



Betty Jo Mahan <bettyjo.mahan@knoxmpc.org>

710 & 712 Walnut Appeal - item #37 on June 13th MPC Agenda

1 message

Hollie Cook <hcook@knoxheritage.org>

Wed, Jun 12, 2013 at 2:27 PM

To: bettyjo.mahan@knoxmpc.org

Dear Commissioners,

I am writing in regard to the appeal of the Downtown Design Review Board's denial of a demolition permit for the buildings at 710 and 712 Walnut – item 37 on your agenda. Knox Heritage has been working diligently to design a solution that preserves those buildings until St. John's needs that space for expansion of its building in the future. We have strived to be sensitive to their desire to thrive as a congregation and appreciate what good stewards they have been of the cathedral. Our goal has been to find a solution that meets the accessibility and financial needs of the congregation while preserving the buildings. We believe the buildings are eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places and should be reviewed in light of their historical significance. They also play an important part in the streetscape of Walnut Street and the overall historic fabric of downtown.

Tomorrow we plan to request a postponement of this item in order to provide the time to meet with church officials again. Our goal is to craft a solution that benefits the church and downtown.

Background:

These structures were built circa 1920 and are similar in appearance to some of the buildings you may be familiar with on Market Square and in the 100 Block of Gay Street. We have seen so many historic downtown buildings demolished for projects people intend to build, but then circumstances change in the future and those projects are never built. The historic buildings are still gone rather than being put to good use. However, there are examples of taking the longer view and waiting to demolish buildings until plans for new construction are firm. There was a proposal a few years ago to demolish the Daylight Building for a tower that will never be built. Many people saw no value in the modest commercial building. It is now a financially viable structure that contributes to downtown and is loved by so many people. We think the community benefited by finding a solution for its reuse rather than opting for pre-emptive demolition.

We did our very best to listen to the church and develop a proposal to address the needs that were expressed to us. Our goal was to meet those needs while preserving the buildings. We sought a path that would be acceptable to all parties involved. We asked David Dewhirst to help us and that is why he made his proposal to lease the buildings from the church, finance the improvements himself and then manage the buildings on behalf of the church until such time as they needed the property for expansion. His proposal would relieve the church of the expenses related to the buildings and provide income to the church. Next, just as we provided a design solution to avoid demolition of most of the 500 Block of Gay Street, we designed a covered rear entrance to the church that addresses accessibility issues while making the parking lot more attractive. We have attached renderings of those proposed improvements.

In addition, Knox Heritage has agreed to not seek Historic Overlay Zoning for the buildings so that St. John's can expand into that space in the future if needed. We stand by that commitment.

This is the same process we undertake with all the historic buildings we seek to save for a future use. It is a process that has worked well and is intended to be cooperative and respectful to everyone involved. We look for solutions that benefit the owner while preserving the historic place. That is what we did with the 500 Block of Gay Street, the Walker-Sherrill House, the Williams House, the Knox County Courthouse, the Daylight Building, Oakwood School, The Alexander Inn, Westwood and many other buildings. That has been our mission for almost 40 years. We were formed in 1974 as so many downtown buildings were being demolished because no one valued them. We try to take a long-term, practical view and demonstrate how preservation is good for the city as it grows and attracts new investment and residents. This is especially true downtown since it holds a special place in the eyes of the community and contains a finite supply of intact buildings built more than 75 years ago. As the economy picks up steam and downtown becomes ever more popular, there will be intense pressure on that finite supply of buildings that contribute so much to making downtown an attractive and unique neighborhood that has become Knoxville's number one tourist attraction.

A big part of preservation is the continuing public conversation the community has about what is worth saving and that opinion changes over time. We strive to listen and participate in that conversation and understand there will be disagreements along way, but we try to act professionally and with civility since ultimately we all call this place home and we are all neighbors. We also understand that a place that isn't valued by one generation could be highly prized by future generations. We learned that lesson well with the Bijou Theatre, the Millers' Building, Market Square, the 100 Block, the Daylight Building, the Old City and many other places.

Thank you for your consideration. I am available to discuss any of the details of this proposal with you. Again, we ask that you consider postponing this item so we will have enough time to create a potential win-win for this situation.

