

CITY OF TRUSSVILLE

SPECIAL MEETING

APRIL 3, 2017

The City Council of the City of Trussville met in a special session at 5:30 p. m. on Monday, April 3, 2017 at Trussville City Hall to get public feedback on what is desired for the Cahaba Project from the residents and owners in the area. Council President Brian Plant presided over the meeting and City Clerk Lynn Porter served as recording secretary.

Those member answering present to roll call were as follows:

Council President Brian Plant
Councilman Perry Cook
Councilman Jef Freeman
Councilman Zack Steele
Councilman Alan Taylor

Absent: None

Others present in official capacity: Mayor Buddy Choat
City Attorney Rick Stotser

Mayor Choat opened the meeting by saying we are here to get information and ideas. We will hold this meeting to one hour. The purpose tonight is to get direction on how to proceed.

Ms. Donnette Plant, 100 Lake Street, stated she was a member of the neighborhood and of the Historical Society. She stated she thinks the concern is the historical integrity of the Cahaba Project district. When the Design Review Committee was started, it was done in part because of a large home that had been built that was out of character with the neighborhood. The recent discussion began when a house in the district was removed, and what was proposed in its place did not fit with the neighborhood. Other newer subdivisions have covenants to protect them, and all of the homes are similar. These homes hold true historical value. The Brookers recently added to their home, but they did not change the character of the home.

Mr. Arnold Reichert, 116 North Mall, stated he would like to see regulations to preserve and protect our area that is on the historical register. We have a desire to maintain that look. Dr. Ross said in a neighborhood meeting that he hoped people would buy in the area because they like the area, not so they can change it. He stated he feels he is a caretaker of his house for whoever gets it next. Our homes were built eighty years ago and there are no restriction or protections. He asked for help to keep this area historic.

Ms. Ann Walls, 303 Lake Street, stated she lives in the project area and the area is special. She stated she wants to maintain the charm, but is against strict rules due to the changes that have already been made. She stated she would like for the look to be kept.

Mr. Brice Faulker, 206 Rockridge, stated he is looking for general provisions, but not for strict regulations that prohibit growth. Trussville has progressed in the last several years, and young people who would not have come here ten years ago, are now moving back. People want to buy these homes and fix them up. He stated they should be able to do so without it being so restrictive.

Ms. Jane Alexander, 207 Lake Street, stated her parents moved into the Project when she was nine months old in 1942, and she lives in the house she grew up in. These homes were built by the Federal government and they are as important to the Federal government as they are to Trussville. She stated she has no problems with changes to later houses, but she would like the district kept unique. The Cahaba Project is the largest development of this type in the country. Most of these government projects were developed as small farms.

Ms. Laura Reichert, 116 North Mall, stated guests always tell them how charming their home is. She stated she liked the large lots where kids can play in their own yards.

Dr. Massey Willingham, 118 Meadow Lane and also 123 North Chalkville Road, stated a lot of the homes are eighty years old and in disrepair. He stated he would like to see people come in and take care of them. He stated he would like to see guidelines of what can and cannot be done. He suggested that there be a set of materials to be used. It is a charming neighborhood that is walkable. It looks like a Norman Rockwell picture. He stated he would like to see these guidelines specifically followed.

Mr. Ian Maddox, 112 Oak Street, stated he sees challenges and opportunities to bridge old and new - what is history and what is investment. He stated this seems as simple as having an architect prepare a design book of materials and styles to be used. There needs to be a balance.

Mr. Ryan Dawkins, 115 Lake Street, stated we need a committee to review plans. If the guidelines are too loose, people will not have to comply. We must have the right balance. We do not want to discourage the market for these homes. The community has common characteristics and is walkable. He stated he felt this can be continued with approximate guidelines. Also there needs to be a review before a home is knocked down. There needs to be a system of checks and balances.

