

REPORT OF THE HUMAN AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

FEBRUARY 18, 2004

A meeting of the Human Affairs Committee was held Wednesday, February 18, 2004 at 7:40 p.m. in the Aldermanic Chamber.

Chairman Lori Cardin presided.

Members of the Committee present: Alderman Marc W. Plamondon, Vice Chair
Alderman-at-Large James R. Tollner
Alderman Kevin E. Gage
Alderman David D. Lozeau

Members not in Attendance:

Also in Attendance: Alderman-at-Large Paula I. Johnson
Paul Newman, Manager, Urban Programs

COMMUNICATIONS

From: Alderman Lori Cardin, Chair, Human Affairs Committee
Re: Allocation of CDBG Funds

**MOTION BY ALDERMAN PLAMONDON TO ACCEPT, PLACE ON FILE AND CONCUR WITH CHAIR CARDIN IN DESIGNATING THE MAXIMUM AMOUNT OF 15% OF THE CDBG TO FUND LOCAL NON-PROFIT PROGRAMS AS ALLOWED BY THE GRANT
MOTION CARRIED**

From: Paul Newman, Manager, Urban Programs
Klaas Nijhuis, AIA, Deputy Manager, Urban Programs
Re: Community Development Block Grant: Emergency Repairs, Adult Learning Center, 4 Lake Street

MOTION BY ALDERMAN PLAMONDON TO ACCEPT, PLACE ON FILE AND CONCUR IN FUNDING THE EMERGENCY REPAIRS AT THE ADULT LEARNING CENTER FROM THE FY04 CONTINGENCY ACCT

ON THE QUESTION

Paul Newman

We brought this matter to the committee in December, and the committee vote in favor of supplementing their funding for this emergency work. The motion as we recommended was FY '02 we find out that activity had been closed and the federal electronic management system is burdensome or impossible to re-open inasmuch as the Adult Learning Center is funded in each of the succeeding years and there are funds available in an open account we ask that you concur simply in moving that approval from FY '02 to FY '04.

Chairman Cardin

Is there any other discussion?

MOTION CARRIED

MOTION BY ALDERMAN PLAMONDON THAT THE RULES BE SO FAR SUSPENDED AS TO ALLOW FOR THE INTRODUCTION OF A COMMUNICATION RECEIVED AFTER THE AGENDA WAS PREPARED
MOTION CARRIED

From: Rev. Fr. Richard H. Dion, Pastor; St. Louis de Gonzague Parish
Re: St. Francis Xavier Properties

MOTION BY ALDERMAN PLAMONDON TO ACCEPT AND PLACE ON FILE

ON THE QUESTION

Alderman Tollner

I have a request of the Chair if she would be willing to read the memo from Father Dion for a number of people that may not have been able to make the meeting tonight or are watching it on television, and then hopefully the committee will be comfortable in allowing some public comment tonight given the fact that when we discuss a little later on the request for I think it was \$8,000 out of CDBG for the study – there may be people in the audience both pro and con that would like an opportunity to speak on it.

Chairman Cardin

Certainly – I would be happy to.

The letter is dated February 11, 2004 – “Dear Mr. Mayor, I pray this finds you well. We have received your letter and the City’s interim report concerning the procurement of St. Francis Xavier properties. We are grateful for the appointed Task Force and their continued efforts to assure the preservation of the building. Recognizing the need to scrutinize budgets and acquire assistance from other venues and the time frame involved in this endeavor has led the Financial and Pastoral Councils to advise me of the parish’s immediate concerns.

Thought it may be of great value to have the city of Nashua retain the building of St. Francis, we are in no financial position at present to continue to incur costs for maintenance and taxes on the property. We have advised the Cabinet Secretary of Real Estate, Mr. Paul Harrington to seek immediate approval from the Bishop of Manchester to put the property on the open market.

Though this decision may impact the city’s desire to continue its efforts – it must be understood that the parish community has waited patiently without resolve – for the city’s decision. Should the city be interested in the immediate procurement of the property it may do so by contacting our office through which the efforts will be coordinated with the Diocesan Office of Real Estate. Please be assured of our continued gratitude for your tireless efforts for the city of Nashua.
Respectfully Yours in Christ, Ref. Fr. Richard H. Dion, Pastor, St. Louis de Gonzague Parish”

Alderman Plamondon

If I might add to that as well in this week's parish bulletin of St. Louis de Gonzague – if I could read this as well – this obviously goes out to all of the parishioners of St. Louis, which now includes those of St. Francis – St. Francis Xavier update – many have asked what is going to happen with St. Francis Xavier. The financial council is working closely with Father Richard and Deacon David to assure the quickest resolution to that issue. The Mayor has asked for further delay in the city's decision as to whether or not they are interested in procuring the property. The council has advised Father Richard that we can no longer wait for the city's resolve as to their intentions. It is suggested that the properties be liquidated in an open market forum coordinated through the Diocese Office of Real Estate. – Again this is the memo that goes out to all the parishioners. Thank you.

