



The City of Seattle

Pioneer Square Preservation Board

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PSB 137/25

Staff Report

Board meeting June 4, 2025

Board Members Please Note: The citations from the District Ordinance, Rules for the Pioneer Square Preservation District, and Secretary of the Interior's Standards listed below are for your consideration in addition to any other citations you find relevant in considering each application.

060425.41 **Cannery Union Building**
213 S Main St

Proposed: Demolition of the remaining structure

Staff report: This site has a long application history going back to 1987. While a couple of Certificate of Approval were granted for use, they specifically did not include demolition or new construction but appeared to be an effort to support the applicant in getting financing to pursue a project. The Board has been briefed on proposals for demolition and new construction, but applications were never completed.

Summary of applications: (from newest to oldest)

The Board was briefed on a proposal to demolish the building and build a new residential mix use building on December 4, 2019. The Board wanted to see alternatives that retained as much of the façade as possible in the future development proposal. The Board also asked that the applicant have a more detailed plan for salvaging the decorative masonry units on the 2nd Ave Et façade above the windows (identified as limestone on the current application submittal drawings). Additionally, the Board wanted a proposal to portray the history and cultural significance of the site in the new construction in way that was open and available to the public; on the exterior of the building rather than the residential lobby as mitigation for the loss of a building with historical significance. This application was never completed.

Earlier in 2019 Council Member Sally Bagshaw proposed a resolution declaring the building a blight with the statement that the City will not attempt to acquire the property if the owner diligently takes action to develop the property and address the blight.

The Board was briefed on a proposal to retain the Main St and the 2nd Ave Ext facades and to build a residential addition on top on October 15, 2014, May 4, 2016 and December 7, 2016. The Board confirmed that the building had architectural and historic significance to the Pioneer Square Preservation District. The Board wanted the applicant to seek feedback from the Filipino American community on how the significance of the site might be portrayed in new construction. That application was never completed.

In 1993 a Certificate of Approval was granted to allow for use as retail, office and residential structure. The Certificate of Approval specifically says that it is conditioned on obtaining demolition and design approval from the Board. Minutes reflect that this use approval was to help secure financing but there were design issues to resolve, and the proof of financing was insufficient for demolition approval. The record shows that there was a previous use approval in 1990 and that the applicant would need to return for demolition and design approvals, and that the use was granted to help the applicant obtain financing. The Board had already noted by this time the desire to have the terra cotta (identified as limestone on the current application submittal drawings) salvaged and reused in any proposed new construction at this time.

Summary of historical and cultural context

The ILWU Local 7 and Local 37 operated a Union Hall also known as the Cannery Union Building or the Alaskan Cannery Workers building from about 1933 (Purchased building in 1943) – 1988. Members of the Filipino American community identified as “Alaskeros” came to the Union Hall to solicit jobs in the commercial fishing industry and to fight for equality and workers rights. On June 1, 1981, Gene Viernes and Silme Domingo were assassinated at the building. Viernes and Domingo were officers of the union and cannery workers rights activists who filed a class action Lawsuit against the several Alaskan fish companies for discrimination in 1972. The men were also outspoken opponents of Ferdinand Marcos, the President of the Philippines, who was ultimately found liable for the murders. This was the first time a foreign government was held accountable for assassinations on US soil.

The 4-story building was built in 1900 as the Cascade Laundry Building. The 2nd Ave façade was altered with the construction of the 2nd Ave Extension in 1928. The changes made to the facade from the 2nd Ave Extension are still in the period of significance of the National Register listing of the Pioneer Square Skid Row District, however the building was reduced to one story following the 1945 earthquake. Because the alteration from the earthquake

in 1945 were outside the period of significance, the building is classified as “historic, non-contributing” to the National Register Pioneer Square Skid Row District. The Seattle Municipal Code, which designates the Pioneer Square Preservation District specifies that the Board has to consider the architectural and historic significance when considering demolition. The Board reviewed the history and architecture of the building at briefing between 2014 – 2019 and found that the site has architectural and historic significance as the location of the union offices and dispatch hall for the Alaska Cannery Workers Union, Local 37, International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU)/Region 37. Though earlier reviews indicate that the Board did not think that the building had architectural significance except for the decorative [terra cotta] masonry units, it is not clear that a complete history of the site or the Filipino American Alaskeros cultural historic significance was considered. Over time the significance of Filipino Alaskeros and Viernes and Domingo have been better documented and received more recognition. In 2021, the Filipino American National Historic Society presented the history of Filipino American gathering places for Historic Seattle including the Cannery Union Building.

