Plans to demolish railroad depot delayed for 90 days

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Plans to demolish the historic Southern Pacific railroad depot in Lafayette have been delayed for 90 days pending the results of the city’s “multimodal” transportation center study.

Denman McNear, chairman of the Southern Pacific Transportation Company, wrote a letter, dated June 15, to Mayor Dud Lastrapes explaining that the San Francisco-based company is still receptive to donating the depot on Grant Street to the city.

“Because Southern Pacific wishes to continue a good relationship with Lafayette, our operating department will delay demolition plans until Sept. 15,” wrote McNear. “I believe this will give the city an opportunity to complete its transportation center study, and allow us time to begin and complete removal plans should you be unable to create a mutually acceptable alternative program.

“Our company’s offer to donate the structure, on condition that it be removed from the property, is still open.”

The Acadian Metropolitan Code Authority issued a building permit to the local division of Southern Pacific on May 27 which gives the company permission to destroy the Lafayette landmark. P.E. Martin, a local Southern Pacific engineer, applied for the permit.

Martin said the depot is too close to the main track and has to be demolished. Southern Pacific had offered to donate the depot, but only if the city moved it to another site, he said. Martin said the city had indicated that it would be too costly to move the structure.

However, the city may consider the depot as the site for a multimodal transportation terminal for COLT, Greyhound buses and taxicabs in a current study by Wilbur Smith Associates. The City Council approved the study on May 31 which will be funded by a $24,000 federal grant and $6,000 of city funds.

McNear informed Lastrapes that Jim Johnston, the Southern Pacific public relations manager in Kansas City, was under the impression that the study of the potential use of the site would be completed in a short time. McNear also emphasized that, based on Johnson’s conversations with Lastrapes, the city would not rescind the approved demolition permit.

“If the City of Lafayette agrees to extend the demolition permit, Southern Pacific reciprocally agrees to temporarily suspend its plans to proceed with the building removal,” McNear wrote.

Johnson said Friday that Southern Pacific is basically giving the city 90 days to do something about the depot, but it has not changed its policy concerning its unused, “redundant” facilities.

“Our policy is that we do not donate buildings to public bodies for other than railroad use,” said Johnson.

If the depot were to be demolished, said Johnson, Southern Pacific would still be responsible for providing a smaller structure for the AMTRAK trains which stop in Lafayette. However, AMTRAK passenger tickets are presently being sold aboard the trains, he said.