



Position Statement on the Certificate of Appropriateness Applications from Emmanuel Episcopal Church concerning 685 North Pope Street

August 8, 2006

The Boulevard Neighborhood Association (BNA) reaffirms its opposition to the relocation of the historic properties at 685 and 693 N. Pope Street, which are listed in the National Register of Historic Places and designated as a local historic district by the Athens-Clarke County Unified Government.

The applications to move and relocate the property at 685 North Pope Street, known as the Meeting House, is part of a long standing attempt by Emmanuel Episcopal Church to remove the two remaining historic structures from this section of North Pope Street. The lack of maintenance on these structures has been willful. Maintenance has been withheld since at least December, 2002 according to Vestry minutes and all support was removed in February 2004¹ when the Vestry elected to have the buildings “removed or relocated...as promptly as possible.”

The BNA has attempted to partner with property owners, design professionals who are members of the church, and the Athens Clarke Heritage Foundation to assist the church with ideas and creative ways to grow, change, and fully utilize their large landholdings along Prince Avenue and Pope Street. The application states that meetings were held with interested parties. The application fails to mention that the BNA (and ACHF) have remained consistently opposed to removal of the two cottages and that the church has continued to resist exploring alternatives to the removal of the remaining historic structures at 685 and 693 North Pope Street.

The BNA opposes and urges the Historic Preservation Commission to deny the application for removal and relocation of the structure at 685 North Pope for the following reasons:

1. Emmanuel has not shown a good faith effort to maintain and reuse the structures in their historic and current locations. They have neglected the buildings and now claim that it is burdensome and expensive to rehabilitate them. They stated that the building’s design makes it unacceptable for Church use. However, two previous

¹ Whereas, after giving many years of careful and prayerful consideration to the use of church property, the Vestry has determined that the two cottages located on Pope Street, known as the Meeting House and the Youth House, are not suitable for future use by the church in their present location: therefore it is resolved that each such house be removed from, or relocated on, the campus of the church as promptly as possible and the Senior Warden, with (*sic*) the approval of the Rector, is directed to appoint a special committee, consisting of no more than nine members of the church, to form a plan for, implement, and carry out such removal or relocation of these houses subject to oversight and final approval by the Vestry of the plan and prior allocation by the Vestry of any funds of the church that may be required for such purposes. (http://www.emmanuel-athens.org/Data/Vestry_Minutes/2004/02-25-04.html)

church-funded studies by reputable planning, preservation and design firms recommended that they be preserved and incorporated into church expansion plans. (Surber Barber Choate and Robison Fischer Associates - work beginning in 2002) Historic Structures Reports conducted by Historic Preservation graduate students from UGA's School of Environmental Design also came to the same decision for both houses.² The current application for moving the structure at 685 North Pope Street and rehabilitating it at a new site on Barber Street clearly shows that the structure in question is significant and worthy of preservation, even though the church also argues that the building "is not an important example of architecture." Either it is or it isn't. Moving the structure and changing its use has nothing to do with its historic significance and worthiness of preservation. They have also very competently proven that it is capable of generating a competitive economic return. Therefore, at the very least, the structure should be placed into useful service in its current location. The Church's own studies and their current application for relocation demonstrate the property's viability for reuse.

2. The applicant has tried to demonstrate that the properties do not contribute to the historic character or urban setting of the street and district. They allege that the buildings should somehow be excluded or exempt from National Register of Historic Places eligibility. This could not be further from the truth. In fact, the property was determined "Contributing" to the National Register District by the Georgia Department of Natural Resources and the U.S. Department of the Interior. The criteria used to list the buildings locally and in the National Register are clear and do not allow for exemption based on ownership. To argue that they are somehow "less contributing" now than they were when they were determined eligible for listing in the Register is a false assertion. The applicant repudiates the decision made the Georgia National Register Review Board (an appointed board of professionals from across the state with strict rules of procedure to ensure unbiased decision making), the Keeper of the National Register of Historic Places in Washington, DC (a position appointed by the Secretary of the Department of Interior with approval by the President) and the Athens Preservation Commission and staff who have determined that the structures are contributing to the character of our neighborhood and local historic district. Additionally the applicant asserts that the property in its current location does have significant urban design elements. They say that an open "grassy, park like setting" would be more appropriate for this portion of our district. These buildings are solid structures that frame the impressive Cobb House and anchor the street. To remove one or both of these structures, as the church has indicated in their post-removal concept drawings, *Emmanuel Episcopal Commons*, leaves a void at the end of this extremely historic street. This permanently alters the framed view as one looks up Pope Street from Prince Avenue. The sensitive relationship of solids to voids and the sense of enclosure they provide in their current location are basic tenets of high quality urban design. They provide a tangible piece of historic fabric and their removal will forever alter the story of the Boulevard neighborhood and even the history of the Church itself. The church's assertion that these buildings are irrelevant in their current location or in some way ineligible for National Register or local listing is incorrect.

² <http://www.emmanuel-athens.org/Data/Documents/LRP/LRP.html>

3. The neighborhood strongly feels that a more accessible and creative solution to the church's need for outdoor space, parking and additional facilities lies in the extremely large and underutilized parcels to the East. Their planning and design consultants have also come to that conclusion. This property, which includes the Potter's House, Community Connection and the Thrift House, is also owned by Emmanuel Episcopal. Currently the large parking lot and intrusive structures do very little to contribute to a cohesive streetscape along Prince as recommended, for example, in the Community Approach to Planning Prince Avenue (CAPPA) Study. We agree that these services provide a valuable social function, but use is not the purview of the Preservation Commission and should not cloud judgments in this case as the applicant desires. Your charge is limited to appearance and historic significance. Therefore the unarguable and noble mission of the church, the abuse treatment centers, the day school and Christian-based educational programs are irrelevant in your decision making. Our neighbors wonder why so much energy is being placed on the removal of historic structures on Pope Street and so little energy has gone into improving the appearance of the non-historic and detracting parcels to the East. If changes are being proposed it seems logical to us, and to the church's professional consultants, that change should be concentrated on the parcels to the East.

4. Regardless of the condition, usefulness and purported inconvenience of the property, moving buildings is not a preservation solution. It is not supported by the BNA and should not be a treatment that is approved by the Preservation Commission established under the Georgia Historic Preservation Act of 1980. Moving historic properties is a dangerous precedent to establish and is not supported by any international, federal or state policies, charters or statutes. It should only be considered a final and negative solution. It is not a property protection strategy. This is not a win-win situation but one that represents the beginning of many lose-lose COA applications from property owners seeking redevelopment approvals instead of preservation alternatives.

Therefore the BNA encourages denial of the application to move the property at 685 Pope Street which would negate the request for its relocation on Barber Street.