



## **Public Hearing Regarding Friendship Baptist Church**

*Public Comments transcribed by Westside Communities Alliance*

Monday May 5<sup>th</sup>, 2014 6:30 pm

Georgia World Congress Center Building C Room C101

Hearing Officers:

Kevin Duvall – Georgia World Congress Center Authority, Chief Operating Officer

Frank Smith – State Properties Commission, Deputy Executive Director

News Sources present: WSB and Channel 46

**PUBLIC COMMENTS:** All those who signed in were given 5 minutes to share their comments publicly.

*\*All names may not be accurate and transcription is not verbatim*

1. Ron Shakir – What is the process of adding something to the Historic Register? What are the requirements for taking it off? What was the process of advertising this meeting and how was the location chosen? Who is paying for the demolition of the church? What about the air quality in the area during demolition?
2. Rhonda Carter: I, too, am concerned with the advertisement of this meeting. You could have made people feel more included. Regular people don't get the Daily Report. You could have done more to tell the community. The location and day were inconvenient. Friendship needs to be preserved. I'd like to see the historic nature of it maintained. This seems to have been a quick process once the money was available, especially cutting off easy access from MLK to downtown. It affects the businesses in the area, I know there is a pizza place, a wing place, and a tax place all right there at that intersection. The church is part of my family history. My great grandfather was the pastor for 62 years. The city/state keeps tearing down buildings. We always want the latest and greatest and can only point to where things used to be.
3. Nassir – Important institutions were established in Friendship. It is so historic (especially after slavery), we need to save it. When they wanted to wipe out a people, they destroyed all evidence of their existence. Football isn't more important, it not still be around in 30 years. History is important. Destroying the history is like destroying the people. It's no light thing to tear down important markers. You would think that African Americans in leadership would be more respectful than just following corporate interests. I came to Atlanta because of the African American success in the area. But now, actions aren't good for the people as a whole.
4. Kyle Kessler – I'm not surprised by the plan to tear down the building. My concerns are as follows. 1) The notification system. It wasn't posted until Friday afternoon where people have been instructed to look (on the GWCC website) for information. 2) Plans to cut off MLK were drawn before negotiations were entered into about the church property. 3) The site design isn't meant for its constraints. 4) Billboards and cell towers can remain but the church has to go? Is not possible to salvage and relocate pieces of the church? We need to put up a historical marker. We need to work better to educate the community, a good start is responsible advertising of meetings such as this one. Friendship is the second oldest church in the city. It's over 100 years



old (older than American football itself) and the stadium is only slated to be useful for 25-30 years. May is National Historic Preservation Month in Georgia. *Reads the proclamation for National Historic Preservation by Governor Nathan Deal:* "Historic preservation is an effective tool for economic development, tourism promotion, growth management, neighborhood revitalization, fostering local pride, and maintaining overall community character while enhancing livability; and historic preservation can benefit Americans of all ages, walks of life, and ethnic backgrounds in urban and rural communities across the nation; and it is important to celebrate the role of history in our lives and the contributions made by dedicated individuals in helping to preserve the tangible aspects of the heritage that has shaped us a people." This claims that preservation provides all the benefits you claim the stadium will provide.