Chairman Cardin

The motion before us is to accept the communication and place it on file. Is there any other discussion?

MOTION CARRIED

UNFINISHED BUSINESS – RESOLUTIONS

R-04-09

Endorsers: Alderman-at-Large James R. Tollner
Alderman Marc W. Plamondon
Alderman Lori Cardin

**AMENDING THE FISCAL YEAR 2002 COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT BLOCK GRANT
TO ADD A STUDY OF THE POTENTIAL RE-USES OF THE SAINT FRANCIS XAVIER
CHURCH**

Chairman Cardin

This Resolution was re-referred to this committee at the full Board meeting of 2-10-04.

MOTION BY ALDERMAN GAGE TO RECOMMEND FINAL PASSAGE

ON THE QUESTION

Alderman Tollner

I would like to discuss it, and maybe see a show of hands if there is anybody out there that would like to speak to it. I think the Chairman of the Task Force is here as well as the Chairperson of the fundraising efforts as well.

Alderman Plamondon

I would like to add – in our packet again this week, and I believe it is the second time that I have seen it in writing, memo from the Office of the Bishop of the Diocese of Manchester dated February 27, 2003 – I am just going to state in the last paragraph and I will quote “I need to tell you that using the church for any type of religious or worship facility is not an option. We will be open to proposals for what to do, but it may not serve as a Catholic Church, mission, or shrine.”

It is signed Bishop McCormick. I just want to have that for the public record so people know the Diocese' position.

Chairman Cardin

I still think that the \$8,000 that is being requested is a reasonable amount of money for the city to pursue re-use of this building. I am disappointed that it was sent back from the full Board.

Alderman Gage

I also came with a bullet notice to read into the record. This has been a very, very difficult period of time for a lot of the constituents of my ward, especially those folks – a lot of them that are sitting here tonight have been sitting through this process, coming to the Friday morning Task Force meetings along with everything else that has been going on. I was shocked and disappointed when we sat here at the full Board and were told that this isn't something that we can do right now, that we are interfering with another process. I don't think in my opinion, and I am not sure exactly what the Chairman of the Foundation is going to say, but I believe he will agree with me that we are both working somewhat to the same purpose of saving that structure. The purpose obviously for the Foundation is that they would like to see it be a religious use again. I have no problem with that. I support that 100% if that can be done. Reality to me at the moment is that is an extremely difficult road to travel, and I commend them very much for their dedication to doing so.

I do hope the Chairman will allow public comment due to the fact that we have several folks that I know would like to speak. I want to make sure that everyone is aware that I do support the efforts of the Foundation. I still think that my view of the Mayor's Task Force is a safety net. We have already seen one of the parishes that was closed sold. There may be somebody else that may come in to buy this parish that the Diocese may say we will sell it to them because they are the high bidder over what the Foundation could do. I really hope that doesn't happen, but somebody made the comment in the past that the wrecking ball is not at the door. When you receive a letter like this from the Pastor, which would not be released without the Bishop consenting to it and the Chancellor and the Auxiliary Bishop; the hierarchy in Manchester has to okay something like this coming to the Mayor's office. I certainly think that says to all of us that the Diocese is looking as quickly as possible to move this piece of property and not necessarily do the right thing at the moment. They mentioned the tax issue, and they were very upset when we sent them a tax bill. I know that having spoken to representatives of the Diocese. I just feel it is a very difficult situation. Thank you.

Chairman Cardin

With some latitude from the committee I would like to open it for public discussion. What I would like to do is maybe take 1 for and 1 against and go back and forth that way to give everyone a fair chance to be heard.

Alderman Tollner

I would agree with that. Maybe the first two speakers – I think that Mo Arel and Randy Wilbert probably are the point people for both projects. Maybe they could start off and then anybody else could follow.

Maurice Arel, Mayor's Task Force for St. Francis Xavier

Thank you very much Madam Chairman and members of the committee. I am one of the volunteers that serves on the committee appointed by the Mayor to determine a re-use for St. Francis Church. Peter LaBombarde is also a member of the committee who is here tonight; Mr. Guthers is a member of the committee and is here tonight. I know Kathy Hersh was here. John Mitterholzer is also a member of the committee and is here. Alderman Tollner and Alderman Gage have served diligently on the committee at our Friday morning meetings – although this month we have changed it to Thursday, but we have cancelled tomorrow's meeting so I hope nobody will be here.

