

APPROVED MINUTES

May 24, 2016

THE FAIRFAX COUNTY ARCHITECTURAL REVIEW BOARD

Special Meeting

Fairfax County Government Center Conference Room 232, 6:30 PM

Members Present:

Jason Sutphin, Chairman
Richard Bierce, AIA, Vice Chairman
Robert W. Mobley
John A. Burns, FAIA
John Manganello, PE
Elise Murray
Michele Aubry, Treasurer
John Boland
Susan Notkins, AIA

Members Excused:

Joseph Plumpe, ASLA
Christopher Daniel

Staff Present:

Linda Blank,
*Fairfax Department of
Planning & Zoning*
Stephanie Goodrich
*Fairfax Department of
Planning & Zoning*
Leanna O'Donnell,
*Fairfax Department of
Planning & zoning*
Casey Gresham,
Recording Secretary

Mr. Sutphin opened the May 24, 2016 meeting of the Architectural Review Board (ARB) at 6:33 p.m. in Room 232 of the Government Center; Mr. Boland read the opening statement of purpose.

Mr. Burns made the motion to approve the agenda. Ms. Murray seconded the motion. The motion was approved on a vote of 8-0.

INTRODUCTION/RECOGNITION OF GUESTS

PRESENTATION: Ms. Carol Ann Riordan, a former employee of the American Press Institute (API), to make a presentation on the API building located at 11690 Sunrise Valley Drive.

Presentation:

- Ms. Riordan witnessed the history of the API building as a member of the API executive staff for 35 years. The API was founded in 1946 for the education and mid-career training for the newspaper industry. In 1969, the API and advisory board sought to raise \$3 million to build a conference center for itself in Reston. The board interviewed several architectural firms, and they eventually sought out Michael Breuer. His buildings were monumental and powerful, and he typically only worked on projects larger than this one. He was intrigued by the newspaper training and how this building would serve the planned community of Reston. Hamilton Smith spent time with the API group to learn what the true function of the building would be. The conference rooms remain acoustically perfect to this day. Mr. Mobley toured the building and said the exterior appearance was “a classic Breuer façade.” The two-story building didn’t overwhelm the visitor. In 1974, the building was dedicated and photographers and architects from as far away as Japan visited the site. Reverse zinc engravings were made and mounted on gold frames, known as the Gold Standard. The ground floor was devoted to offices, and the

second floor contained seminar facilities. A north wing was constructed in 1980 and in 2000, a new addition was built. The building embodied the key themes stated by Robert Simon in 1962 that “beauty, both structural and natural, is a necessity of the good life and should be fostered.”

Discussion:

- Mr. Boland asked if the API was a non-profit group.
 - Yes, and it was founded in 1946.
- Mr. Boland asked why the API got rid of the building.
 - The building was lost during a merger between the API and the Newspaper Association of America (NAA). During the economic downturn, the group thought the industry would be better served through consolidation. In 2013, the NAA decided to sell the building to a management company.
- Mr. Boland wondered if there had been any discussion of preserving it and attributing the building to another non-profit to preserve it.
 - As far as she knew, there was no discussion. There was the hope that the NAA would move out of Arlington and into the API building, but they were bound by a 15-year rental contract.
- Ms. Notkins asked if it had been sold to a management company.
 - Yes, that was correct.
- Ms. Notkins asked if there had been discussion with the NAA about the fate of the building.
 - Ms. Riordan was not involved in any of those conversations, as all API staff was let go during the merger.

ITEMS FOR ACTION:

1. Discussion of the proposed demolition and potential heritage resource significance of the American Press Institute (API) building at 11690 Sunrise Valley Drive. Application RZ/FDP 2105-HM-012 proposes to redevelop the property with the construction of townhouses. The ARB recommended the following in a letter to the Board of Supervisors dated October 5, 2015: the demolition permit for the building be suspended until such time as the heritage resources significance of the property can be determined and the applicant be required to develop a proposal to reuse the existing building, adapted to the proposed residential use for the site. The ARB proposes to make follow-up recommendation(s) pursuant to Fairfax County Zoning Ordinance Section 19-307 (4).

Members of the Public signed up to speak:

- Jordan Tannenbaum introduced himself as a newly minted member of Fairfax County History Commission: The fact that there was a letter from DHR believing that the 50-year rule should be waived is very significant. Another building that was similar in this regard was the Dulles Terminal. The building might even be eligible as a national historic landmark. In addition, the phrase “there are no known heritage resources” usually indicated (at the federal level) that nobody had bothered to look or research this. The building was overlooked during this process, and it wasn’t enough to continue on with

matters at this point. He urged the ARB to do what they could to stop the process and ensure a strong look was taken at this property.

