsed. The Boiler building was constructed c. 1910 and is also in a state of disrepair. The roof collapsed several years ago creating unsafe, unsupported and unreinforced masonry walls.

In January of 2018, the City received an application for redevelopment of the Academy site. Shortly thereafter the City met with the property owner to discuss safety concerns related to the Laundry and Boiler buildings. Over the course of the next year the property owner enlisted the efforts of four engineering firms to determine the overall condition of the Laundry, Boiler and Smokestack buildings. It should be pointed out that a separate analysis is being conducted by the property owner to determine the most appropriate course of action for the Smokestack.

Based on the outcomes of the analysis provided from the engineering reports (Exhibits 2-4) the City required the property owner to provide an action plan (Exhibit 6) to address the structural condition of the Laundry and Boiler building. The City required the property owner to submit the action plan by March 1,

2020. Subsequently in December of 2019, the property owner provided the City with a request (Exhibit 1) for an unfit building determination Per VMC 17.32.

Timeline of Events:

- May 2018 - City and property owner met to discuss safety concerns related to boiler, laundry and smokestack structures
- July 2019 – Property owner provided engineer reports that evaluated current condition of laundry, boiler and smokestack structures
- August 2019 - City required property owner to provide action plan regarding next steps for each for all three structures by March of 2020
- December 2019 - Property owner made official request for unfit building determination
- February 2020 – Building and Fire Code Commission (BFCC) meeting to review Building Official preliminary unfit building determination
- August 2020 – Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) meeting to review Building Official preliminary unfit building determination

APPLICABLE REGULATIONS

Vancouver Municipal Code

VMC Chapters 17.08 Administrative Code; 17.32 Unfit Buildings and Premises Code; 17.39 Historic Preservation; 20.510 Heritage Overlay District

ANALYSIS

The Building Official, along with additional staff, reviewed the request for the unfit building determination with all applicable regulations, code criteria, standards and supplemental documents including an economic feasibility analysis (Exhibits 2-5) in order to determine if an unfit building determination could be made. The City’s consulting engineer reviewed the request including all the supplemental information and is in support of the Building Official’s preliminary unfit building determination. Additionally the Building and Fire Code Commission (BFCC) reviewed the unfit building request on February 13, 2019, and voted unanimously to support the Building Official’s preliminary unfit building determination per the requirements of VMC 17.32.

If determined unfit by the Building Official, the structures can be demolished with SEPA review pursuant to VMC 20.510.050(A)(3)(a). The site is located within the Vancouver City Center Vision (VCCV) area and SEPA Planned Action Ordinance. To comply with SEPA, the applicant must demonstrate compliance with VCCV Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and address mitigation as directed by the EIS.

The applicant prepared a response to the SEPA requirements under the VCCV planned action ordinance and identified mitigation measures (see Exhibit 9 page 5 and 6 of the applicant’s document titled “SEPA Compliance Document.”)

The applicant’s SEPA compliance document was sent to DAHP for review and comment. DAHP provided comment in a letter from Nicholas Vann dated May 21, 2020 (Exhibit 8).

The Historic Trust reviewed DAHP comments and followed up with a response (Exhibit 10). In summary, the Historic Trust proposes the following as mitigation:

1. Archaeology

A qualified archaeologist will be hired to prepare a survey. City staff will require the applicant to obtain a DAHP permit prior to commencing site disturbing work.

2. Updated National Register of Historic Places Nomination

The Historic Trust indicates that they will work with DAHP on an updated nomination to the National Register.

3. HABS/HAER Documentation

The Historic Trust indicates that due to the unsafe conditions of the building, full HABS/HAER documentation is not possible. Instead existing interior photographs and updated exterior photographs will be used with the National Register nomination

4. VCCV Sub-Area Plan

Due to COVID-19, the City has put the VCCV update on hold. Once the process moves forward again, the City will work with HPC, DAHP, stakeholders and the public on the VCCV updates.

5. Public Educational Display and Interpretation

The Historic Trust plans to provide an Interpretive Center inside the main building that will provide information on the laundry and boiler buildings as well as other buildings that existed on the campus.

6. Social Media Postings

The Historic Trust indicates that they will prepare a series of two podcasts covering history, architecture, and rehabilitation of the Academy.

Conclusion

Based on the information provided and the input received from BFCC and the City's consulting engineer the Building Official has made a preliminary determination that the Laundry and Boiler buildings are unfit per VMC 17.32.040.

Required Action

Staff requests the HPC provide input on 1) the unfit building preliminary determination made by the Building Official per VMC 17.32 and 2) the mitigation measures being proposed by the Historic Trust.

EXHIBITS

1. Unfit Building Request Letter-Historic Trust/SERA Architects-December 2019
2. Engineer Assessment Letter-Carlson Engineering-June 2019
3. Engineer Assessment Letter-TMR Consulting-July 2019
4. Engineer Assessment Letter-KGA Structural Engineers-January 2019
5. Feasibility Analysis-Meritus Consulting-March 2020
6. Letter to Historic Trust Requiring Action-Aug 2019
7. VMC Ch.17.32 Unfit Building and Premises Code
8. Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation-May 2020
9. SEPA Compliance Document-The Historic Trust
10. Mitigation Measures Addendum-The Historic Trust