

 <p style="text-align: center;">Council Communication Office of the City Manager</p>	Date: November 3, 2014
	Agenda Item No. 40 Roll Call No. <u>14-1732</u> Communication No. <u>14-533</u> Submitted by: Phillip Delafield, Community Development Director

AGENDA HEADING:

Public hearing regarding application from Jack Porter to designate the “Riverfront YMCA” building at 101 Locust Street as a Local Landmark.

SYNOPSIS:

Staff recommends that the “Riverfront YMCA” building at 101 Locust Street not be designated as a Local Landmark. While the building may be eligible for designation, staff believes that the site is the most important feature in light of numerous plans and implementation activities. The overall interest of the City is to insure that development of the site is maximized from an economic and aesthetic standpoint regardless of whether the building is saved or demolished.

There are other examples of YMCA buildings in Des Moines and better examples of Modernist era architecture in Des Moines, such as Scott Chapel (1955) and the dormitories (1957) at Drake University by master architects Eero and Eliel Saarinen. Much work has been done to preserve the Civic Center National Register Historic District buildings, such as the World Food Prize Center (Local Landmark), the Municipal Building and the Police Station. The City has encouraged preservation via the Civic Center Historic District and economic development via the construction of the River Walk. A continued balance between preservation and redevelopment on the riverfront is necessary for the River Walk to achieve its potential.

If the property is designated as a landmark then any alteration, new construction, or demolition would be subject to review by the Landmark Review Board and require approval by the City Council. The property would become instantly eligible for State Historic Tax Credits if designated as a Local Landmark. Federal tax credits require National Register of Historic Places designation. In general, Landmark designation conveys that the community desires a building be retained and when altered that it should be done in a manner that maintains its historic integrity. This is accomplished through a design review process.

FISCAL IMPACT: NONE

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

The subject property is located on the west bank of the Des Moines River and is bound by Grand Avenue to the north, Locust Street to the south and 2nd Avenue to the west. The property contains the Riverfront YMCA building. The building consists of an 8-story tower containing dormitory style residences along the river with a lower section to the west containing community rooms, gymnasium

and other facilities. A surface parking lot is located along 2nd Avenue. The original portion of the building was constructed in 1960. The Aliber Youth Center was added to the northwest corner of the building in 1980.

The submitted nomination describes the building as “an excellent example of post-war Modernism, the design uses simple geometric forms to emphasize volume, large expanses of brick, sparse ornamentation and flat roofs. In addition to the extensive use of pinkish-red variegated brick, other exterior materials include slate, granite and stainless steel.” The building was designed by William Wagner with the Des Moines firm of Wetherell and Harrison. The Nation Building Service of the YMCA served as design development consultants. The exterior and interior murals were designed by Stan Hess. Mr. Hess was an art professor at Drake University at the time. The 1980 addition was designed by local architect, Ron Walker.

Section 58-56 of the Historic Preservation Ordinance contains the landmark purpose statement and Section 58-58 contains the criteria for the designation of a landmark.

Sec. 58-56. Purpose.

It is declared as a matter of public policy that the protection, enhancement, perpetuation and use of improvements of special character or special historical or aesthetic interest or value is a public necessity and is required in the interest of health, prosperity, safety and welfare of the people. The purpose of this article is to:

- (1) Effect and accomplish the protection, enhancement and perpetuation of such improvements which represent or reflect elements of the city's cultural, social, economic, political and architectural history;*
- (2) Safeguard the city's historic, aesthetic and cultural heritage, as embodied and reflected in such improvements;*
- (3) Stabilize and improve property values;*
- (4) Foster civic pride in the beauty and accomplishments of the past;*
- (5) Protect and enhance the city's attractions to residents, tourists, and visitors and serve as a support and stimulus to business and industry;*
- (6) Strengthen the economy of the city; and*
- (7) Promote the use of landmarks for the education, pleasure and welfare of the people of the city.*

Sec. 58-58. Designation criteria.