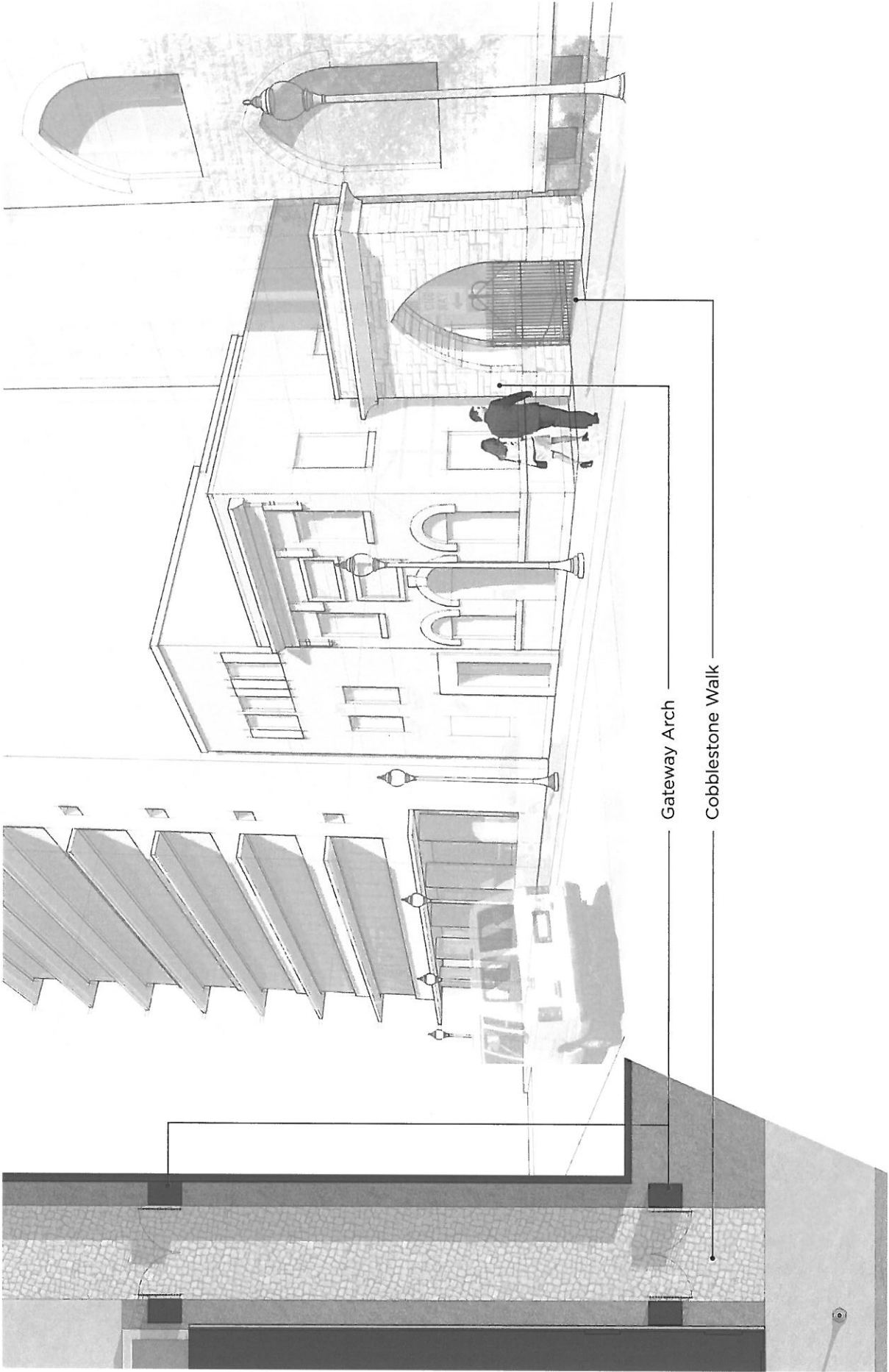
Sincerely,

Kim Trent

Executive Director

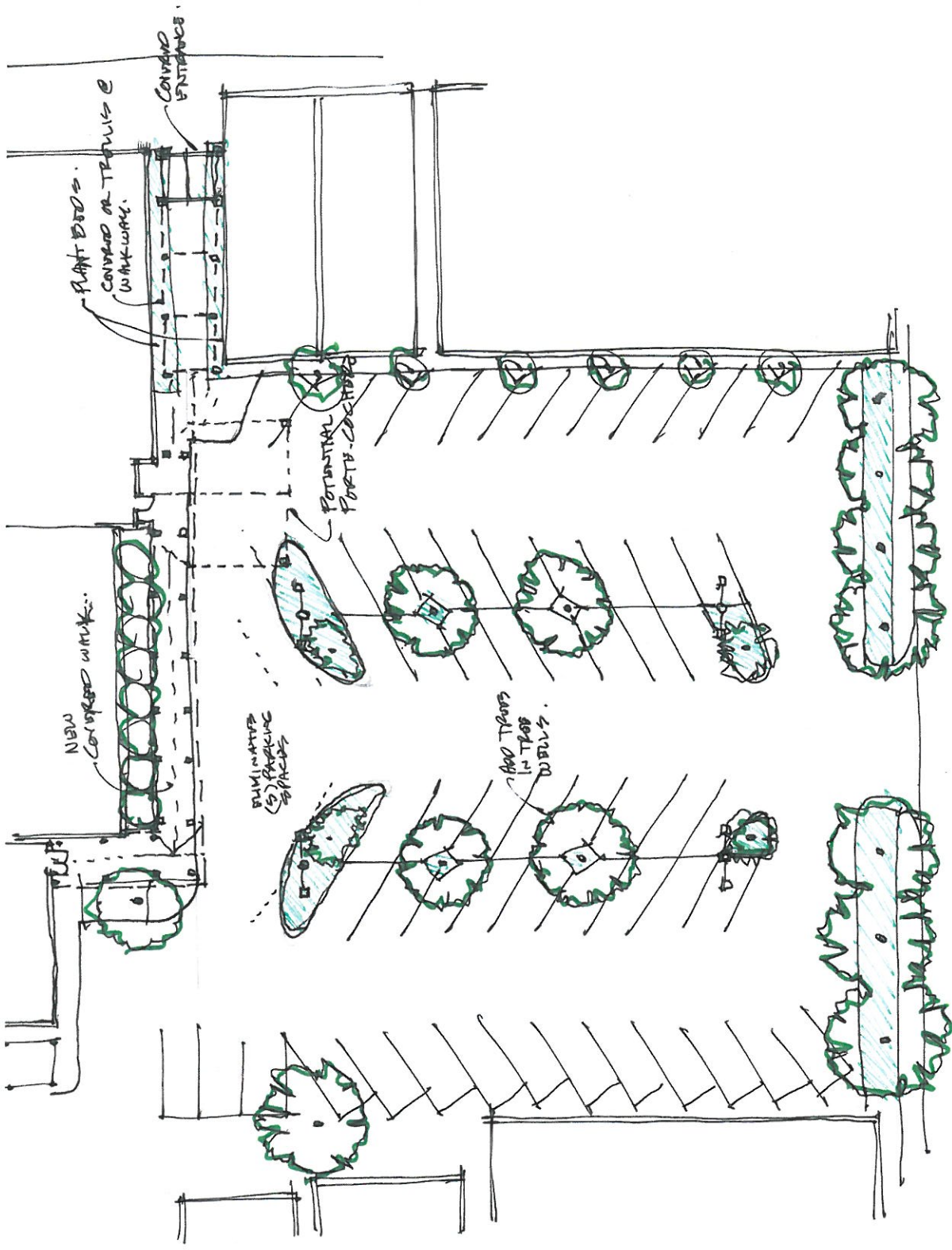
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(865) 523-8008



Gateway Arch

Cobblestone Walk



PLANT BEDS.
CONCREDE OR TRAMMIS @
CONCREDE WALKWAY.

CONCREDE ENTRANCE

NEW CONCRETE WALKWAY

POTENTIAL PORTA-COCHERE

ELIMINATE (5) PARKING SPACES

ADD TREES IN TREE DRILLS

PROPOSED SITE PLAN 2/16/2013

1" = 20'

W. CHURCH AVE