Mr. Bob Davis, West Mall, stated in 1940 a professor from the University of Alabama was hired to study the four subsistence homestead villages in Jefferson County and one in Jasper. The book is out of print now, but the professor said the Trussville Cahaba Project could not be included in the book because it was too different from all of the others to compare. The professor proclaimed this development of low to mid-income citizens was the most attractive of all developments in the country. We need to put our foot down and stop the degradation. You can see fads in homes as you drive around. He stated he attended a meeting of the New Deal Preservation Society in Washington, D.C. They all said that they could not believe that the best example of these projects in the nation was in a small town in Alabama.

Mr. Brent Malone, Parkway Drive, stated he is a builder who has worked on historic homes in the Birmingham area. He stated he is interested in the future. He stated he believed we can come up with a way to keep the look by materials that are used. Most can be saved. You can make where you add on in keeping with the original style. Even though there are some foundation problems because the houses are low to the ground and many have no vapor barrier, most of the floors are flat and sound which is a testament to the quality workmanship in these homes.

Dr. Ray Ross, Lake Street, stated he and his wife moved here twelve years ago, and they chose the Cahaba Project because of its charm. They were not from here and had no connection with the Cahaba Project. His wife wanted a larger bedroom, so they added on, but they tried to make the addition look like it had always been there. By regulating roof slopes, metal roofing, and similar materials, the look can be preserved. Sometimes you must pay for charm, but this is not an impediment. We tried to make our home where it was attractive for others. We can have cosmetic changes and still retain the vivaciousness of the community.

Mr. Paul Carruth, 373 Brentwood Avenue, and owns 322 Brentwood Avenue in the Cahaba Project plus another address, stated the Cahaba Project is the heartbeat of Trussville. It presents both challenges and opportunities. If it is too restrictive, it will not attract young people. We need to conserve the character of the homes, not preserve them. We need guidelines.

Tandy Smith, 154 Rockridge Avenue and 213 Oak Street, stated her dad was the first baby born in the Cahaba Project. She stated that she wants to see the community as a whole stay as it is, but she worries about it being so restrictive that it becomes a nightmare to paint a home. She stated she hopes we can find some middle ground. She stated her house has been added on to five times by owners through the years. Her Oak Street property has not been and remains a three bedroom, one bath home. She stated she hoped we can find that fine line between easy to follow and maintaining integrity.

Mr. Jason Garner, 131 Parkway Drive, stated his house is not an original Project house and does not fit in. He stated he and his wife are in the process of working with an architect to expand and improve their home. He stated he feels the charm is the trees and the sidewalks. He stated his family is in the stone business and he would like to do stone, but stone does not fit the neighborhood. He asked what will be done about homes like his that are not original? He stated there are a lot of kids in the neighborhood and he loves the atmosphere of the area.

Mr. John Edge, 105 Lake Street, stated he moved to Trussville to the Project area. He stated he loves being able to walk the streets and the many children. He asked that we not restrict, but rather conserve what we have. We need to create a balance and encompass preservation ideas.

Mr. Ken Lancaster, 698 Chris Court, stated his family moved to the Cahaba Project in 1938 and he grew up here. He stated he understands that the moratorium is to give time to take ideas, but how do we define the area? Is it unfair if the home was built later? He stated the problem he has is when the government dictates what is change and what is beauty. In speaking of the Project atmosphere the lot sizes have been discussed. This area is zoned R-1 and it is already set. That zoning dictates the lot size - not whether there are restrictions or not. We are proud of the Project because we live here. This area is not important to others. You would think that the sky is falling with the current atmosphere to get something done. He stated he just did not see what everyone says that they fear happening.

Jace Walls, 314 Brentwood Avenue, stated he grew up in the Cahaba Project, but he had to convince his wife Jessica to move here. He stated they have just bought this home, and he hoped that we will err on the side of allowing improvements with like the historical features, but if strict guidelines are imposed it may be a hassle to improve a home and people may look elsewhere.

Ms. Laurie Brooker, 313 Brentwood, stated she just did a major renovation last year. She agreed that the charm of the area needs to be kept. She stated it seems that whoever is on Design Review at the time determines what you will be allowed to do. Maybe if a subcommittee of Cahaba homeowners could say what is in keeping with the neighborhood, it would help. Her house was three bedrooms and one bath when she bought it. Now it is five bedrooms and four baths, but they built back and the street view still fits the neighborhood. We need to work together and come up with a collaborative effort.