(a) For purpose of this article, a landmark or landmark site designation may be placed on any site, natural or improved, including any building, improvement or structure located thereon that possesses integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling and association and that:

- (1) Is significant in American history, architecture, archaeology and culture;*
- (2) Is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history;*
- (3) Is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past;*

- (4) Embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction; or*
- (5) Has yielded or may be likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.*

The submitted nomination includes a State Historical Society of Iowa Site Inventory form for the property that was prepared in 2010. The form was prepared by Shannon Schaefer, Intern, State Historical Society of Iowa and reviewed by Paula Mohr, Ph.D., Architectural Historian, State Historical Preservation Office. On May 7, 2010, Ms. Mohr signed the form as concurring with the survey opinion that the Riverfront YMCA building is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places based on Criterion A and C.

National Register Criterion A is described as properties associated with significant events or a pattern of events or a historic trend that made a significant contribution to the development of a community. This criterion correlates to City of Des Moines Landmark Criterion 2. National Register Criterion C is described as properties having distinctive architectural characteristics that embody a type, period, or method of construction, or represents the work of a master, or possess high artistic value or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction (a.k.a. “district”). This criterion correlates to City of Des Moines Landmark Criterion 4.

Per Criteria 1, along with other former YMCA buildings in Des Moines (including the former downtown YMCA location at 4th Street and Park), this building is an example of the historic YMCA development model of men’s dormitory housing coupled with a public fitness facility and provides a record of a “broad pattern of our history.” Per Criteria 4, the building is an example of late Modernist architecture that emphasizes its materiality in a bold, often geometric manner. This era of Modernist architecture is better exhibited locally at the original limestone building for the Des Moines Art Center (1948) and at Drake University (Scott Chapel, 1955 and dormitories, 1957) by the work of master architects Eero and Eliel Saarinen.

On September 16, 2014, the Landmark Review Board voted 16-0 to approve a recommendation that the “YMCA building at 101 Locust Street be determined eligible for landmark designation in accordance with Section 58-58 of the Historic Preservation Ordinance.” The Board is comprised of the Historic Preservation Commission and the Urban Design Review Board. The Board meets as needed to review nominations and proposed alterations to landmarks not located within a local historic district.

Pursuant to Chapter 82-40(a) of the City Code, the Plan and Zoning Commission is an advisory body to the City Council and is a key factor in the growth and development of the City. Therefore, the Commission reviewed this Local Landmark and Historic District nomination in accordance with the Historic Preservation Ordinance and for compliance with the City’s Comprehensive Plan. On October 2, 2014, the Plan and Zoning Commission, by a vote of 10-0-1, approved a motion to recommend denial of the request to designate the “Riverfront YMCA” building located at 101 Locust Street as a Local Landmark but asked that the City Council work to preserve the art and architecture to the extent possible.

The following Comprehensive Plan documents were taken into consideration during the Commission’s review of the nomination:

2020 Community Character Plan

The following goals from the 2020 Community Character Plan are relevant to this application:

- Promote economic growth and efficiency;
- Enhance and preserve Des Moines' urban character;
- Establish landmark protection status for key landmark buildings;
- Historic district and landmark structures should be preserved and protected;
- Apply special design standards through site plan review process for properties in vicinity of major landmarks; and
- Develop a detailed land use plan for the Downtown working with the principles established in the Destination Downtown Strategic Plan (see "What's Next, Downtown?" plan).

Rediscovering the Rivers Plan

Rediscovering the Rivers, the 2002 Riverfront Masterplan states, "the rivers [have] taken on a less prominent role in the city, providing merely a backdrop for the development and revitalization that is occurring in downtown Des Moines." The plan challenges, "to take advantage of this incredible natural resource -- to reconnect with the rivers, bring them to the forefront once again."

Implementation of a phase 1 with over \$60 million of improvements over several years, concluded in spring 2015 and included the following projects:

- Meredith Trail – 2005;
- DM Union Railway Bridge Renovation (a.k.a. Red Bridge) – 2006;
- Long Look Garden – 2006;
- Brenton Skating Plaza – 2006;
- DM River Outfall & Overflow (Sewer) – 2007;
- Hansen Triangle – 2007;
- Center Street Pedestrian Bridge – 2010;
- Armory Parking Lot & Promenade North of Armory – 2011;
- Promenade adjacent to Brenton Skating Plaza – 2012;
- West End of Center Street Bridge – 2012;
- Hub Spot (Court Ave Plaza) – 2013;
- Court Ave Pump Station – 2013; and
- South of Court (East & West) & Y-Block – 2013.