5. Archbishop Lewis – I'm a native of the area. It's extremely difficult to think of Atlanta without Friendship Baptist Church. Spelman was founded in the basement, Morehouse was housed there after it moved from Augusta. As an advocate of the community and the church, I can say that this crowd is not an indication of how many people have feelings on this issue. God only knows what the church was told about their options were to sell. That building should be preserved as a facility. We never should have allowed this to happen. The people here found out about this meeting at the ninth hour. Congregation members of Friendship did not even know. The new stadium present major air pollution issues. At one point, after heavy rain storms, there was a flood in Vine City and thanks to the antiquated city sewer systems, residents were forced to swim through raw sewage. Why didn't we have a meeting like this for the demolition of Mt. Vernon?
6. Molly Woo – The only reason this was put up on the news today at all was seemingly because I called the news station and they probably thought I was a reporter. If you wanted people to know, they would be here. I'm wearing a t-shirt with the announcement printed on the back because it is one of the only places you can actually find it. This was a deliberate attempt to hide the fact that we are destroying an important piece of history. MLK went to Morehouse, where would the nation be without Martin Luther King Jr? Maynard Jackson's daddy was a pastor at Friendship Baptist Church (and where would we be without his leadership? The city wouldn't be as successful without him). Friendship Baptist Church isn't local history or state history, its world history. The history of this structure is immeasurable. The congregation got the money because otherwise they would have used eminent domain to take it and gotten no money. The structure should remain as a place of cultural heritage. I'm white and I live in Buckhead and I'm here with friends because it's important. Friendship Baptist Church is the saving grace of our city. Even the name is important, friendship. This shirt is like a cast that people wear when they break their bones and people sign it. People can sign this shirt too. We can build up and we can heal from their attempt to cut off our legs.
7. Tracy Bates – Thanks for indulging us in these comments because we know this is just a check off your list of things to do. The mitigation of the church being just a picture in a picture book when we have the actual structure in place is ridiculous. What can I possibly say to change the course of this train? You sit here and you listen respectfully and you do nothing.
8. Roy Griffin – Without these churches there aren't places to meet. My family comes out of Friendship Baptist Church. We have generations now that don't care about what happened before they were born. If we let



Friendship Baptist Church, what comes next? We keep removing churches that are supposed to be sacred places for everybody to meet.

9. Councilman Michael Julian Bond – I am a lifelong resident of the area. I was approached by the group to build the stadium on the north site and approved it. I personally thought it would be good for my church (Antioch). I supported the removal of Mt. Vernon because that congregation approved it. I never thought that this would be a conversation. I remember people saying that purchasing Friendship Baptist Church was unfathomable. Friendship is an irreplaceable jewel. I work at City Hall across from Trinity Church. There are plenty of churches from before the Civil War in downtown, integrated with the other buildings. It is overwhelmingly saddening for our city. It is our landscape. It's odd to not see Mt. Vernon now when I drive by. It is sad and disappointing that Friendship decided to sell their building. No matter how glorious or wondrous this new facility is, there will always be a gap. It is a sad situation but there should be a historical marker on the site. The left turn to MLK needs to be returned. Department of Public Works came up with that idea, but policy makers did not. It negatively impacts people. With all the engineering expertise that's going into the building, we can engineer a left turn.
10. Chioke Perry – As a lifelong resident of Atlanta, this is extremely hurtful to me. It shows that in 2014, I reside in a shallow democracy. I wasn't planning on speaking tonight until I heard others comments. I think it's the heart of the people here that matter. I've been reminded to pray for Atlanta and its people. I challenge, on a human rights level, (I would love it to be a human rights city) will we continue to go without Friendship on our quest for capitalism? The south site is farther from Georgia Tech. I knew the north site wouldn't happen because it was so close to Georgia Tech. The universe will do some self-correcting. We are so shallow in how we practice democracy. We trample on the rights of the people. Yet, we hypocritically open a Civil rights Museum on property donated by Coca Cola.
11. Tillman Ward – We desire to be a 21<sup>st</sup> century city. We want to make the greatest investment ever. It was supposed to be an investment in human capital and the built environment. In a 1 mile radius of the structure, there are 7 man-made unoccupied environments for instance Fountain Hall, Paschal's etc. They need to be re-used. Some young minds can surely envision a solution. GWCC has been a good neighbor. But the design for the new stadium does not benefit the commercial westside. It's a great building but where are the trails/walks/promenades we were shown?

Closing Comments: This was put in the Daily report in accordance with OCGA 12-16-5. Comment will be accepted until Thursday afternoon, by e-mail (media@gwcc.com), or mailed or hand-delivered to "Georgia World Congress Center, Attn: Administration/Friendship Church, 285 Andrew Young International Blvd NW, Atlanta GA 30313-1591".

We will take comments to the Director of GWCC Frank Poe and the Executive Director of State Properties Commission Steve Stancil. This was not videotaped, we will share our notes with them.

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