

 **Habitat for Humanity**[®]
of Frederick County, MD
Neighborhood Revitalization Initiative

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Condemned Log Cabin Up for Yet Another Historic Preservation Vote

Frederick, MD

On the evening of July 23rd, 2015, Habitat for Humanity of Frederick MD made a request to the Historic Preservation Commission at a Public Hearing to demolish a log cabin at 107 East 5th Street. The result was a 2-2 tie vote, due to the absence of members of the Commission. The result of such a tie vote is a hold on the request from Habitat, leaving their request in suspense until the next hearing, currently set for Thursday, August 13th, 2015.

Following the Public Hearing, Executive Director of Habitat, Ron Cramer, found himself wondering why the Commission even held the vote when there was a possibility of a tie. "This is a total waste of time and resources", Cramer stated. A vote against the organization's request would have been better than a tie vote. "At least we would then know the exact direction we should head in," explained Cramer.

Given the possibility that the vote at the next hearing may in fact deny Habitat's request, the organization is already working with an attorney to prepare the appropriate documents to transfer ownership of the property over to the City of Frederick, which would be the only recourse left for the organization if they are unable to demolish the cabin. Habitat first purchased the property in 2005, as a favor to the City officials of the time, attempting to aid their efforts to rid the City of blighted or near blighted properties. In 2003, Habitat had purchased a similar historic property on B&O Avenue and was granted demolition for that structure by the Historic Preservation Commission. After the success Habitat had in dismantling the B&O Avenue structure, replacing it with a new structure for positive use, City officials felt it would be beneficial to have Habitat do the same for the property at 107 East 5th Street, considering the home on the property had been vacant for nearly 3 years. Based upon the request from the City, Habitat agreed to purchase the property in 2005 for \$9,000, believing that plans would follow the pattern of the B&O property. However, that was not the case. "From the purchase of the home as a favor to the City of Frederick, to this date, it has been a total nightmare," Cramer stated.

The latest obstacle, taking place at the aforementioned July 23rd Public Hearing, involved members of the Historic Preservation Commission pointing blame at Habitat for the current status of the structure, stating the

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organization had neglected the property. However, a historical report, commissioned by Habitat, alongside photos from Past President, Billy Shreve, who was in office at the time of purchase in 2005, undermine such accusations by evidencing years of neglect long before Habitat ever acquired the property.

Based on such long-standing neglect, Habitat requested demolition of the home just three years later in 2008 in keeping with their plans from time of purchase. All experts consulted within that three year period had deemed the building too far gone to rehab. Despite the opinion of such experts, it was noted in workshops between Habitat and the Historic Preservation Commission at that time that Commission members would not vote for demolition. Bearing this in mind, the Executive Director of Habitat at that time, David Ozag did not take the request to Public Hearing. Once Cramer assumed the office of Executive Director, the organization attempted to sell the property, not once but twice, but both attempts were unsuccessful due in large part to the condition of the cabin. "The property, with the land included, is worth absolutely nothing with that house sitting on it", Cramer said. With few options left, the organization turned to Preservation Maryland with an offer to donate the property. However, after expert review, even Preservation Maryland would not take on the property as the level of decay warrants its preservation impossible. With the options of sale and donation exhausted, the only choice remaining for Habitat is to take the property through the full cycle process for demolition again, which may result in being right back where the property started from, in tax auction. "We have taken our lumps on this one," stated Cramer referring to the drain on time and resources from the organization.

At the July 23rd Public Hearing, Commission Member Carrie Albee stated, "frankly, I would rather see it sit there and turn to dust than see it approved for premature demolition," which has caused an uproar among supporters of Habitat. "That one did not sit well," stated President of the Board, Reverend Ken Dunnington. Habitat wants better things for the 5th Street Neighborhood than to see buildings allowed to stand unused, in crumbling condition. The organization believes that the removal of the deteriorating, condemned, blighted property, would be a very welcome change, especially when it can be replaced by a usable structure as is currently planned. Habitat has a buyer in line, who has plans to build a house on the lot, but the sale to that buyer is contingent upon the demolition of the decaying cabin.

Now, ten years past point of purchase, Habitat feels that the organization has made every good faith effort to explore all options, from preservation, to sale, to demolition, since relieving the City of the property. However, without assistance and cooperation from the City and its Commission, the property continues to be a drain on resources and a blight on the landscape of the neighborhood.

Habitat for Humanity of Frederick County is now preparing to return for another public hearing in front of the Historic Preservation Commission on August 13th at 6pm at Frederick's City Hall where it hopes that all members will be present to execute a deciding vote. As part of the preparation, the organization requests that all who support Habitat, and the removal of this cabin at 107 East 5th Street, be in attendance. "It would be a true blessing to see everyone out for this hearing and engage in the work to move this community forward," stated Cramer.