

DOWNTOWN LINKS – 7th Street Building
by W. Eugene Caywood, August 11, 2014

PREMISE: One of the goals of the project has been to limit as much as possible the demolition of buildings. Thus the CAC, consultants and city staff have a responsibility to examine all potential alternatives that could result in saving a building rather than demolishing it. This should be done even if ultimately the building owner, for whatever reason, decides to remove the building. The responsibility for demolishing the building will thus rest with the property owner, not the City of Tucson or its agents.

THE BUILDING: There are two attached buildings facing 7th Street between 7th Avenue and Ferro Avenue. It is clear the westerly of the two is in the path of the roadway and will have to be demolished. However, the easterly of the two is minimally impacted. The bike/ped path on the north side of the roadway will run through its southwest corner, cutting off a triangular shaped piece approximately 10 feet north-south and 15 feet east and west. Behind that the consultants have identified additional land for right-of-way to construct the pathway and adjacent retaining wall.

CHALLENGES AND OPTIONS: During the site visit on August 5, the following challenges were identified. Reflecting on them since the visit, resulted in the following observations and suggested actions:

- Detaching the two buildings – the owner stated his architect indicated there might be structural issues with demolishing the westerly building and leaving the easterly building. The easterly building is the older of the two and is historically and architecturally more significant. During the site visit it was clear that the westerly building trusses extend through and are supported by the wall of the easterly building. **SUGGESTED ACTION:** It would appear that the westerly building trusses could be cut a short distance away from the west wall of the easterly building, and the building could be removed without altering or damaging the wall of the easterly building. The COT should have this possibility investigated by a structural engineer, thus verifying that the westerly building can be detached from the easterly building without the need to structurally modify or demolish the easterly building.
- Sidewalk instead of bike/ped path – an earlier plan with a sidewalk instead of a bike/ped path missed the corner of the easterly building. The short bike/ped path was added to shorten the distance bikes crossing the railroad on 7th Avenue would have to travel to reach 7th Street. **SUGGESTED ACTION:** Return to the earlier plan so no project improvements necessitate the removal of the easterly building. The ped route would be the same in either case. Bikes would have to use the bike/ped path on the south side of the roadway, then access 7th Street by using 6th Avenue. While a bit longer, the inconvenience is an acceptable trade-off in order to save an historic building.
- Room to construct – While the sidewalk in the earlier plan barely missed the southeast corner of the easterly building, the building was still shown as being taken for right-of-way in order to construct the sidewalk and adjacent retaining wall. **SUGGESTED ACTION:** The project team should investigate the feasibility of the contractor working around the building while constructing the project. Even at a slight additional cost, the inconvenience to the contractor is acceptable in order to save an historic building.
- Semi-truck access to Benjamin Plumbing – Benjamin Plumbing has a need for semi-truck access to their loading docks. Based on the assumption that the building would be demolished by the Downtown Links project, plans drawn up for the Benjamin Plumbing owners show truck access off 7th Street across Ferro Avenue and the vacant land left after demolition of both buildings. **SUGGESTED ACTION:** The project team should investigate the possibility of providing a driveway off Downtown Links just west of the easterly building for semi-truck access, determining whether trucks would have room to maneuver into place at the existing loading docks. Provision of this driveway would require moving the bike/ped crossing of the railroad slightly to the west.