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Buckhead historic house moving to Ansley Park

by Everett Catts

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Staff / Nathan Self
 Wright Mitchell and the Buckhead Heritage Society are looking for a new location for the historic Randolph-Lucas House on Peachtree Road.

The Randolph-Lucas House finally has a safe new location.

Under the threat of demolition for years, the historic home in Buckhead is moving to Ansley Park, its new owners announced Thursday in a news release.

NewTown Partners, an Atlanta-based economic development consulting firm focusing on distressed historic resources, Thursday closed on the purchase of a vacant Ansley lot at 78 Peachtree Circle and has already started the process to move the house. Built in 1924, the mansion will be the private residence of NewTown's co-founders, Christopher Jones and Roger Smith.

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The home is expected to be moved to its new location this summer, but a date has not been set yet. It is contingent on working with local utilities AT&T, Comcast and Georgia Power. Jones and Smith have agreed to sensitively rehabilitate the home according to historic preservation standards. One Museum Square, which owns the vacant lot at 1301 Peachtree St., will permit a temporary road to be built across its property, granting direct access to 78 Peachtree Circle, which sits directly behind it.

"This is a watershed moment for historic preservation in Atlanta," Wright Mitchell, president of the Buckhead Heritage Society, a nonprofit that fought to preserve the property, said in a statement. "The Randolph-Lucas House project proves that groups with sometimes divergent interests can truly come together to support a creative solution to a difficult historic preservation problem. That has not always been the case in our great city."

The society has offered to give the house to whoever agreed to move it, and it could cost its new owners up to \$500,000 to relocate it, Mitchell said.

In 1997 the 2500 Peachtree condominium building was constructed behind the house, located at 2494 Peachtree Road, and since then it has fought to demolish the home, claiming it was in poor condition. Its condo association even got from the city of Atlanta a permit to demolish the home this past fall. In a phone interview Thursday, Mitchell said the reason for the announcement's timing was meeting a June 21 deadline for the permit to expire, adding the new owners must now weigh the house, per the Georgia Department of Transportation's request, to determine which bridges it can traverse in its journey to Ansley Park.

The home was designated a historic building by the city's Urban Design Commission in 1990, according to the commission's website. Originally owned by attorney Hollins Nichols Randolph, the great-great-grandson of Thomas Jefferson, it was sold to Margaret Lucas in 1935, according to the commission. No one has lived in the house since Lucas died in 1987, society Executive Director Erica Danylchak said in an email. Her descendants sold the house to Blaine Kelley Jr., the 2500 Peachtree condos' original builder, Danylchak said.

In a stipulation of the condos' building permit, Kelley was required to move the house 35 feet forward from its original location to make room for the project. The property was rezoned to allow more density (condos) under the condition that the condo association maintain the house.

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In October, the society, the city and the 2500 Peachtree Road Condominium Association entered into a legally binding agreement that established the framework to relocate the house. In December, the society published a request for proposal to individuals who had expressed interest in relocating the house.

Jones and Smith were not available for interviews Thursday but are expected to comment on the house in about a week.

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