

Silverhill Planning Commission members express procedural concerns with Little Hall move



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By John Underwood

SILVERHILL, Alabama — The Silverhill Town Council members agreed at Tuesday night's council meeting to address concerns over moving the Little Bohemian Hall to Paul Anderson Park, expressed by members of the town's Planning Commission.

"This has nothing to do with our personal feelings as to whether or not the building should be moved to that location," said Commission Chairman Stan Joy at Tuesday's meeting. "Our concern is that the town is not following the proper procedures in moving the facility which could open the town up for a lawsuit."

Joy and other members of the Planning Commission presented a letter to the council at Tuesday's meeting asking that the council rescind a motion to support the Save the Little Hall Committee's efforts to move the structure to Paul Anderson Park, and revisit proper procedure in moving the structure.

Joy said at the Commission's January meeting, concerns were expressed over moving the structure to that location, including that the building would not meet the town's setback requirements and that moving the building to the park would violate a condition that no permanent structure be placed at the park.

"It was our understanding that there would be a public hearing through the Planning Commission where all of these concerns would be addressed," said Committee member Lamar Giles. "Now we find out that the Council is supporting the move without a (formal) public hearing."

Council member Jared Lyles said the council voted to support the move, provided that certain conditions were met and there was never an attempt by the town to circumvent procedure.

"I'm really not sure that a government entity — any government entity, not just the town of Silverhill — is required to follow Planning Commission procedure when it comes to structures owned by that entity," Lyles said. "I'm not saying I don't think it's a good idea for us to follow those procedures. I'm saying that we need to talk to Josh (Myrick, the town's attorney) and find out if we're not opening ourselves up to a lawsuit by tying ourselves to procedure."

Mayor Tim Wilson said the town would look into the procedure requirements and asked Save the Little Hall Committee Chairman Frankie Kucera to meet with Superintendent of Utilities Steve Williams, who is the town's building inspector, to see what the setbacks were and what the town would be required to do if the building did not meet setback requirements.

The Little Bohemian Hall was built in 1920 southwest of Silverhill to serve as a school for the Czech children in the Silverhill area.

In 1928, after students were bussed to the new public school in Silverhill, the building was used as a community center for meetings, dances and social activities. It was also used to teach Czech language classes and church services.

In 1956, the newly established Silverhill Farmers Club merged with the Czechoslovakian Farmers Association and the building was sold to the Farmers Club for \$1. For over 20 years the Silverhill Farmers Club and the Extension Homemakers Club used the building for meetings. The building was also used for martial arts club meetings.

In 1978, the building was sold for \$1 to Silverhill School and was moved to the Silverhill School campus where it was used as a band room and an assembly hall. The building was later donated to the town of Silverhill and moved onto town property near the ballparks and water tank to make room for a new gym facility at the school.

The building was shifted off its foundation and sustained extensive damage during a tornado that struck in Silverhill March 9. The Silverhill Town Council voted at its meeting Monday, May 16 to proceed with plans to build a new structure and plans have been discussed to move Little Hall from its current location and refurbish the structure.

At its meeting on Monday, Nov. 21, the Council voted to support moving the building to Paul Anderson Park and pay half, up to \$4,000, to right the building and prepare for moving.

On Dec. 5, the town council voted to establish a Save the Little Hall Board for the town, which meets monthly at Town Hall. Meetings are open to the public and minutes from the meetings are submitted for approval at the Council's second monthly meeting.

They also voted to establish rules and procedures for accepting donations to the Save the Little Hall Committee through a bank account established through the town with United Bank.

Kucera told council members and those present at Tuesday's meeting that work began this week to right the structure and get the building ready to move, whether it be at Paul Anderson Park, or another location in the town.

"A lot of people have worked extremely hard to see that this is done," Kucera said, "and will continue to work until it is done. We will save Little Hall."

No formal action to rescind any previous action was taken at Tuesday's council meeting.