What's Next, Downtown? Plan

The following statements are from the "Movement: Celebrate our Rivers" section of the "What's Next, Downtown?" plan.

Historically, development at the River's edge produced an array of handsome civic buildings and some industrial uses. However, a handful of prime riverfront redevelopment opportunities -- from vacant lots to lingering industrial and warehouse uses to under-utilized, aging properties -- are likely to alter this century-long development pattern, adding a new dimension to the riverfront.

Redevelopment has the opportunity to contribute activity to the riverfront. As handsome as the Beaux Arts civic buildings are, they generally house workers for approximately 40 hours per week. New development should contain a mix of uses in order to contribute to a vibrant, active riverfront.

Though there may be new uses along the River, the continuity of public access along the entire downtown stretch of the riverfront should remain intact. This is a somewhat of a rarity at waterfronts across the country and should be maintained.

The YMCA building is currently in a state of flux. The tower portion of the building has been empty as the men's housing portion of the YMCA program moved to a new facility in downtown in 2011. The fitness center will relocate from the Riverfront YMCA later this year/early 2015 to a facility that is currently under construction in downtown. Within the next three (3) years, the site will be sold for redevelopment or for holding by the Des Moines Redevelopment Company.

The site holds high economic development potential and the constraints of the existing building – small floor plate, low floor-ceiling heights, obsolete mechanical-electrical systems, lack of sprinkler system, small window openings, and unique fitness facility floor plan – present considerable challenges to reuse of the facility. Further, the building entrances are oriented away from the river, discounting the considerable effort the River Walk expends to enhance views and use of the Des Moines River. Changing the entrances and window pattern on the west side of the YMCA to enhance river usage would compromise the character defining elements of the building as its siting and window pattern provides a record of the “broad pattern of our history”. Regulations on use of historic tax credits for renovations may be difficult to comply with given the building changes needed for adaptive reuse and river orientation.

There are limited opportunities for redevelopment along the Des Moines River in the downtown. The City has encouraged historic preservation via the Civic Center Historic District and economic development by construction of the River Walk. It is critical that additional uses be added to the River Walk that are active beyond “8 to 5”. All or parts of the building may be able to be incorporated into a redevelopment project. However, requiring preservation of the structure versus encouraging it limits the potential range of projects that could be proposed. Limiting the possibilities reduces the ability to secure a high impact project. Staff does not intend this position as a blanket statement to be used in all redevelopment cases as often the greatest impact involves historic preservation. In this case, staff believes the potential positive impact on the downtown and the tax base is too great to require retention of the building.

PREVIOUS COUNCIL ACTION(S):

Date: October 20, 2014

Roll Call Number: [14-1631](#)

Action: Set date of hearing on application from Jack Porter to designate the “Riverfront YMCA” building at 101 Locust Street as a Local Landmark, (11-3-14). [Attachment 1](#) [Attachment 2](#) [Attachment 3](#). Moved by Hensley to adopt. Motion Carried 7-0.

BOARD/COMMISSION ACTION(S):

Board: Plan and Zoning Commission

Date: October 2, 2014

Resolution Number: 20-2015-4.01

Action: Voted 10-0-1 to recommend denial of the request to designate the “Riverfront YMCA” building located at 101 Locust Street as a Landmark but asked that the City Council work to preserve the art and architecture to the extent possible.

Board: Landmark Review Board

Date: September 16, 2014

Resolution Number: 20-2015-4.01

Action: Voted 16-0 to recommend that the Riverfront YMCA building be determined eligible for landmark designation in accordance with Section 58-58 of the Historic Preservation Ordinance.

ANTICIPATED ACTIONS AND FUTURE COMMITMENTS:

If the property is designated as a Local Landmark, review and approval of any alterations, new construction or demolition by the Landmark Review Board and the City Council would be necessary.

For more information on this and other agenda items, please call the City Clerk’s Office at 515-283-4209 or visit the Clerk’s Office on the first floor of City Hall, 400 Robert D. Ray Drive. Council agendas are available to the public at the City Clerk’s Office on Thursday afternoon preceding Monday’s Council meeting. Citizens can also request to receive meeting notices and agendas by email by calling the Clerk’s Office or sending their request via email to cityclerk@dmgov.org.