

GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA  
DEPARTMENT OF CONSUMER AND REGULATORY AFFAIRS  
WASHINGTON, D. C.

ORDER

Before the Mayor's Agent for DC. Law 2-144, the "Historic Landmark and Historic District Protection Act of 1978."

H.P.A. No. 85-90 application for demolition, alteration and new construction on Lots 800, 803, 864, 813 and 63 in Square 248, on the north side of K Street, N.W.

Hearing Date : January 24, 1985

FINDINGS OF FACT:

1. The Applicants, The Almas Temple Club (hereinafter "the Club") and Rouse & Associates, have applied for demolition, new construction, and alteration permits under Sections 5 and 8 of the Historic Landmark and Historic District Protection Act of 1978, D.C. Law 2-144 (hereinafter the "Act"), to allow for demolition of an existing structure and addition of new construction on a site owned by them on Lots 800, 803, 804, 813 and 63 in Square 248, known as the "Almas Temple Building" at premises 1315-1323 K Street and 1000 13th Street, N.W. The Almas Temple Club is the record owner of the property and Rouse & Associates is the contract purchaser.

2. The Almas Temple Building is a Category III Landmark on the District of Columbia Inventory of Historic Sites and it stands in the C-4 zoning district.

The subject site was designated as a Category III Landmark in 1981. As set forth in the designation decision of the Joint Committee on Landmarks (now the Review Board), the Almas Temple Building was found to qualify as a Category III Landmark because of its elaborate and ornamental polychrome terra cotta facade and because of its historical use as a clubhouse for the Almas Temple of the Ancient Arabic Order of the Nobles of the Mystic Shrine. (Exhibit No. 3).

3. In accordance with Section 5(b) of D.C. Law 2-144, the Application was referred to the Historic Preservation Review Board (hereinafter "Review Board") on November 11, 1984. (Exhibit No. 1).

4. On November 21, 1984, the Review Board reviewed the Application and gave its preliminary approval. (Exhibit No. 3).

5. On August 9, 1984, an application for a variance was filed with the Board of Zoning Adjustment. On October 24, 1984, a public hearing was held before the Board of Zoning Adjustment and by unanimous bench decision the Board decided to grant the application for variance relief. Following that decision, by letter dated October 26, 1984, Applicants requested a waiver of Section 108.2(c) of the

Emergency Rules of the Board to allow the Review Board to consider the project' under preliminary review status without the required "sign-off" of the Zoning Administrator. By letter dated November 20, 1984, Carol Thompson granted the requested waiver.

6. In accordance with Section 5(b) of the Act, the permit application was referred to the Mayor's Agent for review to determine if the requested demolition should be permitted. By letters dated December 5, 1984, and January 16, 1985, Applicants requested an expedited hearing and a waiver of the requirement of 30 day notice pursuant to paragraph 3.2 of the Rules of Procedure. The asserted good cause for such waiver was Applicant's need to vest the approval given by the Board of Zoning Adjustment, Applicants' financing commitments, and the need to make a decision concerning the temporary relocation of the Club's facilities.. . Applicants filed the prehearing submission, setting forth the facts and arguments in support of the application and containing all information required to be filed under. paragraph 3.3 of the Rules of Procedure. (Exhibit Nos. 4 and 5).

7. Notice was sent to the affected Advisory Neighborhood Commission 2C and the abutting property owners, none of whom indicated that they had any objection to the waiving of the thirty (30) day notice requirement. The D. C. Preservation League, by- letter dated January 14, 1985, stated that it had no objection to the scheduling of an expedited hearing and that it supported the project. Accordingly, the Mayor's Agent determined that good cause for the waiver had been demonstrated and that it could be granted without public detriment. The case was set for hearing on January 24, 1985, in accordance with the applicable notice requirements of the Act.

8. On Thursday, January 24, 1985, the Mayor's Agent conducted a public hearing on said application. During the course of the hearing, three witnesses were heard. (Exhibit No. 2).

9. Applicants by Counsel stated that the basis of the request for the issuance of the permit was that the demolition was consistent with the purposes of the Act.

10. The Applicants by Counsel stated that the proposed demolition- would allow for "safeguarding the City's historic, aesthetic and cultural heritages embodied in such landmarks and districts" in accordance with Section 2(a)2 of the Act in that the original ornamental facade of the structure will be retained and relocated and given new life by virtue of the proposed redevelopment of the site on an economically sound basis.

11. The Applicants by Counsel stated that pursuant to Section 2(a)(4) and 2(a)(5) of the Act, the demolition proposed will:

protect and enhance the City's attraction to visitors and the support and stimulus to the economy thereby provided and will promote the use of landmarks and historic districts for the education, pleasure and welfare of the people of the District of Columbia.

They reasoned that the proposed design and the necessary demolition to effectuate it will result in the protection and enhancement of the landmark as well as the economic adaptive reuse of a property now in decline and the continued presence of the historic Club function on the site.

12. Applicants by Counsel stated that pursuant to Section 2(b) 2(a) of the Act, their proposed demolition would in fact "retain and enhance historic landmarks in the District of Columbia and encourage their adaptation for current use."