The goal as set forth by the Mayor was to determine an alternate, economically viable use for St. Francis and to preserve the structure that is there. I would like to ask Peter **LaBombarde** after I speak to – Peter is an expert in church architecture, and can talk about the architecture of this church and some of the details that are here that are not found anywhere else – just look at all of the churches in Nashua – you won't find another one like it. Timothy McCormack who was the architect built a number of churches between the 1890s and the 1930s. The committee did have the opportunity to visit a church built by Mr. McCormack up in Maine – a church which has been closed by the Diocese of Maine and is being converted for a re-use – it is being converted to a French Heritage Center, meeting space, and in their case they are also going to use it for weddings and funerals, which you can do and the Bishop in Maine is allowing them to do that.

We also had the opportunity to visit churches that have been closed for over 10 or more years and took a look at the deterioration – pigeons flying inside, broken windows, total falling down of the plaster in the inside. That can happen if you leave a facility like that unheated and unattended.

The committee is extremely concerned that we don't leave it for too long a period. We know that there was some damage done to St. Casimir, the rectory – a couple of young men went in there and sprayed and broke the glass inside – all the cabinets and the glasswork, and at the same time sprayed the whole facility with fire extinguishers in there and created quite a bit of damage. We are happy to say the Nashua Police caught them and they will be fined and may even go to jail. You wouldn't want that to happen to the inside of St. Francis. The Diocese has been very, very diligent in taking down the statues, the crosses, and a lot of the Catholic memorabilia and storing it so that it will be kept safely, but if you were to walk into the church now you would see that it is very barren compared to what it was at its last mass.

Our study group is looking to determine an alternate re-use that is economically viable. To do that we do need the re-use study. We have received a \$2,000 grant. That was matched by the city for \$2,000 and we need the other \$8,000 to do it. Though we know that the St. Francis Foundation, another group, is attempting to raise money so that they can continue to use the church as a house of worship. We support them and wish them all the luck in the world. We will do whatever we can to help them. However our charge was based on a portion of the letter just read by the Alderman from Ward 4 where it says that the church cannot be used for any religious worship facility or cannot serve as a Catholic Church, a mission or a shrine. Hopefully the Foundation could raise enough money and get the Bishop to reverse that, but if not I believe that the work that we are doing will work towards the preservation of that facility. It needs to be preserved.

If the Foundation is successful the work that we do will also give them some ideas so they can

generate some revenue to also help to maintain it because the parish when it was active had trouble in a capital campaign to raise the kind of money that it needed to do renovation. The Foundation hopefully will be successful to do that, but having a source of revenue not just from parishioners I think would be very helpful. I look at our study as a compliment to their work if they are successful and if they are not successful as an alternate to tearing the building down. Can it happen? Absolutely it can happen. There are great churches in the City of Lowell that have been torn down. Other churches in the State of Massachusetts have been torn down. Very shortly the Diocese of Boston is going to announce the closing of a lot of churches and some of them may not survive the chopping block.

I think our study is important. I think it is important not only for the preservation based on our charge, but also if the Foundation is successful then I think it can be helpful to them. The letter that you received from Father Dion – I met with the Mayor this afternoon – he asked me if I would come in, and he gave me the letter and said what should I do with it. I said give it to the Board of Aldermen right away so that they will have it for tonight's meeting, and he chose to do that. I think that the sentiment that is important is that they have advised the Cabinet Secretary, Mr. Paul Harrington, to seek immediate approval from the Bishop of Manchester to put the property on the open market. The decision hasn't been made totally at this time although I agree with Alderman Plamondon that I am sure the Bishop was aware of the letter, but the Bishop will have to make that decision. Then putting it on the market it will take some time I believe for the church to sell. St. Casimir has taken time to sell. Our committee hopes that if we get this approved at the next Aldermanic meeting we could have the study done and report our findings to the Mayor and to this Board by the month of June. I am certain that Alderman Tollner and Alderman Gage would be thrilled not to have anymore meetings, and I am sure that the committee would be thrilled not to have any more meetings either. We think if you are interested in the preservation of this facility we need to do this study and we need to get it started immediately. Thank you very much. I would be very happy to answer questions.

Chairman Cardin

Thank you. Does anyone have any questions? Thank you very much.

Randy Wilbert, President of the St. Francis Xavier Church Foundation, 221 Main Street

Before I start, with your permission I would like to distribute a couple of brochures that we have so that while I am making some comments you can take a look at the church.

I appreciate the comments of Mayor Arel. The first thing I want to make clear is I think we are all on the same side here. I want to make sure that no one thinks that we are opposing the city or that the city is opposing us or we are opposing the Task Force. We want to preserve the structure. The only difference is that our organization wants to preserve the structure as a church and as a center for the community for the French Hill community. That includes having religious services, ecumenical services, as well as cultural events such as chamber music, choirs, there is a pre-school there on site right now which we want to continue and maybe expand. These are what we want to do for that community – that special community of Nashua. I am not so sure whether the city could do the same things if it were to own the church or the structure.