- Mr. Sutphin added that the scope of the ARB is solely within Historic Overlay Districts (HODs), and the ARB was invoking powers from the Zoning Ordinance to opine on preservation matters on this site. The ARB was providing thoughts on an advisory level to both the Planning Commission (PC) and the Board of Supervisors (BOS).
- Wayne Hughes introduced himself as an architect in Fairfax County, as the president of Hughes Group Architects, and as a member of the Reston ARB: he believed the API was a cornerstone of the historical, cultural, and architectural heritage of Reston and Fairfax. It was also one of the most heralded examples of modern architecture in our region, and this was an opportunity to continue the rich cultural heritage of Fairfax. The question for contemporary society is what does it contribute? He believed it would contribute the same thing that Mt. Vernon, Woodlawn, Sully Plantation, and others do to this day. Each of those examples provided a perspective on the path of life and contributed to an understanding of how people who preceded us lived and worked. It created a context on how to view the contemporary. He believed the API would only increase in significance.
- Andrew Nachisan introduced himself as a former employee of API but also as a resident of Reston: He said the history of the API building was important as a journalist and it was a part of that educational heritage. The architectural significance of that building to Reston was what he hoped the ARB would urge upon the BOS. He added that the API Building was a masterpiece, although it might not be obvious to those who drive by it. He acknowledged that Brutalist architecture was pretty aptly named, and some would call the building ugly; however he believed nobody would call it ugly once inside. He could sense the vision of the architect and how the architecture informed experience. The building was made to foster learning and for education, knowledge, and culture. He thought that especially to Reston, a planned community built on vision, this building could serve as a cultural institution and symbolized the planners who created Reston. He thought that anybody who knew anything about modern architecture would have to conclude that the question of “is this building worth preserving” was at least worth studying and understanding.
- Craig Branson worked in the building for 15 years and had lived in Reston for 20 years: He believed Fairfax County had perfected the colonial townhouse look, but it did not have good examples of other types of architecture such as this brutalism. The building was set perfectly on its lot and served as a great example of whole-site architecture. The slope down to the water and the view from the building overlooking water and trees was a very tranquil setting. Inside the building was a festival of light. At certain times in the year, the light casts different shadows. He urged the ARB to put forth any effort to preserve this. If the lot was to be used for something, he wished it wouldn't be used for townhouses.
- Gloria Pan was a communications director for the center at API: She was quite intimidated the first time she walked into this building. To have an architectural jewel in

Northern Virginia was unexpected and really wonderful. Reston was too forward thinking and eager to develop this site and to disregard its history. She really hoped the decision makers would choose to preserve the building.

- John Ulfelder, Planning Commission Member for Dranesville: He wished that everyone who had spoken today was there at the PC hearing on May 5th, as it would have been very helpful for the PC to hear directly. However, the decision had been deferred and the record remained open during this period for written comments. He hoped these comments would be added to the record. A lengthy staff report was posted online about this Rezoning, which included memos and the October letter from the ARB in 2015. During review, staff had recommended two things in connection with heritage resources: they asked the applicant to document the property and to conduct a feasibility study for adaptive reuse. While the applicant paid for documentation of the building, often all that was done was to create a file so the history was recorded when the building was torn down. He believed the building was poo-pooed at the PC hearing. Citizens in Reston hadn't made a big deal about it, and the ARB letter was viewed as "old." In addition statements were made about the April walkthrough and how the building inside was a mess and not special. He suggested that people who had a real interest in the history should file something in writing to the PC objecting to this building being knocked down. For the ARB, he suggested they should consider writing a follow-up letter to the PC at this stage outlining their concerns, the continued concerns, and the importance of this building, particularly the failure of conducting a feasibility study on adaptive reuse. This way, the decision could be deferred further. This was an opportunity to try to convince the PC to defer the decision. At this stage, the idea is to say that nobody had taken a hard look at the potential for reuse of this facility along with the statements of the importance of the building and why it should be preserved.
 - Mr. Bierce said if he understood correctly, the developer was obligated to provide adaptive reuse study.
 - The developer was asked in accordance with Comprehensive Plan text and it was recommended that it be conducted. The demolition permit was pending zoning approval, so there was no immediate danger to the building. It needed to be made clear that there were a number of people who think adaptive reuse could be an option. The PC and BOS could consider this information as a part of any decision.
- Mr. Bierce said if the developer did the study, it would not be favorable. He asked if the PC would entertain a submission of a feasibility study from the ARB.
 - Ms. Blank thought this was an option that could be looked at if the County would agree to do it. If the ARB felt strongly that it should be done by a third party, this should be made known.
- Mr. Boland asked if the applicant owned the property.
 - The applicant was a contract purchaser, and the contract was contingent on a successful rezoning.
- Mr. Burns suggested watching the May 5th hearing, as Mr. Sekas indicated that the study to pursue alternative uses was not worthwhile.
- Mr. Bierce thought Mr. Sekas would not come on board, and there needed to be a document that showed potential alternative uses.

