

Greek Cathedral Facing Opposition to Plan for Park and Event Space in Columbia



COLUMBIA, SC – The proposal by Holy Trinity Greek Orthodox Cathedral for a new park and event space at 1324 Richland Street in downtown Columbia, currently a gravel lot, is facing some opposition from its neighbors, including another church, The State reported.

The proposal is pending approval from the Columbia zoning board, but Ebenezer Lutheran Church across the street from the property has reservations about the plan. “Speaking on behalf of Ebenezer, David Turner said church officials worry the park could become a stopping place for the downtown’s homeless,” The State reported, adding that “places full of benches to sleep on ‘tend to become camp sites,’ and ‘Unfortunately, we have had people use our property as their personal restroom,’” Turner said.

Owned by the estate of late Columbia businessman Joe Azar, the lot is currently used by a neighboring business for parking, and “would be transformed,” according to a proposal presented at the December 10 meeting of the board of zoning appeals.

The event space “would host Sunday gatherings, Christmas and Easter celebrations as well as birthday parties,” William Akel, Azar’s cousin said, The State reported, adding that “it could hold as many as 200 people.”

“There’s nothing else like it. It has an open and natural design,” said Bruce Yeske, an Azar family friend who made the presentation, The State reported. “We met with church leaders and they’re anxious to get started.”

In response to the reservations expressed, Yeske said that “the site’s location and design would make it easy for passing police vehicles to check for anyone trespassing in the park,” The State reported.

“The plan is to develop the site and then gift it to Holy Trinity,” Yeske said, The State reported, adding that “Akel said the property had initially been offered to Ebenezer, but the church declined.”

Turner noted that “the Lutheran church already has its own event space,” The State reported.

City Center Partnership president Matt Kennell wrote a letter to the zoning board also opposing the Holy Trinity plan for the lot, writing that “it is just much too small and in the wrong location for such a venue. We would support a passive use such as parking or a community garden.”

Concerns about the location and parking were expressed by members of the zoning board and Yeske said that “he expects visitors would be served by street parking and parking at Holy Trinity, about two blocks away,” The State reported.

According to The State’s report, Board Chairman Chuck Salley noted that no representatives from Holy Trinity attended the meeting on December 10 and the Board members voted to wait until they receive more information from Holy Trinity about the plan before making a decision on the proposal.

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