The reason why we oppose the grant – it is not because we want to hurt what the city is doing, but in our fundraising efforts we have had a difficult time trying to justify to people what we are doing versus what the city is doing. It has interfered with some of our efforts in trying to raise funds by people saying well the city is doing this why should I contribute to you. We try to explain that we think we have a different mission. We think we can do something different than what the city can do, and we like to explain to people that we can provide services to the French Hill community as well as to greater Nashua that I don't think the city can do or perhaps would want to do.

That is why we have asked the Task Force, and I think I have appeared before the Task Force this summer in July and also ask this committee to give us some more time to work this out. Our fundraising efforts have been successful in our first phase – certainly not as – we have not reached our goal as of yet – we have made inquiries nationwide and we think we will be successful. However, if we are competing with the city it is hurting us. On the other hand, I don't want the wrecking ball. We want the structure preserved. If we can't do it then of course we want the city to do it. We are on a parallel track here. I think we have the same goals in mind. However, in order for us to fulfill what we want to do with this lovely structure – with this church – we would like for the city to give us time – give us another 90 days to see whether we can fulfill what our mandate is. That is why we are asking for the city to hold its proceedings, let us proceed with what we want to do, and we can come back and tell you whether we can do it or not.

If we are competing with each other – you may be successful, you probably will be successful because of the power and purse, but you are going to hurt us and our trying to do what we want to do. I am disappointed that Father Dion would send a letter to the Board of Aldermen and certainly not copy us and let us know what is going on, but I should not be surprised by what the Diocese does anymore. We have met with Father Dion on several occasions. It is surprising that the Diocese with a stroke of the pen can say we will wipe 100 years or more of devotion, faith, and the lucre of the people who gave to that church, but I guess that is what happens in this day and age.

The city, the Task Force, wants to preserve French Hill, the church – we do too, but we want to preserve it in a different way. We want to use it for the community in ways that the city probably cannot use it. I know in the past I think people have cited St. Curin's was a lovely church that is now a community center, but this is St. Curin's calendar for this coming year – on May 11th we will have Bobo's interactive children's magic show and on June 12th we will have a tribute to the Beatles. I guess I would hate to see Bobo's interactive children's magic show come to St. Francis.

There are others who would like to speak about several of these issues that we have talked about and I would like to give them the time to do that, but I will certainly answer any questions that you have.

Chairman Cardin

I guess I am a little bit confused about what you are looking to do as opposed – first of all what Alderman Plamondon read into the record was the letter from the Diocese saying that the wouldn't allow this to be used for religious or worship facility. He is saying it is not an option. In

your testimony today you are saying that you wanted to use it for religious purposes. I am conflicted here. I am not sure of what your goal is if they are saying it is not an option and you are ...

Randy Wilbert

You are right. That letter is dated February 23rd of last year. It is an old letter. Frank Bonner is here who I think spoke with the Bishop about this, and he could make comments to you that is not set in stone. The Bishop himself has spoken with Frank about perhaps there is leeway into what he said in that letter. He can answer that question better than I can.

Chairman Cardin

The letter we got today seems to almost confirm what they said a year ago. I am a little bit confused as to what your goal is and what you think can happen.

Randy Wilbert

We have a goal – whether we are going to achieve it or not I don't know yet, but our goal of course is to – this was a moving target, which we have been working with the Diocese for the past year to try to attain. Right now our goal is to purchase the structure just like the city wants to buy the structure or I am not sure how you would ...

Chairman Cardin

I am not sure the city wants to buy the structure. I think the city wants to study what the re-use would be at this point. I don't know that there is an interest on the city's part of buying the structure.

Randy Wilbert

Who would own the structure then?

Chairman Cardin

That is yet to be determined. The city at this point just wants to study what the re-use could be.

Randy Wilbert

I understand that, but someone has to own it, and I don't think the Diocese is going to own it and allow the city to use it.

Alderman Tollner

The intent of the study is for the city to look at whether it is viable if the Diocese would donate the church to the city. I don't think right now we are in any financial position to purchase the facility. I do know that the Diocese is at a point right now where they want to move, which I

agree with you I don't agree with many things the Diocese has been doing lately – they have been dragging their feet for a year and a half and all of a sudden we get a letter that – the first time we saw it too tonight is when we came in the Chamber as well – that they are going to put it up for sale. I think that is probably just a tactic that they are using right now.

