

County Asks Reversal of ARB Demolition Decision

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*PWC - Historic Buildings
Manassas - Prince William
County Jail*

REFERENCE



Michael Bramson—The Journal Messenger

Old County Jail

Built in 1894 at the same time as the old county courthouse, the old jail was designed by the same architect who designed the courthouse, and shares many of its architectural details. It is one of two buildings for which

the county has been denied demolition permits. That decision by the city's ARB has been appealed the the Manassas City Council.

Prince William County has appealed a decision by the Manassas Architectural Review Board to deny permission to demolish the old Bennett Annex and the old county jail.

The county requested permission to tear down six county-owned buildings that are located in the city near the old courthouse and the Judicial Center.

ARB approval of the demolition permit is required because the buildings are in the city's historic district. In a meeting last week, the ARB voted to allow three of the buildings to be torn down—the old county planning office on Peabody Street, the quonset hut on Center Street and a cottage in the Bennett complex.

The county will also be able to demolish a fourth building, the old sheriff's office on Lee Avenue. Manassas Assistant City Attorney Robert Bendall has advised the city that a write-in vote submitted by ARB member Richard Guy was not a valid vote. Guy voted to deny permission to demolish that building.

"Because it is a public body, you can't vote by letter," Bendall said. "You can't vote without being at the meeting."

The Manassas City Council received a letter from the Board of County Supervisors late Tuesday, appealing the ARB's decision to deny permission to tear down two of the buildings.

The county has sent out for bids on the demolition of the buildings, and the county's deadline for accepting those bids is August 19.

Manassas City Attorney John Cartwright said Tuesday that the council would probably act on the matter by August 18. A public hearing must be held before the council can vote on the appeal, Cartwright said.

Prince William actually has two alternatives in dealing with the ARB's denial.

Under the city's zoning ordinance, the county can offer the buildings for sale at a fair market price for from three months to a year, depending on the sale price. If no one offers to buy and preserve the buildings within the specified time period, the county is automatically entitled to raze the buildings.

Deputy County Executive Larry Hughes said that the board will not chose that option because it doesn't want to sell off portions of the property.

County Attorney John Foote said that the board hasn't indicated what action it will take if the council upholds the ARB's denial. The county can

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appeal to the circuit court if the council turns down the appeal.

The demolition of the annex and the old jail has met with strong opposition from the city's historical community because of the historic value of the buildings to Manassas. The Bennett annex was built in the 1920's. The old jail was built in the 1890's at the same time as the old courthouse, and shares many of the courthouse's architectural features.

The county has no plans for the property, according the Hughes and Foote, but wants to tear the buildings down because of high

maintenance costs.

"It's not going to be used for any purpose except public buildings," Foote said. The property is zoned B1, which allows any type of business or professional offices, but no retail use.

Foote added that the county does plan to put in additional parking for the Judicial Center at the site of the quonset hut.

Although the other four buildings can be torn down after August 24, Hughes said demolition would probably not begin on those buildings until sometime in October.