- Ms. Notkins asked if the PC Chairman could open up the public hearing again.
 - No, as there is a public hearing opportunity at the BOS.
- Mr. Mobley asked why the ARB's October letter was said to be too old.
 - He was unsure, but he did note that it appeared there had been no follow-up since the October letter. The upcoming May 26 PC meeting was the first opportunity to say a feasibility study on adaptive reuse would be critical. If Mr. Sekas was serious about the development, he did not see how Mr. Sekas could oppose this approach. He also agreed it would be better coming from a third party.
- Mr. Mobley said the ARB was doing everything it could within its power to effect a positive outcome on this property, and the PC would be getting a motion from the ARB.
- Mr. Robert Beach introduced himself as the architect at large from the History Commission: He had toured the building in April, and he also read the letter from DHR. He agreed with everything in this letter, specifically with the last line, stating that this office space could be renovated and maybe reconfigured; however, it might take a fair sum of money to make it habitable. He could not imagine how the building could be reused as residential units without disturbing or destroying the architectural fabric or character that's unique to Breuer's designs.
- Cheryl Simon: She said her husband, Bob Simon, thought that his best dream of Reston was that it'd be Columbus, Indiana east. The API building was a beautiful building that took Reston in that direction. In some ways, this building exceeded Lake Anne and was of the same nature. She thought it would be a horrendous heartbreak for anyone that loved architecture for this to be demolished.
- David Vanell was on the Reston Planning and Zoning Committee: He said when Commissioner Ulfelder commented that Reston didn't have any objections to the proposal, he was correct. When asked what the historic significance was, the committee did not have access to the Staff Report or any knowledge of the October letter from the ARB or History Commission. He had tried to extract a commitment from the developer to memorialize the building location, and they had voted to recommend approval to the PC. However, had he known the other issues or had letters, he would not have made the motion or voted in favor of the rezoning. He found the survey that had been done to be a pretty listless document that didn't adequately reflect the importance of this building. His guess was that if the Reston Planning and Zoning Committee had had access to these materials discussed tonight, it would probably have sent the case on with a negative recommendation.
- Sue Straits: Also on the Reston Planning & Zoning Committee. Added that this was modernist expressionist architecture that fit perfectly in Reston.

ARB Discussion:

- Mr. Burns took photographs of the API site and shared a PowerPoint he had compiled. These photos showed different elements, both on the interior and exterior.

- Mr. Sutphin read highlights from the letter provided by VDHR (attached) which included the opinion that the API building is potentially eligible for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion C, Architecture and Criterion Consideration G, which allows for the consideration of buildings that have achieved significance within the last 50 years if it is of exceptional importance and that VDHR research indicates that the API Building is the only Breuer designed building in Virginia. The May 17, 2016 letter was sent to the Board of Supervisors and the copied to the Planning Commission and ARB.

Mr. Bierce made the following motion:

“In light of substantial and substantive new information pertinent to our understanding of the API building’s architectural and historic significance, the ARB pleads urgently that the Planning Commission defer a final decision of its fate, to allow a more thorough and comprehensive compilation of relevant data. And further, the ARB requests that the PC requests and reviews adaptive reuse studies to answer some fundamental questions about its feasibility.

Pursuant to Article 19, Part 3, Section 19-307 4. of the Fairfax County Zoning Ordinance, I move that the Architectural Review Board (ARB) recommend that the Planning Commission, Board of Supervisors, and County agencies consider further historical and architectural evaluation and specific heritage resource significance of the American Press Institute building, and consider appropriate land usage that could lead to the preservation and/or adaptive reuse of the building.

As outlined in the October 5, 2015 correspondence from the ARB to the Board of Supervisors, the ARB believes that the property has a reasonable potential for meeting the criteria for listing in the Fairfax County Inventory of Historic Sites and the National Register of Historic Places.

The Comprehensive Plan (2013 Edition POLICY PLAN Heritage Resources, amended through 4-29-2014) and the adopted 1988 Heritage Resources Management Plan (HRMP) recognize that heritage resources cannot be preserved or studied if they are unknown, unrecorded, and unevaluated.

With regard to Heritage Resources, the overview for the Upper Potomac Planning District portion of the Comprehensive Plan states:

The Upper Potomac Planning District contains both known and potential heritage resources. [p. 11]

Prior to any zoning action, heritage resources staff from the Department of Planning and Zoning should be consulted as to what architectural surveys are necessary to document any on-site cultural resources. Staff from the Cultural Resource Management and Protection Branch of the Park Authority should be consulted to develop a scope of work for any on-site

archaeological surveys prior to any development or ground disturbing activity. Should architectural or archaeological resources be discovered that are potentially eligible for inclusion in the National Register, further survey and testing should occur to evaluate these resources as to their eligibility. If such resources are found to be eligible, mitigation measures should be developed that may include avoidance, documentation, data recovery excavation and interpretation. [p.23]

I further move that the final recommendation of the ARB be forwarded by staff to the Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors with a cover letter from the ARB chairman.”