To answer your question in the end yeah I think the city would probably take possession of it and in turn legally own it if that works out, but we are getting ahead of ourselves, because that is what this \$8,000 is for is for us to take a look at the condition of the church, do a feasibility study of what it could be used for, and then try and make an educated decision from that. We don't want it to become an apartment, a condo development – that would be the worst thing that I could ever imagine happen to that glorified structure. Really it is a monument – we keep talking about it like it is a church – it is a monument because there are no other buildings like it in the city. I guess the one thing I wanted to add was the committee did step aside I think for – I don't know exactly – I think it was 2 months, and that came last year when your group requested that we did it, and I did bring that to the committee, and we did cancel meetings for about I think it was 2 months – 8 weeks something like that. I am kind of betwixed in between as far as if we were to step aside for 90 days and the Diocese moves forward to try and sell it and in those 3 months they get a buyer the city loses, your group loses, but more importantly the people that have practiced there for years and their lives are wrapped around that building lose.

Randy Wilbert

You are absolutely right and thank you for making those comments because that is my concern too. I don't want us to be opposed to each other and then we both lose and next thing you know we have a big sandlot there. If we don't succeed we certainly want the city to succeed.

Alderman Tollner

I am in favor of spending the money to look at what we can do with it. At the same time I think I have spoken with a number of people and fully understand the mission that your group has is to raise money. I am perplexed by how we will get the Diocese to change their opinion as far as masses and religious events taking place at that facility when they say they are not interested in that.

Randy Wilbert

You are right. Maybe there will be some changes in the Diocese before that happens and we will be able to ...

Alderman Tollner

Hopefully there will be changes in the Diocese regardless of whether ...

Randy Wilbert

Maybe we can revisit that situation. I don't want to get ahead of myself. I am not sure under your rules of order whether you can even put a footnote and say we vote the funds, but we wholeheartedly support what the St. Francis Xavier Foundation is doing because I just want to make sure that we are not stepping on each other's toes. I don't want to slow the city down and

hurt the city if they have to take over the property, but on the other hand I don't want to hurt us either.

Alderman Tollner

I would be very supportive of that – that we will go forward with this study, but we wholeheartedly support the efforts of the group that is raising the money.

Randy Wilbert

I appreciate that.

Chairman Cardin

I think it is important to go back to what Mr. Arel said – he doesn't see that there is a competition. He sees it as complimenting what your group is trying to do, and I believe that. I truly believe that is the case.

Randy Wilbert

I think it is too and I think everyone here is working on good faith. We have just a different view of what we would use the grounds for and maybe different than what the city would do – maybe they would be the same, but I think our organization is composed of parishioners of St. Francis. Most of them bleed, hurt over what has happened to not only St. Francis but to all the churches and there is a very emotional component of what we are doing. That is why we have spent hundreds of man-hours doing the things we have done to raise funds. Perhaps we are in a situation to make a tender to the Diocese to buy it – we will have to discuss that. In the meantime I just wanted to let the city know that we are here, we are working – we don't make a lot of noise, but we are very fervent in what we are doing, and I hate to use the worn out phrase of today, but God willing we will succeed.

Chairman Cardin

Good luck in your endeavors.

Alderman Tollner

Could I ask Randy one more question?

Chairman Cardin

Certainly.

Alderman Tollner

If someone was to ask you are you in support of the city using CDBG money, in this case the \$8,000, to look at the feasibility – I know I am putting you in a tough spot, but what would your response be?

Randy Wilbert

My board may not be happy with me when I say this because we had a meeting last night about this, but we did not have Father Dion's letter either -- I think time is of the essence and I do not want this property sold to a developer, but I don't want the city to interfere with what we are doing either so I think that my answer is if you have to do it put my asterisk there that you do support us and what we are doing.

Alderman Tollner

Okay.

Alderman Plamondon

First I want to thank both committees for all of the hours they have put in trying to save this building. From everything that I have heard today and prior these two committees certainly are not at opposite ends of the spectrum. In fact it was stated several times this evening that they both share the same goal. I think any confusion with the entities involved in trying to save this historic structure should be handled maybe from an educational point of view in one aspect no we are working in concert with the city – if the church can't be saved for religious purposes the city is simply doing a study of potential uses, which helps even if it is still a religious outcome. Whatever the outcome the final resolve is that we are working together to save the structure. The facts are before us; the time is running out. I really like what Mr. Arel had stated on one of the churches in Maine that they use for weddings and funerals, and there is precedence there that we could probably lobby Bishop McCormack that the Bishop in Maine is allowing that. I think those are the types of things that would come out in this study as well that would help us in not only securing the building but securing a variety of purposes, securing a variety of fundraising ventures going forward. We certainly could amend this resolution, but you also have the minutes of these meetings and you have heard 3-4 Aldermen just this evening state on the public record we support your efforts. I, for one, would certainly like to see continued religious services there as well, but we have to basically cover all of our bases. Time is of the essence, and if we are not prepared to act then that is when we will see – the analogy has been made several times of the wrecking ball. It is not in front of the church now, but it is certainly on the road and it is driving to Nashua. We have to be prepared to cover all of our bases to preserve this historic structure.

