

2/28/24 City Council meeting Item C. 1 - Bell Street Abandonment

Alicia Barber <aliciambarber@gmail.com>

Mon 2/26/2024 1:48 PM

To:Public Comment - CC <PublicComment@reno.gov>

I am writing to voice my strong **opposition** to the request by Jacobs Entertainment for the City of Reno to abandon part of Bell Street and contiguous alleyways. It is impossible for City Council to make the required finding that the public will not be materially injured by this request. The current and future occupation and use of Bethel AME Church at 220 Bell Street would be greatly injured by these abandonments, with not just the loss of 21 unmetered public parking spots but also the loss of any route of ingress and egress to the church building other than West Second Street. Not only does another congregation currently use this building, but Bethel AME has long been considering transforming the church into a museum or cultural center, and needs all of those spaces and routes to remain intact as public rights-of-way and public space in order to ensure that they will be able to continue to extend and expand its use by the community. The Bethel AME Church is listed in the National Register of Historic Places and is the oldest surviving African American church in Nevada, and these abandonment requests are unnecessary and injurious. Please read my latest Barber Brief for more discussion of why they should not be granted. <https://thebarberbrief.substack.com/p/bell-street-and-the-bethel-ame-church>. Thank you. - Alicia Barber, Ph.D., resident of Reno Ward 1



BETHEL AFRICAN METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH

BAY VALLEY DISTRICT OF THE CALIFORNIA CONFERENCE

February 27, 2024

Mayor Schieve and City Council Members
Reno City Hall
1 E 1st Street
Reno, NV 89501

Dear Mayor Schieve and Esteemed Members of the City Council of Reno, Nevada:

I am writing on behalf of Bethel AME Church and the Bethel Housing Development Corporation to formally reject Jacobs Entertainment, Inc.'s application for the City to abandon part of Bell Street and the connected alleyways. We adamantly uphold our right to access these alleyways and the entire length of Bell Street. We do not waive our rights. We urge City Hall to consider our concerns in this matter as Jacobs Entertainment's request is materially injurious to our current tenant and our plans for 220 Bell Street:

We reject the application for several reasons:

- 1) The property at 220 Bell Street (APN #011-021-05) is not abandoned.
- 2) A longstanding tenant currently occupies the property full-time and requires all parking spaces employed.
- 3) Bethel AME Church has concrete plans to convert the property into a Black Museum and future Cultural Center, which will serve as a valuable community resource. The parking on Bell Street is limited as it is. Jacobs Entertainment's application will decrease parking for 220 Bell Street.
- 4) Our tenant's church is already constrained by limited parking availability. Granting Jacobs Entertainment permission to close off part of the street would exacerbate parking issues, impede our access to 220 Bell Street, and hinder ingress and egress facilitated by the alleyways. Should there be a need for emergency vehicles, access will be hindered and might impede life-saving measures.
- 5) 220 Bell Street holds national significance as a building listed in the National Register of Historic Places, and its preservation is paramount to our organization. We have no intention of selling or relocating this property.
- 6) We vehemently oppose any encroachment upon our property or diminishment of its historic significance. Jacobs Entertainment has requested to purchase or relocate our property for years.
- 7) Bethel AME Church holds a unique place in Nevada's history as the oldest surviving African American church in the entire state, not just Northern Nevada. It is incumbent



BETHEL AFRICAN METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH

BAY VALLEY DISTRICT OF THE CALIFORNIA CONFERENCE

upon us to safeguard and preserve our African American heritage. Please do not allow Jacobs Entertainment to disregard or dismiss the heritage represented by our property that has been present in our community since 1907.

In light of these considerations, we respectfully urge the City Council to reject Jacobs Entertainment's application and to uphold our rights and interests in this matter. We appreciate your attention to this important issue and trust that you will give due consideration to our concerns.

