

Aiken City Council Minutes

WORK SESSION

February 28, 2005

Present: Mayor Cavanaugh, Councilmembers Clyburn, Cunning, Price, Smith, Sprawls, and Vaughters.

Others Present: Roger LeDuc, Gary Smith, Bill Huggins, Richard Pearce, Sara Ridout, Philip Lord of the Aiken Standard, Krista Zilizi of the Augusta Chronicle, and about 15 citizens.

Mayor Cavanaugh called the meeting to order at 6:37 P.M. He stated Council had one item to discuss in the work session, the building at 224 Park Avenue SW.

Mr. LeDuc stated that last October City Council met with Dr. Davor Sklizovic to discuss his plans for the property at 224 Park Avenue SW. For over ten years this property has remained vacant. Dr. Sklizovic is interested in opening a fresh food market at this location. For the past four months we have been working with him concerning ways to utilize the existing building or to replicate it in some form. On two occasions we have met with his contractor, Mike Mullan with Kuhlke Construction out of Augusta. Although the front face of the building appears to be in sound condition, due to the high cost to work around this front face and to protect it during construction they feel they cannot save the facade because of economic conditions. Instead, they plan to build a new building and match the detailing of the existing front to an approximate 90% to 95% replication. They will try to save some of the existing windows and doors from the old structure to include in the new façade. They hope to get started on this process in the next few weeks, and they have submitted a demolition permit through our Building Inspection Division. The contractor feels that there will be a significant cost savings through this process versus trying to preserve the building.

At the last meeting with Council Dr. Sklizovic asked Council if they would be willing to reserve up to ten parking spaces, marked for 15 to 30 minute parking, in front of the building. He now feels that he would only need a couple of short term parking spaces similar to what has been granted in other areas in the downtown and would like to have some additional parking spaces for up to 2 hours. Currently there is no room in the area for temporary staging of construction material, and he would need to use the existing parking spaces in front of his building during construction. It would also be helpful if there were a nearby area that could be used for material storage so a forklift could pick up the materials and transport them to the job site. Additionally, there may be some safety measures that they may need for pedestrians along Park Avenue.

Dr. Sklizovic is ready to get started on this project and wants to discuss these remaining few issues with Council before they get started.

Dr. Sklizovic stated he had worked in much detail trying to do something with the building and trying to preserve the building, especially the front façade. He said to preserve the façade would be very expensive and would not be feasible for him. He said he had decided to try to replicate the façade in building the new wall. He said he would try to save the windows and doors and use them somewhere. He said the contractor had stated that the doors were very old, and if they were used as the front doors they would not last very long with traffic in and out of the commercial building. Also, heating and air conditioning becomes an issue for the windows. He stated he would like to have a few parking spaces marked for limited parking, such as a couple of hours, because presently some people park there all day.

Councilman Cunning expressed concern about how many parking spaces Dr. Sklizovic would like to mark for limited parking. He was also concerned about the lay down area and what space could be used.

It was pointed out that probably some of the parking spaces in front of the building will have to be used for the lay down. Also, there will have to be a safety walk for pedestrians around the construction area.

Council continued to discuss the building, what is proposed for the area, a lay down area, parking and a pedestrian walk way. Councilman Smith pointed out how construction, lay down and sidewalks are done in the Washington area.

Dr. Sklizovic stated he had chosen Kuhlke Construction Company because he felt they were capable of doing the work safely and fast compared to smaller companies that he could have chosen.

Councilwoman Price stated she could not get excited about the project. She said she knew having a fresh market there would be good for the downtown area. She stated, however, that the building proposed to be used is the location where one of the founders of the County had his business. She said she was concerned that nothing could be salvaged from the building, as it had some historical significance. She said she recognized the difference in cost to try to salvage part of the building would be significant. She was concerned that at least some parts of the building be preserved.

Councilwoman Vaughters also expressed concern about Dr. Sklizovic not salvaging any of the building. She pointed out the front of the building is old brick, and the arches are well done and attractive. She felt it was one of the most distinctive store fronts in Aiken and one of the oldest.

Dr. Sklizovic stated he had spent a lot of time in the building, but it is not a safe building and it would be difficult to preserve any of the building. He said to preserve the front wall would be very costly. He said he had originally thought it would not be difficult to salvage part of the building, but after looking at it for about two years he felt it would not be economically feasible to salvage the front façade. He said there are a lot of issues involved in trying to save the front façade.

Councilman Cunning pointed out Dr. Sklizovic has the right to demolish the building as there are no regulations to prevent it.

Mr. LeDuc stated that it would be good if Dr. Sklizovic could try to preserve something from the building, such as the doors or windows, and use them somewhere in the building. He said he brought this back to Council so Council would be aware of what is going on and what has been done to date. He said he wanted Council to be aware of the request for limiting parking to two hours for some spaces in the area and the request for a lay down area.

Mayor Cavanaugh stated before any decisions are made on parking, he would like for the matter to be discussed with the Aiken Downtown Development Association. He said he would also like to know the extra cost if Dr. Sklizovic were to save the wall, considering the extra time to complete the building, and the fact of working around the wall.

Mr. LeDuc stated the figure he has from the contractor is that it will cost \$40,000 to try to save the front wall.

Councilwoman Clyburn asked if the bricks could be reused in some manner as a historical marker for the founders of Aiken. She stated perhaps if Dr. Sklizovic cannot reuse the bricks that possibly someone else could use the bricks on another site in some form as a historical marker. It was suggested that they might be able to be used as a walkway or some other form. Dr. Sklizovic stated to save the bricks would mean taking the wall down brick by brick. He said the bricks are very soft. It was suggested that possibly some of the original bricks could be used somewhere in the building. Dr. Sklizovic stated he would talk to the contractor about the possibility of trying to save some of the bricks. He said he had tried very hard to try to save the building.