Randy Wilbert

I think that is accurate and I don't think we are in competition – none of us are in competition with each other. I appreciate what Dave Lozeau has said and has done for us and others that are concerned about the structure. I know Mayor Arel is concerned and he has voiced that. Again, I just want to make sure that we just don't step on each other and perhaps hurt both of us in the interim. That is why I probably changed my position that in light of Father Dion's letter – I just want to make sure that we preserve the church. It is no longer going to be a church probably if the city takes it over, but at least we will preserve the structure.

Alderman Plamondon

The analogy of the wrecking ball coming – there is also an internal wrecking ball and that is the time and what is going on with the building. I was instrumental in securing CDBG funds for

purchasing the former St. Phillips – the old Greek Church on Ash Street. When we took that building over it sat there for I want to say 7-8 years – when we took it over and I viewed that structure I could not believe the amount of disrepair that building had gone through. So to speak there is a pendulum swinging outside and inside and it is the pendulum of the clock. I just want to make sure that we can preserve the structure no matter what. Thank you.

Maurice Arel

To tie in with what Attorney Wilbert has been talking about, as a Task Force if we can get the study going we would be very happy not to meet for a period of 60-90 days until we have the study and then we can do something with it. That way you can keep working – we won't get any publicity and it will be done nice and quietly and hopefully you can continue working to raise funds. I think that maybe that would be a decent compromise.

Randy Wilbert

I think it would too because I think we need 90 days – we will know in 90 days whether we are going to do this or not. I appreciate that. I know you did that last summer. I think Jim mentioned that too.

Maurice Arel

It was at Alderman Tollner's request.

Randy Wilbert

I appreciate that and again if it doesn't work for us we certainly want to help you.

Maurice Arel

We do want to have our report by June to this Board and to the Mayor.

Alderman Tollner

Randy thank you very much.

Alderman Johnson

I am one of the Aldermen that pushed it back to committee – a lot of us were getting mixed messages and we didn't want to step in if the committee was trying to get the funds to buy the church so they could take it over and then have the city walk in on this. I guess if people wouldn't mind I just after the comment that was made by Mr. Wilbert I just want to see the parishioners show of hands are they in favor of what was just said so we as a Board make sure so that we don't have a mixed message because once this goes back to the full Board and the decision is made we will not debate it back to the committee again. It is either going to pass or fail. What I just heard I am willing at this point in time and I don't sit on this committee and I came here specifically tonight just to hear because I was one of the people who sent it back – to fund this study. People in favor of it to have everybody kind of back off – the Mayor's committee. I just want to know should we continue to try to do the study to make sure that somebody will be able to preserve this church and I would like to show this to the community

this beautiful church and I am not Catholic, but it is just the beauty of this church – you see like St. Patrick’s Cathedral in New York – this is what you see usually in New York the beauty and structure of this that you don’t see in modern times. You see a modern building. This is what we are trying to preserve in this city. At this point in time, I will, when it goes back to the full Board support the money to do the study, but I just want to see what the study will show after – what is the best use of this church. I hope that the parishioners, everybody that is in the audience tonight, understand what exactly is going to happen now and when Mr. Arel said that he would back off for the 90 days to give the committee a chance to finish the fundraising to see where they are going to end up and if need be then everybody will come to a meeting of the minds and we will get this study done.

Alderman Tollner

It is the intent of the committee once the study is done to have a public hearing or meeting – announce it in the newspaper and communicate to everybody at the same time.

Chairman Cardin

Is there anyone else who would like to speak?

Francis Vauner

I would like to speak as an x-parishioner of St. Francis Xavier Church and also as a member of the Foundation and everything that occurred in between. Since the publication of the Bishop’s prohibition about the use of St. Francis Xavier Church I had two conversations with Bishop McCormack. On both occasions he stated quite clearly to me that he would reconsider that prohibition. Very straight forward if and I make a plea that this committee individually and collectively to give us your support so that not a mixed signal will go to Manchester to the Bishop but a signal that we want that church to have sufficient religious services in the church to maintain its character as a church and otherwise be a multi-use facility both for the benefit of French Hill and for the City of Nashua. The Foundation’s plan is well developed. It shows quite clearly how to go about doing this. I would ask you to take a close look at it no matter whether your direction is from the spiritual, is from the economic, or from the political – you should be able to see merit in this plan. It is a unification plan. It will unify the groups as they continue as a religious edifice with the groups that want to use it for the service of the community and the service of the city and those that want to preserve it. Isn’t the highest form of preservation to preserve a building as close to its original intended use? I think that is the highest form of preservation and we can do that. Thank you.