They reasoned that; although the proposal requires the demolition of the floors, interior structure and rear walls of the building, it preserves the character-defining features of this Category III landmark. The terra cotta facade will be stabilized and preserved and placed within a setting that emphasizes its unique, jewel-like architectural qualities. Further, Betty Bird, Applicants' expert architectural historian, testified the proposed demolition promotes the institutional health of the Almas Temple Shrine organization and continues the important association of architectural form and functional content that is such a striking feature of this landmark.

13. The Applicants by Counsel contend that, pursuant to Section 2(b) of the Act, the demolition proposed would encourage the restoration of historic landmarks in that it will retain and enhance the aesthetic appearance of the significant portion of the exterior of the structure.

14. Mr. Alan Razak, the Applicant's representative, stated that in 1981, the Club determined that its structure was too small for its needs and that its configuration did not lend itself to the Club's activities. New or reconstructed space was needed in order to grow and to remain as a viable organization in downtown Washington. To meet its space needs, the Club considered several development options, including a plan that would preserve and relocate the Almas Temple Building facade on K Street and allow for construction of a new office and retail structure, both behind and beside the facade. This development proposal, which is virtually identical to the one proposed, was given conceptual approval by the Joint Committee on January 20, 1982. Due to high interest rates and adverse market conditions, the Club was unable to go forward with its plans at that time. In the Spring of 1984, the decision was made to go forward with development plans for the property or to look for office space elsewhere. Not wanting to abandon its downtown location, the Club chose to go forward with the plans previously approved by the Joint Committee. These plans were reviewed by the Zoning

Review Branch and it was determined that Board of Zoning Adjustment relief was required to waive the rear yard requirements in the C-4 zone. The variance was granted on October 24, 1984.

15. Mr. Razak testified that the present proposal is the only way to provide for adaptive reuse of the building with a design that preserves and incorporates the ornamental facade and ensures the continued viability of the Club at this location. Applicants submit that their proposal for demolition will effect and accomplish the protection, enhancement and perpetuation of improvements and landscape features of the landmark which represent distinctive elements of the City's cultural, economic, political and architectural history as set forth in Section 2(A)(1) of the Act.

16. Applicants' architect, William Bass, described how the proposal preserves and relocates the significant Almas Temple Building facade on K Street and allows for construction of a new office and retail structure both behind and beside the facade, with underground parking for 171 cars. The proposed office building is sympathetic to the Almas Temple Building as the materials for the new structure have been carefully chosen to enhance its jewel-like facade. By providing the adaptive reuse of the structure, the proposal further ensures the continued viability of the Club, a distinct element of the cultural and social history of Washington and the country, beginning in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, at this location and in this building.

17. Applicants' expert architectural historian, Betty Bird, testified that the proposal preserves and enhances the significant aspects of the landmark in three ways: (a) it ensures the continued viability of the Club as an institution, thereby continuing the association for which the building was designed; (b) it provides for extensive work to restore the terra cotta primary facade of this landmark; and (c) it places the facade in a context designed to enhance its striking architectural qualities. Ms. Bird testified that this project ensures the continued identification of the Almas Temple Building form with the Almas Temple Shrine organization, a non-profit organization with a long history of community service.

18. On February 6, 1985 Advisory Neighborhood Commission 2C voted to support the merits of the application.

19. The D.C. Preservation League, by letters dated November 21, 1984, and January 14, 1985, expressed its support of the project, stating that it "is delighted with the development of the project. . . ."

20. There was no opposition to the proposed application for demolition.

CONCLUSION OF LAW

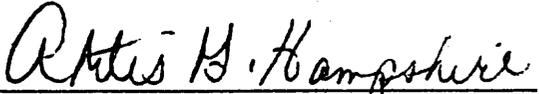
Pursuant to Section 5(e) of D.C. Law 2-144, no demolition or alteration permit may be issued unless the Mayor or his designated agent finds that issuance of the permit is necessary in the public interest. Section 3(j) of the Act defines "necessary in the public interest" as "consistent with the purposes of this Act as set forth in Section 2(b) or necessary to allow the construction of project of special merit." The Mayor's Agent is of the opinion that the Findings of Fact show that Applicant's proposal to preserve the original portion of the K Street facade of the Almas Temple Club is consistent with the purposes of the Act.

Based on the evidence of record, the Mayor's Agent finds that the Applicants' proposal will retain and enhance the aesthetic appearance of the significant portion of the exterior of the structure. The evidence of record demonstrates that demolition of the structure is a viable way in which to effectuate adaptive reuse of the Almas Temple and allow the continued historical presence of the Almas Temple Club on the site. Accordingly, demolition of all portions of the building, other than the original facade facing K Street, N.W., is consistent with the purposes of D.C. Law 2-144 and in the public interest as defined by Sections 2(a)(1), 2(a)(2), 2(a)(4), 2(a)(5), 2(a) and 2(b) (2)(b) of the Act.

The Mayor's Agent therefore finds that the Applicants' application for demolition is consistent with the purposes of the Act and necessary in the public interest and that the permit should be issued as requested.

ORDERED:

Issue demolition permits. Application H.P.A. No. 85-90 is necessary in the public interest.

  
Artis G. Hampshire, Esquire  
Mayor's Agent for D.C. Law 2-144

**MAY 21 1985**

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Date