Demolition of structures in Pioneer Square is intentionally rare. All previous demolitions have been reviewed using SMC 23.66.115 A. In those cases, the Board has determined that the structure did not have any architectural or historic significance and approved the use and design; and the Director found that the proof of financing was adequate. The applicant is asking the Board to consider the demolition under section SMC 23.66.115 B. The Board can make a recommendation for demolition when it is essential to protect the public health, safety and welfare, whether the prerequisites in 23.66.115 are met or not. The applicant is asking to have the building demolished under B now that the condition of the facades has deteriorated to point according to the structural report they are failing. They are not proposing to meet any of prerequisites under A and are not proposing any mitigation for the loss of the building as the Board has previously requested. Although the applicant says that they will try to salvage the [concrete lintels], it is unclear if they are referring to the decorative masonry units on the 2nd Ave ET façade labeled as limestone or a different element. They do not provide for any means or methods of retaining the decorative masonry units. Previously the applicant had shown braces holding the walls while internal and rear walls would be demolished. The Board received a letter from former officers, union members and community supporters of Alaskan Cannery Workers Union Local 37 supporting the demolition under caveats to recognize the history of the site and retain those decorative masonry units.

. The decorative masonry unit and have been referred to as terra cotta, cast stone, concrete, and limestone over the years and in different documents. Regardless of the material, it is clear that the decorative masonry units have been discussed for salvage over the years are the features outlined in red in this photo.



There has been no application completed for rehabilitation or new construction project for the site and there is no new construction proposed with this application. Staff recommends that any approval be conditioned upon a covenant that would be placed on the site so that the conditions would carry forward in the case that the property sells or there continues to be a long time period waiting for the property to be developed.

Staff have prepared a draft motion considering the Boards past discussions, the public comments from Filipino American constituents and the structural report for the Board consideration.

Staff is recommending that the salvaged pieces be stored on site, so that if the property sells that the pieces are not lost in the sale. However, storage in a warehouse may be most appropriate, and a covenant could guarantee that the architectural pieces will be provided for reuse by any future owner of the property.

Draft Motion:

I move to recommend granting a Certificate of Approval for demolition, with conditions, of the remaining structure at 213 S Main St known as the Cannery workers Union Hall under SMC 23.66.115B according to the photos and the structural report that documents risk of safety issues. Though the Board and the community would rather see a building with residential uses constructed, no construction is proposed at this time. The Board finds the site to have historic cultural significance as the union hall of the Alaska Cannery Workers

Union, Local 37, International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU)/Region 37, labor history and life and death of Gene Viernes and Silme Domingo which had national and international implications and well as significant to the Filipino American community as a space of cultural significance. The conditions of the approval are to ensure that the historical significance of the site is portrayed in future new constructions in accordance with the goals of the district. The conditions include:

The property owner will engage a masonry professional with demonstrated experience in historic building rehabilitation and may include consultation with a structural engineer to provide a letter of opinion regarding feasibility to salvage the decorative masonry units. The locations of decorative masonry unit are above the windows and the arched center hall entry from the window head up to the parapet coping on the 2nd Ave Et façade. The decorative masonry units are to be salvaged unless the masonry professional determines that they are not salvageable. The letter of opinion will be provided to the District Coordinator prior to any work on demolition.

Prior to any demolition activity, the owner shall record a covenant with the King County Recorder's office, approved as to form by the District Coordinator, that substantially provides:

If the decorative masonry units are salvageable, the owner or the owners representative or agent will provide the Pioneer Square Preservation District Coordinator (District Coordinator) the proposed means and method to salvage and store the decorative masonry units prior to any work on demolition for approval of the District Coordinator

The decorative masonry units shall be stored in a manner and location that protects them from the elements. The preferred location is on the subject site in a storage container the owner prefers that the decorative masonry units are stored at a warehouse the owner shall provide the address to the District Coordinator in writing as to where the decorative masonry units are being stored. Any change in location requires notice to the District Coordinator. If the owner decides to sale the property, the current owner will return the decorative masonry units to the site and store in a manner that protects them from the elements. the retention of pieces for reuse even in the case of a new owner is included in a covenant for the property.

The site, the fence and the storage container, if the decorative masonry units are stored on site, will be kept free of litter, graffiti, off premises signs prohibited by code, weeds and otherwise be maintained.

