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June 18, 2024

Mr. Leon Maben, Chair  
Augusta Historic Preservation Commission  
c/o Augusta Planning and Development  
535 Telfair Street  
Augusta, GA 30901

Re: 802 Greene Street, Old First Baptist Church, Downtown Historic District

Dear Mr. Maben,

We would like to draw to your attention to an egregious violation of the Augusta Historic Preservation Ordinance regarding the Old First Baptist Church building at 802 Greene Street. We are concerned that failure to maintain the building has resulted in significant deterioration of the structure due to water infiltration through its dome, through its gutter system, and through its walls. Continued neglect of this outstanding architectural property in the heart of the historic district may lead to its loss if something is not done in short order.

The Old First Baptist Church, dating from 1903, is a fine example of the Beaux-Arts style of architecture, and was designed by outstanding Georgia architect Willis Denny. It served the congregation of Augusta's First Baptist Church until 1975, and subsequently housed other Baptist congregations, and a religious school.

The building is listed individually in the National Register of Historic Places, and is considered a contributing structure, not only in the locally designated Downtown Historic District, but also under two other overlapping National Register Districts – Greene Street Historic District, and Augusta Downtown Historic District.

The specific clause in the Augusta Historic Preservation Ordinance that applies to this violation is cited below, under the ordinance passed in September 2011, and amended in June 2015.

**§ 7-4-52. FAILURE TO PROVIDE ORDINARY MAINTENANCE OR REPAIR.**

Owners of historic properties or of properties within a historic district shall not allow their buildings to deteriorate by failing to provide ordinary maintenance or repair. The Commission shall be charged with the following responsibilities regarding such deterioration by neglect:

(a) The Historic Preservation Commission shall have the authority to monitor the condition of historic properties and properties within a historic district to determine if they are being allowed to deteriorate by neglect. Such conditions as broken windows, doors and openings which allow the elements and vermin to enter, the deterioration of exterior architectural features, or the deterioration of a building's structural system shall constitute failure to provide ordinary maintenance or repair.



(b) In the event the Historic Preservation Commission determines that there has been a failure to provide ordinary maintenance or repair, the Historic Preservation Commission will notify the owner of the property and set forth the steps necessary to comply with the provisions of this Section. The owner of such property will have ten (10) days to apply for the appropriate Certificate of Appropriateness.

(c) In the event that a COA is not applied for within ten (10) days, as referenced in (b) of this Code Section; the Historic Preservation Commission shall notify the appropriate City Department of the situation.

We request by this communication that the Augusta Historic Preservation Commission request the appropriate city department to take steps to encourage the owner of the property to make the needed repairs, or agree to transfer ownership to another entity that will. Augusta cannot afford to lose another fine architectural treasure such as Old First Baptist Church, especially not one with the significant history that is embodied in this structure.

Sincerely,



Erick D. Montgomery  
Executive Director

Cc: Hon. Garnett Johnson, Mayor; Ms. Takiyah Douse, Interim City Administrator; George D. Bush, President, Historic Augusta, Inc.; Robert L. Mauldin, First Vice President, HAI; John Gordon McBrayer-Howe, Second Vice President, HAI; Carla Delaney, Director, Augusta Planning and Development