

# Akron Documenters

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## Regular Meeting

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Agency: Akron Urban Design & Historic Preservation Commission

Date: June 11, 2024

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### Summary

- Three (of seven) [Urban Design and Historic Preservation](#) commissioners were present at the June 11 regular meeting. At least four commissioners must be present to vote, [which is called a quorum](#). Voting will be postponed until the July meeting unless posted otherwise.
- The three commissioners present spoke in favor of the partial demolition of the former [Firestone Tire and Rubber building at 1200 Firestone Parkway](#). The commission plans to roll this vote to July when enough commission members are in attendance.
- The Brown House at [242 Lake Street](#) was [approved for historic designation](#) at the City Council meeting on June 10, following approval by the Urban Design and Historic Preservation Commission meeting on April 2. This application prompted the commission to consider revisions to the application and submission requirement forms to facilitate applications from residents.

### Follow-Up Questions

- What is the process for revising nomination forms for local historic landmark designation?

### Notes

- Start time: 9:08 a.m.

- Urban Design and Historic Preservation Commissioners Elizabeth Kukwa, Elizabeth Corbin Murphy, and Mark Schweitzer were in attendance.
- Murphy opened the meeting and said at least four commissioners must be in attendance to vote. She noted only three commissioners were present. Voting is postponed until the next meeting in July.

### **Demolition of Firestone Tire and Rubber Company Plant 1 building**

- Kurt Mulhauser from the [Planning and Urban Development Department](#) presented the Certificate of Appropriateness to demolish a portion of the former Firestone Tire and Rubber building at 1200 Firestone Parkway.
  - The City of Akron is applying for a Certificate of Appropriateness to demolish a portion of the former Firestone Tire and Rubber Company Plant 1 building. The building was listed as an Akron Historic Landmark in 2013. The building was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 2014.
  - Plant 1 was built in 1910 as a factory and office building. According to the original nomination, the building was originally 19 bays wide, 18 bays deep and four stories tall. Soon after completion, additional bays and a fifth floor were added. Before 1916, additional bays were added, as well as a new entrance placed at the base of an eight-story clock tower, producing the existing 46-bay, 5-story front façade. The entire front building, including the clock tower, will be retained. The rear three wings (an aerial view of the building shows that the building is actually four side-by-side wings) will be demolished. Demolition is requested because they are unable to find a buyer to renovate the structure and there are high levels of contamination and asbestos. The City of Akron has owned the property since 2010.
  - The City's Historic Preservation Ordinance states that the Urban Design and Historic Preservation Commission shall approve a Certificate of Appropriateness for demolition when A) the historic landmark is so deteriorated that its integrity has been irretrievably lost; or B) the structure is a secondary one that lacks historic or architectural significance or does not occupy a major portion of the historic landmark; or C) retention of the historic landmark is not technically or economically feasible; and D) the commission, after thorough investigation, determines that there is no feasible alternative to demolition. The approval or denial of the Certificate of Appropriateness is then forwarded to Akron City Council. Any applicant

for a Certificate of Appropriateness wishing to appeal the denial of that Certificate of Appropriateness may do so by requesting a public hearing before Akron City Council.

- Murphy opened the floor for public comment and asked if anyone was in favor of this project.
  - Pat Dailey, a representative from Miramar Realty, the neighboring building owners of the [County Office Building](#), stated that they are in favor of this project. They are happy to see the front portion of the facade remain. He expressed concern about dust and contaminants coming into the neighboring buildings during demolition and asked that things be properly coordinated before demolition begins.
  - Schweitzer approved.
  - Murphy had questions about the city's Historic Preservation Ordinance, which states that the Urban Design and Historic Preservation Commission shall approve a Certificate of Appropriateness for demolition, specifically: "They must prove the historic landmark is not technically or economically feasible **and** D) the Commission, after thorough investigation, determines that there is no feasible alternative." Murphy asked to address this ordinance with the city, and said, "This is a perfect example of why we need to address this ordinance [...] according to the ordinance, you haven't proven we can do it and meet the ordinance. I would like the city to address these questions verbally."
  - Bradford Beckert, the city's business retention and expansion manager, spoke in favor of the demolition. "I've been associated with this building for all my life," Beckert said. Developers have gone through the building to see if it could be reused throughout the years, and they said because of how the building is set up architecturally, it is of no use architecturally, because it is built like a spider. You cannot have residential, daycare, or anything having to do with children in the building. Possible reuses would be manufacturing, but black mold and asbestos make it highly improbable and expensive to do right now. It's very difficult to have the building operate at today's standard, especially in terms of energy efficiency, according to Beckert.
  - Beckert said that they have applied for grants for demolition and asbestos abatement. Transformers have PCP oil and need to be

removed carefully. Vagrants are infiltrating the building and creating environmental hazards. Structurally, the basement is not in good shape. Some of the columns on the upper floors are crumbling, and the metal in the roof has rotted. This has drywall and asbestos on the inside.

- Murphy asked if Beckert is working with [Ohio's State Historic Preservation Office](#) in accordance with [State of Ohio Section 106](#), and for the status of this process.
- Beckert is working with Ohio's State Historic Preservation Office, and they are of the same opinion. If the city can get a body like this to sign off on the appropriateness, they will sign off on the demolition application and they can proceed with that.
- After hearing from Beckert, Murphy closed the hearing, as they could not vote on it without a quorum.
- Murphy stated she believes this is a reasonable solution for saving the face of Firestone and Firestone Mile.

### **Brown Family House historic designation**

- The next agenda item discussed was the Brown Family House. On April 2, the commission approved the historic designation of the Brown Family House. The application passed at the June 10 City Council meeting, where Chair John Wheeler approved three items.
  - The council requested the Urban Design and Historic Planning Commission look over the [application](#), emphasizing criteria A4: "Exemplifies the area, property or site of the cultural, political, economic, social or historic heritage of the city, state or nation." At the time of the City Council meeting, the applicant agreed to have A4 included.
  - Kukwa and Schweitzer agree that the three criteria the commission indicated are appropriate. Murphy proposed A4 for consideration. If the Summit Lake neighborhood becomes a district, the commission could reconsider additional criteria.
  - The commission motioned to include A4 in the application criteria for historic designation, which has already been approved.
  - Murphy further discussed the application, in terms of administrative concerns that came up at the [April 2 meeting](#). Kukwa proposed instructions to be included in the actual application, so no one has to search and there is less room for error on the applications.
  - Mulhauser said that the form is dated, and he would like to include instructions for attaching relevant materials, as more information is often

needed. He said that for an average citizen to fill this out on their own, they need to include as much information as they can with attachments.

- Murphy said that a fellow commissioner plans to submit a project and that she has asked him to wait for the new form so they can test it.

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**Notes to reader:** Unless quotation marks are used, all text is paraphrased. If you believe anything in these notes is inaccurate, please email us at [documenters@signalakron.org](mailto:documenters@signalakron.org) with "Correction Request" in the subject line.