Any new building constructed on the site must include a display, plaque, mural, artwork or other architectural features that portrays the history and significance of the site on the exterior of the building visible to the public. The content of the portrayal and the manner in which it is displayed will be developed including feedback from the Filipino American community, including Filipino American National Historic Society and must first be approved by the Pioneer Square Preservation Board.

If salvageable, the owner shall incorporate and install the salvaged decorative masonry units in any new constructed building on the site in a manner that is approved by the Board in a Certificate of Approval application.

If it is determined that the decorative masonry units are not salvageable by a masonry professional with demonstrated historic building rehabilitation experience, or the decorative masonry units are not salvaged during the demolition the owner must submit and get approval of the Board a second substitute method of recognizing the historical significance of the site in addition to the display, plaque mural, artwork or other architectural feature mention above, one of which could be the name of the building. The way in which the significance is portrayed will be developed through feedback of Filipino American community, including Filipino American National Historic Society and must be approved by the Pioneer Square Preservation Board.

The covenant shall run with the land and shall be binding on any new purchasers or successor in interest.

The Board directs staff to prepare a written recommendation of approval based on considering the application submittal and Board discussion at the June 4, 2025 public meeting and forward this written recommendation to the Department of Neighborhoods Director.

Code Citations:

Seattle Municipal Code

23.66.030 Certificates of Approval required

Certificate of approval required. No person shall alter, demolish, construct, reconstruct, restore, remodel, make any visible change to the exterior appearance of any structure, or to the public rights-of-way or other public spaces in a special review district, and no one shall remove or substantially alter any existing sign or erect or place any new sign or change the principal use of any building, or any portion of a building, structure or lot in a special review district, and no permit for such activity shall be issued unless a

certificate of approval has been issued by the Department of Neighborhoods Director.

23.66.100 Creation of district, legislative findings and purpose

A. During the City of Seattle's relatively brief history, it has had little time in which to develop areas of consistent historical or architectural character. It is recognized that the Pioneer Square area of Seattle contains many of these rare attributes and consequently is an area of great historical and cultural significance. Further, the regional sports stadiums, constructed in and near the Pioneer Square area, and the traffic and activities that they generate have resulted in adverse impacts upon the social, cultural, historic and ethnic values of the Pioneer Square area. To preserve, protect, and enhance the historic character of the Pioneer Square area and the buildings therein; to return unproductive structures to useful purposes; to attract visitors to the City; to avoid a proliferation of vehicular parking and vehicular-oriented uses; to provide regulations for existing on-street and off-street parking; to stabilize existing housing, and encourage a variety of new and rehabilitated housing types for all income groups; to encourage the use of transportation modes other than the private automobile; to protect existing commercial vehicle access; to improve visual and urban relationships between existing and future buildings and structures, parking spaces and public improvements within the area; and to encourage pedestrian uses, there is established as a special review district, the Pioneer Square Preservation District. The boundaries of the District are shown on Map A for 23.66.100¹ and on the Official Land Use Map.

23.66.115 Demolition approval

A. Demolition or removal of buildings or other structures in the District is prohibited unless approved by the Department of Neighborhoods Director. Except as provided in subsection B below, no approval shall be given for building demolition or removal unless the following prerequisites are met:

1. The Director of Neighborhoods, following a recommendation by the Preservation Board, determines that the building or structure has no architectural or historic significance; and
 2. Use and design of the replacement structure has been approved by the Department of Neighborhoods Director; and
 3. Proof acceptable to the Department of Neighborhoods Director of a valid commitment for interim and long-term financing for the replacement structure has been secured. In addition to other proof, the Department of Neighborhoods Director may accept a bond, letter of credit or cash deposit as
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a demonstration that the project has adequate financial backing to ensure completion; and

4. Satisfactory arrangements have been made for retention of any part of the structure's facade which the Department of Neighborhoods Director, following a recommendation by the Preservation Board, determines to be significant; and

5. Satisfactory assurance is provided that new construction will be completed within two (2) years of demolition.

B. When demolition or removal of a building or other structure in the District is essential to protect the public health, safety and welfare or when the purposes of this ordinance will be furthered by the demolition or removal, then the Director of Neighborhoods, following review and recommendation by the Board, may authorize such demolition or removal whether the prerequisites of this Section 23.66.115 are satisfied or not.

Issued:

May 27, 2025

Genna Nashem

Pioneer Square Preservation Board Coordinator