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Committee recommends preserving historic Buckhead house

by Caroline Young

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(UPDATED WITH CORRECTED INFO ON MEETING)

At Tuesday nights' Atlanta Neighborhood Planning Unit-B zoning committee meeting at the Cathedral of Christ the King in Buckhead, several residents made it clear they are concerned about the preservation of the Randolph-Lucas House.

The house, located at 2494 Peachtree Road, was built in 1924 and in 1990 was named a historic building by the city of Atlanta's Urban Design Commission, according to the commission's website. It sits in front of the 2500 Peachtree Condominiums, constructed in 1997. Margaret Lucas, who died in 1987, was the last occupant of the house.

"The plan of the developer, Blaine Kelley [Jr.], was to turn the Randolph-Lucas House into a guest house," said Buckhead Heritage Society Executive Director Erica Danylchak in an interview Wednesday. "His original plan was to demolish the house but widespread opposition motivated him to move the house and develop a plan for its use. However, it was never converted into that guest house that was promised."

Hakim Hilliard, the lawyer representing the 2500 Peachtree Condominium Association Inc., addressed the committee and concerned residents about the demolition permit the association is seeking, saying the house is "unsafe."

However, its request for a permit was denied by the city of Atlanta because the city did not agree the house is unsafe. Then, the condo association decided to appeal.

"We're going to pursue demolition no matter what," Hilliard said. "We inherited a problem: A building that was never lawful under city ordinance. It was used unlawfully."

Hilliard emphasized the house was initially put under a "lower-level of protection" than landmark places by the city of Atlanta. Somehow, the official documents did not include an agreement to preserve and maintain the house.

Tuesday, the committee informally voted in favor of denying the demolition permit appeal. Residents at the meeting were all in favor of denying the appeal filed by the condo association.

"One thing we've learned along the years is that there's conditions that get stapled onto site plans and they get torn apart," said NPU-B chair Sally Silver. "We see conditions that are intentional but never taken downtown."

Buckhead Heritage Society president Wright Mitchell said the Watson-Brown Foundation offered \$1 million to the condo association to come in and renovate the building and move into it. Apparently, the condo association did not follow through or take action and Watson-Brown is now moving into another historic home.

"I think it's safe to say we cannot force the condo association to preserve and maintain the Lucas House," Mitchell said. "They've demonstrated they have no desire to do that."

However, Hilliard said they would give the society and other community members 30 days after they receive a demolition permit to find a place for relocation. If so, the association would apparently be willing to work together and even provide necessary funds for the process.



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The issue will be presented to Atlanta Board of Zoning Adjustment at a July 12 meeting.

"We recognize there is concern for saving this structure, but we don't believe there is an alternative to reusing this structure as an adaptable use on this site," Hilliard said. "What we are interested in doing is exploring options to locate the structure somewhere else."

Silver said she already started looking at new locations for the house.

"There's obviously a lot of interest in preserving this building. I'm asking for your commitment," she said to the concerned residents.

Silver said more support and fundraising needs to start happening if people are serious about saving the house, whether it be preserving it where it is or moving it elsewhere.

"Let's make it happen," she said. "If you don't put your money where your mouth is, it means nothing."

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