Alderman Plamondon

I am wondering if we had a resolution supporting the organization that is trying to solve the financial needs of resurrecting the church for religious purposes. I would be willing to co-sign, but I am going to defer to the two Aldermen; Tollner and Gage how they feel because that might be as the gentleman mentioned a nice clear message to the Diocese that we support them in their efforts. I just thought I would throw that out.

Alderman Tollner

I would be willing to work with Mr. Arel and Mr. Wilbert to draft something – a resolution. I think it is pretty important and I want to make sure that both groups feel very comfortable with what the resolution would state. If they were willing to do that some time in the next week or so I would be more than happy to get together with them or if they want and we will draft something and I will attach that to a memo and send it out to the Board of Aldermen to see who else would feel comfortable endorsing it.

Chairman Cardin

Is there anyone else who would like to speak?

Alderman Tollner

I just want to let people that are listening as well as people that are out there – the people that are on this committee, this Task Force, are extremely passionate about the building – I have to say that is the main reason why 2 or 3 of them are on the committee. If they could put a bubble around that building right now to protect it while we are trying to work this out they would do that – I think we would do that.

John Mitterholzer, Executive Director of Great American Downtown and a member of the St. Francis Task Force

I am also a member of the National Trust for Historic Preservation and a former employee of that organization. I just wanted to bring some historic preservation insight to the committee this evening. I helped get the grant from the National Trust for this study, and I have had the opportunity throughout my career to do feasibility studies to work on both the funding end and on the technical side of feasibility studies. The real role of a feasibility study – it is a backup plan. There is no doubt in my mind that the highest and best use for this structure is a church and I certainly think that the neighborhood deserves to have a church, the community deserves to have that church, but unfortunately at this given time the Diocese is choosing not to allow that option. I look at this as our backup plan. I look at this as having something important. I think that Alderman Plamondon was very wise in saying that the wrecking ball is on the way. It is on the road here. I don't want to be an alarmist but having worked in the field of historic preservation for almost 7 years now I am very well aware that across the country not just the Catholic Church but other churches as they grapple with lower attendance, with lower numbers of the clergy are having to make very difficult decisions and many times those difficult decisions end up in demolition. I know that there is no one in this room that wants to see that structure demolished.

I have had the opportunity to travel to many states and to see many historic structures and in my honest opinion, and I am not just saying this, I believe that the St. Francis Xavier Church is among the top 10 buildings I have ever seen in this country. I believe that not just because of its architectural uniqueness but also because of its ties to the heritage of the community. I certainly believe that to lose that structure would be unbelievable in this community. We can't afford to do that. I have only been a member of this community for 9 months, but I have fallen in love with that structure. I walk that neighborhood now, I look at it on almost a weekly basis, and I can see it from my office. I look at this feasibility study from a historic preservation expertise side and it gives us a backup plan. It allows us to find the next highest and best use for that

building. If we can't allow this structure to become a church we can find a better, feasibly economically viable, re-use for that structure.

I also look at it as part of our ongoing downtown revitalization efforts. If that structure cannot remain a church it needs to remain something viable that adds to both the neighborhood and to the downtown and that is how I look at that. I really do encourage all of you to please allow this study to go forward. The CDBG grant program has been instrumental in saving many historic buildings across the country. Alderman Plamondon mentioned one church that we have already allowed those funds to help save and I certainly hope that we can decide tonight to allow this study to go forward so that we can have that plan and have that ready by June 30th. Thank you.

Elizabeth Kent, Jr. at Bishop Guertin High School and former member and altar server of St. Francis

St. Francis Xavier is an architectural beauty. It was designed specifically to be a house of worship. The buildings spiritual atmosphere cannot be extinguished. Although some people believe St. Francis should be transformed into a performing arts center I believe that every effort should be made to allow St. Francis Xavier church to retain its original purpose so that its history of faith will continue. The city's efforts are commendable and I would like to thank the City of Nashua for their support of St. Francis Xavier Church Foundation to preserve the cathedral's original message and heritage. Thank you.

Chairman Cardin

Is there anyone else that would like to speak to the committee this evening?

John Kent, member of the St. Francis Xavier Foundation

Earlier it was mentioned that the city might approach the Bishop and the Diocese about retaining weddings and funerals at the church if it does have a different use down the road. You have all mentioned that you support the Foundation. I would hope that you would lobby as you would lobby for weddings and funerals you would lobby on our behalf for the Foundation's mission to again retain the church in its original purpose. Thank you.

Alderman Tollner

I think in response to the speaker that was just here, if a resolution is put in place I think what the Board would do hopefully with the support of the Mayor is to take the resolution with the results of the vote of the Board of Aldermen, attach that to a letter, and ship it up to Manchester.