The motion was seconded by Mr. Mobley

Prior to taking a vote, the ARB had the following discussion:

- Mr. Boland asked if the ARB had sufficient information to suggest to the BOS whether the building could likely be adaptively reused.
 - Mr. Bierce was hesitant to make this suggestion, as he had not seen any sketches and an analysis had not yet been done. However, the intent of the motion was to see this building is studied.
- Ms. Notkins noted that there were many non-profits in the Washington area, and should could not imagine that no group wanted to occupy the API building.
- Mr. Manganello said the owner had marketed the building for lease for two years.
- Mr. Bierce said that it could be a challenging building to adaptively reuse, but this was the challenge that architects were up for. Before the final decision is made on the fate of the building, at least some investigation should be done and presented to enrich the discussion and the decision.
- Mr. Mobley agreed that adaptive reuse study needed to be studied by a professional.
- Mr. Burns said the fact that VDHR stated the building was potentially eligible for the National Register could make it eligible for federal and state rehabilitation tax credits. These could make it economically feasible to reuse.
- Ms. Notkins wanted to make sure the study should not be completed or paid for by the developer.

The ARB voted to approve the motion on a vote of 8-1 (Mr. Manganello voted in opposition).

Mr. Burns then proposed a follow-on motion: “that pursuant to the authority in Section 19-307.3 of the Fairfax County Zoning Ordinance, the Architectural Review Board propose the establishment of a Historic Overlay District centered on the American Press Institute Conference Center, 11690 Sunrise Valley Drive, in the Hunter Mill District, Reston, Virginia.

And I further move that, pursuant to Section 7-203.3 of the Fairfax County Zoning Ordinance, the Department of Planning and Zoning, in cooperation with the ARB and the History Commission, shall prepare and submit a report to the Planning Commission and the Board of

Supervisors evaluating the proposal to establish a Historic Overlay District centered on the American Press Institute Conference Center.

The motion was seconded by Ms. Murray.

Discussion of the motion:

- Mr. Mobley asked what the advantage was to creating an HOD without knowing the boundaries.
 - Mr. Burns said that the national registrar eligibility did not provide protection, but the HOD at least gave some protection. The motion used “centered on the API building” because this section of the county was specifically set aside as a location for associations to build and have their headquarters. There could possibly be a larger HOD to incorporate the enclave of corporate campuses that collectively have historic significance to the planning of Fairfax. Since many of these buildings are in an area designated for Transit Oriented Development (TOD), many are threatened.
- Mr. Boland thought that a motion proposing a study for a potential HOD might be more appropriate rather than to establish an HOD, as there was not sufficient information.
- Mr. Burns had no problem with this amendment.
- Ms. Blank suggested rewording the motion to help with survey work to look at the area with a potential HOD in mind.
- Mr. Bierce thought that there was an opportunity to tie this area together with the Lake Anne Village Center HOD. These discussions also pointed towards the need to making guidelines explicit in the expectations for contemporary design, as there should be a direction established that is consistent with and contributes to the evolution of the area.
- Mr. Burns asked if there were any discontinuous HOD’s that were related but not contiguous.
 - Ms. Blank said there were none in Fairfax, but it was looked at when the Centreville HOD was expanded. There were concerns from a legal standpoint.
- Mr. Bierce’s suggestion was to build upon the Lake Anne HOD to protect historic contemporary architecture.
- Mr. Burns had heard many suggestions, and he intended to withdraw the motion until the June meeting when a complete motion could be presented. If Mr. Sutphin wrote to the PC that a motion was carried and included a note regarding the discussion of potentially looking at a study to create an HOD centered on the API building that would convey the important information.
- Mr. Manganello asked if the Comprehensive Plan and TOD designations looked at the properties around Reston and the Wiehle Metro Area?
 - Ms. Blank said that the Heritage Resources was not involved in the Reston planning process and TODs.
- Mr. Burns said some of the burden should be on the ARB for not being at the table during the May 5th PC hearing. He thought Mr. Sekas saying that the ARB was “disappointed” following its site visit was a mischaracterization.
- Mr. Boland was shocked how the API group disposed of this building.

Mr. Burns officially withdrew his motion, with the concurrence of the second, Ms. Murray.

- The ARB responded affirmatively to Ms. Blank's question asking if they wanted the VDHR letter cited by the Chairman along with any written testimony supplied by the speakers to become part of the record and attached to the meeting minutes.

Mr. Burns made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 8:17.