Thank you for your time and attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

Rev. Dr. Debra A. Whitlock Lax, Pastor
Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church and
CEO and Executive Director
Bethel Housing Development Corporation (BHDC)

BHD Board of Directors

- Rev. Dr. Debra A. Whitlock Lax (CEO / Executive Director)
- Tommy L. Jackson (Treasurer)
- Toni Odom-McNeil (Secretary)
- Melvin Gentry (Historian)
- Charles McNeil (Trustee)
- Rev. Richard L. Lax (Member At Large)

Re: Opposition to 2/28 item C-1/Forced Takeover-Oldest Black Church of All of Nevada

Debra Whitlock-Lax <pdebz@bethelamesparks.com>

Sun 2/25/2024 8:27 AM

To:barbano@frontpage.reno.nv.us <barbano@frontpage.reno.nv.us>

Cc:Public Comment - CC <PublicComment@reno.gov>

Thank you so much. Can you help identify how I can get the email address of the city council members?

Sincerely,

Rev. Dr. Debra A. Whitlock Lax, Pastor

Bethel AME Church

2655 Rock Blvd.

Sparks, NV 89431

Cell: 408 726 7200

Email: pdebz@bethelamesparks.com

[Zoom Link](#)

Feel free to call me PDebz

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On Sun, Feb 25, 2024 at 5:49 AM <barbano@frontpage.reno.nv.us> wrote:

Dear Reverend Whitlock-Lax:

Thanks so much for this bulletin. Once again, Reno City Hall has demonstrated its endemic moral obtuseness -- scheduling this hearing at the end of Black History Month.

Comedian Chris Rock got it right when he asked "has anyone noticed that they gave us the shortest month of the year?" Thursday's 2/29 leap day provides not even cold comfort.

I will help you all I can. I will move an item in my Wednesday Sparks Tribune column and post followups. As soon as it's on the press, I will send the column to the mayor, city councilmembers, city attorneys and city manager. The satire writes itself.

I will heavily wallpaper my targeted e-mail database about how Reno celebrates Black History Month. With a little luck, the irony will go viral and receive national attention. Been there. Done that. See BallotBoxing.US/ira.html/

I have searched the city council agenda and the accompanying 59-page staff report. There is nary a mention of the AME Church or its jeopardy.

The Tribune will post my column to its website later this week. I will immediately upload this advance to the front page of my flagship website, NevadaLabor.com and to my civil rights site, MississippiWestNV.org/ (With a blast from the past from two Reno-Sparks NAACP legends.)

Have you contacted individual council members? It's an election year.

I suggest that you include the council's group e-mail address in your future uploads: <publiccomment@reno.gov> Note in the subject line that the communication should be recorded as opposition to the Feb. 28 council agenda item No. C-1. (See above.)

The city's website states "Comments received after 4:00 p.m. the day before the scheduled Reno City Council meeting (in this case, Tuesday, Feb. 27) will be included in the record in closing public comment. You are encouraged to send in your comments early to allow for distribution to the Reno City Council for review."

Keep up the good work and the good fight.

Vaxx up, stay safe, pray for Ukraine and almost 100 other currently war-torn lands.

¡Sí se puede!

In Solidarity,

Andrew Quarantino Barbano
MississippiWestNV.org
CesarChavezNevada.com
NevadaLabor.com
Sparks.Trib.com
BallotBoxing.US

ec: Reno-Sparks NAACP officers and executive committee; targeted branch members

- Barbwire Confidential subscriber list
- Targeted media and legislators
- The usual suspects

NOTE: The comments expressed above are strictly those of Mr. Barbano and not of any organization in which he holds membership.

CWA 9413/AFL-CIO

On 2024-02-24 22:03, Debra Whitlock-Lax wrote:

> Dear Friend of Bethel:

>

> I'm reaching out to you urgently about a critical matter that is
> threatening the very fabric of our community. Jeff Jacobs of Jacob's
> Entertainment is orchestrating maneuvers that imperil the historic
> Bethel AME Church National Registered History Building. His efforts to
> persuade the City of Reno to designate certain streets as abandoned,
> thereby facilitating the expansion of his company's property line to
> encroach upon ours, are deeply concerning.

>

> Let's be clear: our property is not abandoned. It is home to a
> longstanding church that has served our community faithfully for
> years. Yet, Jeff Jacobs' actions threaten to displace this sacred
> institution and erase an integral part of our cultural heritage and
> the African Methodist Church's historical presence of more than 119
> Years.

>

> We cannot stand idly by as Jacobs Entertainment seeks to undermine the
> integrity of our neighborhood and erode the rich tapestry of our
> history. That's why I implore you to join me and fellow Bethel members
> at City Hall on Wednesday, February 28, 2024, at 9:45 AM.