Ms. Jane Alexander, Lake Street, stated many of these homes have been changed and are beautiful and some are disasters. She challenged Mr. Lancaster's statement that the Cahaba Project is not important to anyone but us saying, there is a group of twenty people from a Shelby County historical group that want to see these Cahaba Project houses.

Mr. Barry Prince, 116 Parkway Drive, stated his home was originally a two bedroom, one bath home and is now 2800 square feet. He stated he is passionate about the area. He stated the plaster in these homes was done by a family member when they were built. He stated he has worked on many of these homes. He stated materials close to what is original need to be used.

Ms. Laura Reichert, North Mall, stated she hoped that there was not a misconception that the people who have lived here a long time, do not want changes made. They only want the changes made to be in keeping with the original style.

Mr. Ian Maddox stated there is precedent for historical preservation across the country. He stated he thinks we can work something out.

Ms. Donnette Plant, Lake Street, stated the materials and the original plans are at the archives at the Library. There are several templates to look at.

Mr. Jason Garner, Parkway Drive, asked was there anything that can be done to stop the bad? He stated he thought keeping the charm is important in adding and changing.

Mr. Jace Walls, Brentwood Avenue, asked what the next steps were?

Mr. Ken Lancaster, Chris Court, stated most do not know what materials these homes are made of. All of the wood siding is redwood. He stated he hoped it was not a mistake to name materials. He stated when the Cahaba Project was built, there were only three home colors - brick, white, or grey. All of the roofs were either red or green. How original do we want?

Councilman Taylor stated everyone loves the project. He stated he did not live in the Project. He lives in Tutwiler. He stated he got online to do research and there was very little about historical homes. Most had to do with commercial structures. We need facts on what makes something historical. There are different types of historical. Our Cahaba Project District was made historical. A common thread was that the historical significance was lost if there was a change in scope. The scope has been changed on many of these homes. We want to maintain the charm. There are a lot of different opinions about what is beautiful.

Dr. Ross, Lake Street, stated if someone built a glass house or a log cabin next door to Councilman Taylor in Tutwiler, he would not be happy about it.

Councilman Taylor agreed he would not be pleased, but stated their covenants deal more with the length of the house across the front and some brick. He stated one shortcoming of their covenants was that no dues were required. Currently about 75% pay dues, but there is no way to enforce on the ones who do not pay.

Mayor Choat stated he thought that we have heard what all the thoughts are. Some people want to preserve in different ways. The demolition of one of these homes is what got all of this started. We need guidelines as to when a home can or cannot be taken down, and how construction can be done in conformity with the area. We will take this into consideration. We need to bridge the gap between investment and history. He stated he thinks we can work together.

Councilman Steele, Rockridge Avenue, stated when he took a job with Trussville Vision, realtors took him and his wife all around Trussville, but they kept coming back to the Project. Their house had two bedrooms and one bath. When they had kids they sold that house and moved, and immediately regretted it. He stated he has now moved back to the Project. Is it the people, the houses, the trees? The most important thing is the community.

Councilman Freeman stated the development built here was not large farm lots due to the fact the homes were built on slag. There were comments that we need to conserve rather than preserve, not to be too restrictive, not want the houses that are there, and that we are all proud of the area because we live here. He stated he worked on downtown with the Redevelopment Authority. We need to research resources. We need to find them and go forward.

Councilman Cook stated he appreciated what some have done. He stated he has lived in the Project, has bought, remodeled, and sold houses in the Project. He thinks everyone has the right attitude.

Councilman Plant stated this has been a great meeting. Some balance is needed. There are many areas that would kill to have the problems that we have here. People now want to move back to our community. The old has been blended with the new in renovating Cahaba Elementary. Home ownership is important.

Mayor Choat stated we will decide when we will meet again, and let everyone know. He stated we will work swiftly.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:00.

Respectfully submitted,

Lynn B. Porter
City Clerk