



2.19.19

Comments by Becky West, Executive Director to East Franklinton Review Board

I hope you were able to attend Mayor Ginther's State of the City Address where Historian Reita Smith, who attended this meeting last month to ask you to save the West Side Spiritualist Church, had the honor of giving the welcome address. Reita reminded us that in the Book of Joshua, the Israelites were told to leave those 12 stones on the banks of the River Jordan so that future generations would ask what happened there and the story would be recounted. She cautioned that we must preserve our places to tell our stories.

With demolition of this building, we will all land firmly on the wrong side of history. The Church survived the Great Flood of 1913 and over a century. 107 years to be exact. And how long do we anticipate the new housing to last? With today's building material warranties, a mere fraction of that at best. The West Side Spiritualist Church will no longer exist as a touchpoint – a photo display will not right this wrong and we are not creating "new" history. This significant building could and should be repurposed.

When the bulldozers come, they will scoop up not only a century's worth of historic building materials, but buckets full of the authenticity and resiliency that lend to the true neighborhood vibe. There is nothing like this building – it is uniquely Franklinton. The new building could go anywhere in anyplace. But it will never, ever tell you where you are like this survivor does.

It is unfortunate you have been presented with this either/or scenario that casts affordable housing and historic preservation in a false dichotomy. Columbus Landmarks has tremendous respect for Homeport and we welcome opportunities to work together on future site selection. In the meantime, Columbus Landmarks will double down on our efforts to preserve older buildings and mixed-age blocks throughout the city that provide naturally occurring affordable housing, as well as affordable and inspiring space for artists and small businesses.

In addition to HABS documentation, we have a recommendation for the Commission if voting yes to demolition today: request selective demolition to reuse or recycle significant features and building materials.