>

> Your presence and voice are crucial in this fight to protect Nevada's
> oldest Black/African American church. We need passionate advocates
> like you to speak out against Jacobs Entertainment's unchecked
> expansionism and advocate for the preservation of our community's
> soul.

>

> Please consider lending your voice for three minutes to underscore why
> we must resist Jacob's Entertainment's attempts to seize control of
> downtown. Together, we can safeguard our heritage and ensure that
> future generations continue to benefit from the invaluable
> contributions of Bethel AME Church.

>

> Yes - just in case you are wondering whether Jeff Jacobs has moved
> other historically registered property....he has and wants to move our
> building, too. It is currently being rented to a church. We plan to
> make a Black Cultural Center in the future. Please - stand with me.
> Stand for justice.

>

> Thank you for your unwavering support and commitment to our shared
> cause.

>

> Warm regards,

>

> Rev. Dr. Debra A. Whitlock Lax, Pastor
> Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church

- > 2655 Rock Blvd.
- > Sparks, NV 89431
- > 408.726.7200
- > <pdebz@bethelamesparks.com>

Public Comment: City Council Meeting 2-28-24: Agenda Item C.1 Bell St. Abandonment

Gary Cecil <garycecil621@msn.com>

Fri 2/23/2024 1:26 PM

To:Public Comment - CC <PublicComment@reno.gov>

Please include these comments in the packet for Agenda Item C.1 Bell St Abandonment, at the City Council meeting on February 28, 2024. Please also tally me as "Concerned".

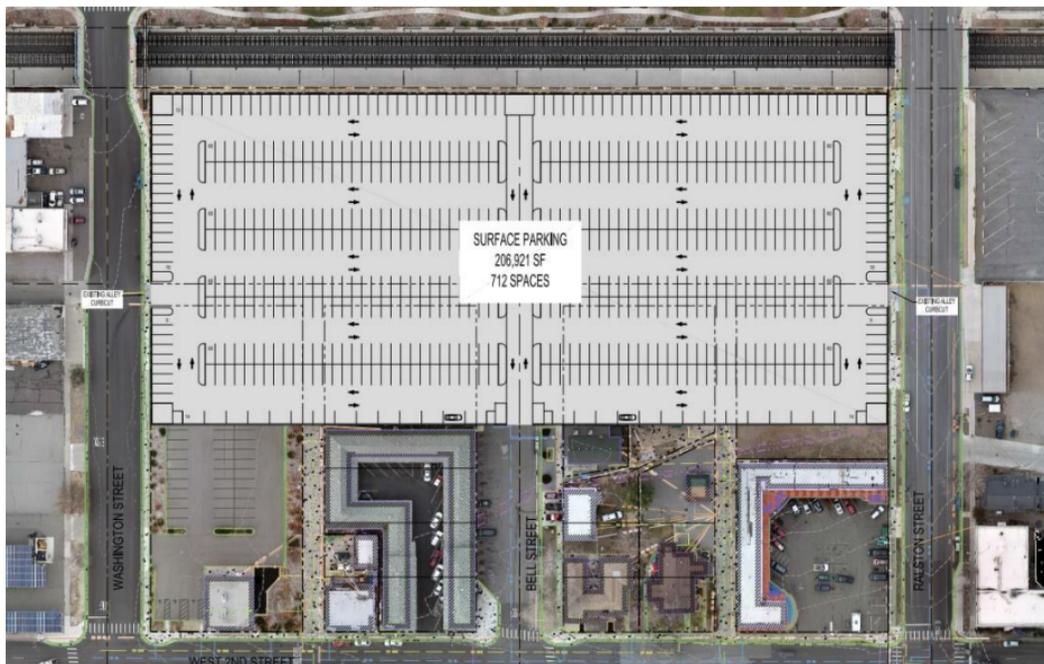
Associate Planner, Jeff Foster, has already included in the agenda packet earlier email comments we had exchanged ahead of the canceled Ward 1 NAB meeting scheduled for February 12, 2024. However, since then, I have collected additional relevant information, so this current email more accurately reflects my concerns on this abandonment.

Thank you for your help.

