July 12, 2021

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Elizabeth Abernethy

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Delivered by Email

**RE: StPete2050 – Comprehensive Plan Amendments – Historic Preservation**

Derek & Liz:

The following comments are made regarding StPete2050 and updating the Comprehensive Plan, focused on the Plan’s Historic Preservation Element and related historic preservation goals, objective, and policies within the Future Land Use Element. While the existing HP policies establish a strong framework for the City’s preservation program, Preserve the ‘Burg (PTB) believes that our collective experience during the present development boom has clearly shown the need for changes to these policies. Some policies need to be updated, some made more specific, and a number of new policies need to be adopted to meet the Goals and Objectives of the Historic Preservation Element.

**Primary Issues**

* Adopting a Community Character Master Plan
* Ensuring the City gathers additional survey information to identify and document historic resources;
* Ensuring a broader public participation program for development applications – there are a growing number of examples such as the 900 Central project where public dialogue has led to better designed development yet many development applications have no public notice or optional requirements for community outreach.
* Establishing DC zoning criteria requiring/encouraging compatible development with the scale and feel of those portions of downtown with concentrations of historic resources, including but not limited to the Central Avenue corridor, the area around Williams Park, 4th Avenue North, and the area around Mirror Lake;
* Having a comprehensive demolition review/delay process for properties with historic resources;
* Requiring neighborhood compatibility development review criteria that staff will consistently apply, including within downtown;
* Ensuring the development review process provides incentives for historic building reuse and disincentives not reusing such as eliminating base and streamline approval for development that will adversely impact historic resources.
* Making the TDR program more effective at meeting its goal of preserving historic buildings.
* Revamping and refocusing the FAR bonus program. The program in Chicago offers an approach to be considered, requirng payment to the city for FAR bonuses and those payments funding the Adopt-A-Landmark grant fund and the Neighborhood Opportunity grant fund. See, <https://www.chicago.gov/city/en/depts/dcd/supp_info/realigning-zoning-with-neighborhood-growth.html>.

**Policies Not Fulfilled**

It should also be recognized that there are a number of policies that the City has, at best, a “checkered” record of fulfilling. The answer to addressing these shortcomings is not to weaken the policies but to reinforce them so the policies will be used and followed to achieve the HP Element’s goals and objectives. These policies include:

* Updating the list of properties eligible for local listing (HP1.4);
* Annually initiating landmark applications (HP2.5);
* Annually requesting SHPO to provide a determination of National Register Eligibility for local landmarks or eligible properties (HP1,6);
* Annually conducting an archaeology workshop (HP5.7);
* Applying the Comprehensive Plan definition of “historic resources” to existing policies and LDR’s (GID1.7)

PTB’s specific recommendations for changes to HP policies are below, grouped in accord with the present HP Objectives.

**OBJECTIVE HP1**: To continue to promote the preservation of resources through the commitment to conduct historic and archaeological resource surveys and the continued development of ordinances, guidelines and databases.

HP 1.1 sets forth that the City will continue to pursue grant funding for further surveys. The policy should include:

* Factors for prioritizing areas to survey;
* Requiring annually a specified minimum number of neighborhood surveys and surveys along commercial corridors; and
* Requiring, for those areas in which an approved survey has not been completed, applications for development or site plan approval to submit a survey of the properties adjacent [within 200 feet] to the development site.

HP1.4 requires, in part, for the City to provide information to the owners of properties on the Eligible list regarding the benefits of designation. The policy should be amended to require the City to send those property owners information annually.

HP1.6 is a policy that requires the City to seek a determination of eligibility for National Register listing for all properties listed or considered eligible for local landmark designation. Because this has not occurred, PTB suggests that the policy be strengthened by:

* Establishing a schedule by which those properties presently listed (or eligible) will have a determination of NR eligibility sought;
* Requiring certification from the National Park Service for all local districts.

**OBJECTIVE HP2:** To continue to develop programs and policies to protect and preserve the City's historic resources.

* Expanding policy HP2.11, so that it applies to all development review criteria, not just to DRC site review criteria [policy requires criteria that ensure sensitivity and protection to adjacent historic resources related to scale and mass];
* Expanding policy HP2.11 to include consideration of height and set-back.
* Requiring development review criteria to provide disincentives to demolishing historic buildings and incentives to the reuse of such buildings, including:
  + Not allowing base or streamline development review for applications adversely impacting historic resources.
  + Not allowing variances or special exceptions for development adversely impacting historic resources.
  + Limiting FAR in DC districts to base approval FAR for development that will adversely impact historic resources.
  + Not allowing the “exemptions” within the DC districts building massing and form table for development that will adversely impact historic resources
* Requiring site plan applications to identify buildings greater than 50 years old that are expected to be demolished, the alternatives considered to demolition, and why it is not feasible to reuse the building.
* Requiring public notice where a site plan application/approval will result in the demolition of buildings greater than 50 years of age.
* Requiring the definitions of key historic preservation terms, including but not limited to “historic resource” and “community character” to define the terms in a manner consistent with protecting the broadest array of historic buildings and sites. Some communities define historic resources as being buildings of at least 50 years of age.
* Requiring mitigation for adverse historic resource impacts. Mitigation of adverse development impacts is a well ingrained component of the development review and approval process, particularly for environmental resources. The cost of mitigation in terms of time and dollars serves, in part, as a disincentive for impacting the resource.
* Expanding HP2.9 to require meaningful demolition delay and review for historic resources. Demolition review should include public notice, including to the CPPC and City Council. It may be appropriate to provide different periods of demolition delay depending upon the significance of the historic resource.
* Redefining the City’s FAR bonus program to make it more effective at offsetting impacts to historic resources.
* Requiring all CRA’s to include goals, objectives, and policies/design standards to protect historic resources.
* Requiring the City to annually publish a Community Character Report focused on historic preservation, the arts, local business and neighborhoods, including but not limited to identifying actions recommended to be undertaken for the coming year to maintain community character and identifying the loss of historic resources that occurred during the reporting period.

**OBJECTIVE HP3** - To support the programs and incentives provided by local, state and national preservation organizations.

* Create a Historic Preservation Grant Program within each CRA and seek approval for the use of tax increment financing for funding the grant program. The City has established such a program within the intown CRA.
* Create a citywide preservation grant program to be funded with proceeds from the purchase of FAR bonuses or other funding sources. Such a grant program could be modeled after the Adopt-A-Landmark Fund in Chicago, <https://www.chicago.gov/city/en/depts/dcd/provdrs/hist/svcs/citywide-adopt-a-landmark-fund.html>.
* Expand policy HP3.6 providing, “The Building Official shall be encouraged to interpret and apply the existing building code to facilitate and encourage the preservation, rehabilitation and renovation of historic properties” to also include the Fire Department.
* Requiring the CPPC to annually conduct a workshop with input from the preservation community and property owners on how to minimize demolition by neglect.
* Requiring the CPPC to annually review whether programs intended to protect historic resources are meeting their objective including but not limited to the use of historic TDR’s and the use of FAR bonuses.

Any of the policies requiring LDR amendments or establishing grant programs should include dates (deadlines) by which the action will occur.

PTB appreciates the opportunity to present these comments. We have been actively participating in the StPete2050 process, having provided previous written comments and recommendations for the 2050 Vision. Additionally, PTB recommended the Charter Review Commission approve a City Charter amendment to provide a process for the adoption of a community character master plan. Please consider those comments in addition to these comments and recommendations.

Sincerely,

/s/

Peter Belmont

Advocacy Chair