Claire Betheume, 5 Watersedge Drive – Parishioner

This letter that was received by Father Dion – I am very disappointed. I have to agree with Mr. Wilbert. For months I attend St. Louis and I have asked what is going on, what is happening – I have been coming to the Task Force meetings on Friday once a month and always Father Dion says geeze I don't know, I have no idea. I look at this last paragraph that Lori read – though this decision may impact the city's desire to continue with efforts it must be understood that the parish community has waited patiently without resolve for the city's decision – I thought it was the Bishop's decision. You are getting mixed messages, I am getting mixed messages, and I am sure the people are getting mixed messages. If the Diocese is willing to turn over the

church to the city why do they not want to turn it over to the Foundation? I know you can't answer that, but this is a question for the Bishop. When we met with the Bishop, Bishop McCormack asked me because you know he wanted to know why we were so insistent upon keeping the church open and I said to him because we pray and he said well we pray too and my response to him was well maybe God is not listening to you. I think God is listening to us and I know that he is listening to all the hearts of the people – the ones that did the rosary outside of the church.

Foremost the building and I agree with Mo Arel and everybody here that it is an architectural gem, but it has to be a church. Mr. Plamondon you say that it is in concrete that the Bishop said it is never going to be, but you know you never say never with God. We are still praying and we are very eager to see what will develop. I just needed to say that I was very disappointed in this letter that the Pastor of both churches couldn't take the opportunity to tell the people about this, that we read it in the bulletins in church on Sunday and that now this letter comes. I am sure there are a lot of other people that are going to be very upset by the fact that there was no communication – not only was there never any communication with the Diocese, but I think that Father Dion failed in communicating with the parishioners before this was let out to the Board. Thank you.

Alderman Tollner

I'm frustrated as a member of the committee that I think – I don't remember how many times we met as a committee but it has been months and we have asked the Diocese to attend a meeting and they haven't. I think that the Diocese has put Father Dion in a very, very difficult position. I think he is following the charge that comes down from Manchester. It is frustrating that we have asked them to come down to meetings and they haven't and all of a sudden we get this letter. I think the timeliness of the letter is interesting.

I do want to clarify one more thing before we vote. As far as a committee I think Mr. Arel has agreed that we will suspend the meetings for 60-90 days, which is the request that was made by Mr. Wilbert who is heading up the fundraising efforts. I appreciate Mr. Wilbert's honesty in answering that question. I know it was a difficult question. I didn't mean to put him on the spot, but I think it was an honest answer because I think we all have the same goals and objectives for St. Francis.

The committee, and I can't comment for every single member of this committee or the Board of Aldermen, but that we do come out and support the efforts of the fundraising group. I think that is what the group is looking for. I think the St. Francis Task Force I think can live with that. I think we accomplished pretty much what everybody wants us to do as far as moving forward with it. Hopefully it will work out for the best.

Chairman Cardin

I think the forthcoming resolution will probably get support from the Board. I know it probably will from this committee as well.

Alderman Lozeau

My resistance last week in front of this committee was simply to accomplish what we accomplished here tonight. Alderman Gage's reference to his response to my wrecking ball is not on the street – I am sorry I offended you. I stand by that statement. I am glad we accomplished what we accomplished tonight. I think we accomplished a lot. I will be supporting this legislation. Thank you.

Alderman Plamondon

Where this is such a sensitive issue I just want to clarify my position, and I would certainly – my first desire is to keep this a Roman Catholic institution and second would be a religious institution, but I can only go by what is in writing, and what is in writing I have seen nothing from the Diocese, the Bishop or Father Dion contrary to their adversity to any religious services being held there. I can't say one way or the other if it is etched in stone. I think that mountains can be moved. I just want to be prepared for any and every thing that might come our way. I think this study is key to that. We have to be prepared because we certainly, as a city and for our future generations to come, cannot afford losing this structure. That is the first priority before us now. I just wanted to clarify my position on that. Thank you.

Chairman Cardin

I would like to take a moment to thank the St. Francis community for coming out and speaking to the committee – telling us your thoughts and wishes for this facility. It is a beautiful facility and one that we all have a common goal to save. I would also like to thank the Mayor's Task Force for the hard work that they have done in moving this forward. Thank you very much.

Alderman Tollner

I think what the Diocese and the Bishop doesn't get is that St. Francis Church doesn't belong to the Diocese it belongs to the people that built it, practiced there, went to church there, raised their children there. Hopefully this will all work out where they come to the realization that it isn't their gift that they are ... **tape flipped** ...

MOTION CARRIED

UNFINISHED BUSINESS – ORDINANCES – None

NEW BUSINESS – RESOLUTIONS - None

NEW BUSINESS – ORDINANCES - None

DISCUSSION

ADJOURNMENT

**MOTION BY ALDERMAN TOLLNER TO ADJOURN
MOTION CARRIED**

The meeting was declared adjourned at 8:39 p.m.

Alderman-at-Large James R. Tollner
Committee Clerk