Gary Cecil

In a January 24, 2024 letter, in answer to a question from Development Services regarding the Applicant's future use of the block which includes the current requested Abandonment area, the Applicant answered:

Response: The Owner intends to utilize this block for parking and additional event space for the existing Glow Plaza Festival grounds. A rendering is included below.



In the Applicant's letter of December 27, 2021, submitted as part of a CUP application package for the Glow Plaza, the Applicant submitted the following response to address the requirement that the project would mitigate traffic impacts.

Response: The proposed Glow Plaza is anticipated to host several events throughout the year, primarily during nights and weekends outside of peak traffic hours. The Glow Plaza contain 200 parking spaces, and another three parking lots provide an additional 319 parking spaces within 1,040 feet or closer to the festival grounds. As necessary, approximately 136 parking spaces may be made available at the nearby Gold Dust West, which is held in common ownership with the festival grounds. Indeed, a parking study identified that the total parking supply in the immediate project area could accommodate an event up to approximately 3,500 attendees at this site. .

Further, in the same 2021 CUP application package, consultant Headway Transportation provided the following table for the Glow Plaza.

Table 2. Available Parking Supply

Parking Lot	Available Parking Supply	Dedicated Parking	Approximate Distance from Project (ft.)
A	130	Yes	400
B	200	Yes	0
C	70	Yes	1,040
D	119	No	550
Total:	519		

NOTE: In 2021, none of the A, B, C, or D parking lots included the 712 new parking spaces now revealed in the Applicant's current Abandonment request.

So, in 2021, the applicant explained that there were 519 existing and available parking spaces and, with support from their transportation consultant, the applicant was able to make the statement "*total parking supply in the immediate project area could accommodate an event up to approximately 3,500 attendees at this site*". In other words, the Applicant asserted that there were ample existing parking spaces (even more if one also counted on-street parking spaces and 136 spaces at the Gold Dust West casino) to satisfy the CUP requirements for the Glow Plaza.

And yet, since the Glow Plaza CUP was approved in 2022, the Applicant will have added 712 more parking spaces. Of these, approximately 500 have already been built and approximately 200 more will be added if the current Abandonment request is granted. Said simply, the Applicant erred egregiously in the CUP Application (712 spaces over the 519 presented = **137% variance**) and now seeks to compound this error.

In an RGJ opinion article from January 11 , 2022, CM Duerr pointed out that: "*Reno has the dubious distinction of being one of the fastest-warming U.S. cities over the last 50 years....*"

With the stated plans the Applicant has for this current Abandonment request, there would be yet more parking blacktop added to an already over-heated Downtown Reno. There is a case to be made that this Abandonment therefore *does* "materially injure the public". Every sweltering summer day of every future year this blacktop will add to the ever-rising temperature in Downtown Reno.

In 2021, the City Council approved only its second Development Agreement with a private party when it accepted presentations from the Applicant regarding the improvements it planned for Downtown Reno.

Section 2.02 a. of the Development Agreement includes the following statement:

*"The District will include....an array of other commercial, retail, plaza, **green space**...." (District presumably refers to what the Applicant named the Neon Line District.)*

It's quite possible that the Applicant's "Master Plan" includes green space but, so far, I see no additional green space, just a lot of blacktops and empty lots.

During an interview with KTVN Reno's Arianna Bennett on March 4, 2022, Mr. Jeff Jacobs announced that he had a **Master Plan** in place for the development of the many Downtown parcels he had already purchased, as well as those he planned to purchase. And yet, as of my writing of these public comments, the City Council has apparently not yet been afforded the opportunity to see that Master Plan. Even a comment/request from CM Taylor at the December, 2023 Annual Review of the Development Agreement that the public are very interested in seeing the Master Plan, and that evoked a response from the Applicant's representative that said plan would be coming "soon", has not changed anything.

This current Abandonment request is yet another "drip" from the Applicant's Master Plan. How many more "drips" are forthcoming? How many might cause concerns for residents? How can City Staff and the City Council effectively evaluate the likely effects of any individual development request from the Applicant without knowing the breadth and land use nature of the Applicant's full Master Plan?

As part of your analysis and decision on this current Abandonment request, **I respectfully ask that the City Council Members insist the Applicant makes the Master Plan available to them now and that they, in turn, make the Master Plan immediately available to the public.**

Respectfully submitted,
Gary Cecil
255 N Sierra St.
Reno, NV 89501

To: City Council Members
From: Sally P. Tate
Date:2/27/2024
Re: Item C1 on agenda

I am opposed to Jacobs request for abandonment of part of Bell Street and the intersecting alleys. I drove this area and got to see Reno's historic African American Church (The Bethel AME church) nestled in this corner, surrounded by those encroaching office buildings, which I believe are already empty.

The church is already being smothered and swallowed up by these nondescript buildings. To have the city part with this little available access would be a huge mistake, and practically make access to this location, almost impossible. And, who knows what Jacob's true agenda truly is? Most likely they will tear down both of those office buildings....and for what purpose...more tear downs with no replacements? There is already the large parking area on the other side of the alley which borders the Glow Plaza.

We have already learned about what can occur with street abandonment in Reno, with no parameters established or time line for changes and we just totally forgo any control or jurisdiction of public access right away of that space forever. Big mistake!

Moreover, since this church was brought to our attention, I think the city needs to take a different approach and feature the importance of this institution. It is on the US National Register of Historical Places and should be treated with such dignity it deserves and assist the church to consider creating a museum. And, continue to have public access on Bell and on the alleys surrounding it.

Educate Jacobs on what a treasure this church is and vote **NO** on the abandonment of part of Bell Street and intersecting alleys.

Bethel AME/Jacobs Entertainment

shayne del cohen <shaynedel@att.net>

Tue 2/27/2024 12:30 AM

To:Public Comment - CC <PublicComment@reno.gov>

This is to express a few thoughts regarding the plan/request of Jacobs Entertainment to acquire and destroy the former AME church on Bell Street.

This is almost a recreation of history repeating itself. The story of how the church came to be may be one of the historical facts that Reno may want to forget. By obliterating a spot, one also obliterates history and, in this case, a brilliant legacy. Not so of the Reno City Council.

The implosion of the Mapes was done to shade prior actions of influencers and councilpersons. Will this be the same?

Reno has over 70 national historic register properties, many of which are near the Jacobs current property. Is the Lear/First Church of Christ Science, the the Arch or Twaddle House safe?

Why have so many labored to protect and tell the stories of these properties? To tell the story of architecture, of commerce, of institutions, of civic life, subjects of which many feel are important to share with succeeding generations so that emergent leadership can understand the context of decisions made, of issues confronted, and of the panorama that shaped the community they inherit. Educated and informed citizenry make for cohesive communities.

Beyond debating historic worth, Jacobs Entertainment is missing a tremendous commercial opportunity. Having a historic church in which weddings (and other services) can be performed could be a tremendous draw to sectors of the national population. An association with the AME Church could provide a nexus for destination weddings; needless to say an easy package for a hospitality corporation.

Thanks for reading.
Shayne Del Cohen

Public comment Item C.1

Khazikani <bkhaziks@gmail.com>

Tue 2/27/2024 2:36 PM

To:Public Comment - CC <PublicComment@reno.gov>

Hello.

I am writing today to oppose any further expansion of Jacobs Entertainment in our town. In this case, depriving a treasured historical building of parking space and access to public roads in order to give Jacobs more no-questions-asked ownership over this city. Our representatives should not be abdicating responsibility for public lands and giving them to out-of-state developers who have nothing to show for it.

Instead, we should be increasing green space or something else that properly improves not just one person's profits, but the city's health. Maybe a seasonal warming/cooling shelter so people don't die of exposure? Giant parking lots (Jacobs plan) don't help us. They're actually bad - especially in a part of town where we've been told the city is aiming to encourage alternate forms of transportation.

Spencer Banda

Item C-1

Sue Smith <sue@argentnevada.com>

Tue 2/27/2024 1:11 PM

To:Public Comment - CC <PublicComment@reno.gov>

I am writing to ask that you deny the abandonment to Bell St and ally ways in the area. The AME church was rehabilitated and is on the Nat'l Register of Historic Places. The abandonment would jeopardize the future use of the facility. Please vote no.

Sue Smith

NV Real Estate License # B028370

Argent Commercial Real Estate

775-323-5000

Sent via mobile-

