

SandRidge Downtown Project Information Sheet
by Suzette Hatfield, for Preservation Oklahoma, Inc.

SandRidge Energy has applied for permission from the City of OKC to establish a large corporate campus downtown, in the 100 block of Robert S. Kerr, between Broadway and Robinson. Case number is DTCA-10-016.

This includes demolition of six structures at:

- 136 Dean A. McGee (portion of parking podium)
- 300 N. Robinson (a.k.a., 135 Robert S. Kerr). This is the old “KerMac” building, first headquarters of Kerr-McGee, built in 1928.
- 135 Robert S. Kerr (YMCA building, constructed in 1918)
- 125 Robert S. Kerr (a.k.a. 131 Robert S. Kerr) This is the Capitol Savings and Loan, built in 1924.
- 107 Robert S. Kerr (a.k.a. 111 Robert S. Kerr). This is the India Temple Shrine building, 1902. When the state seal was stolen from the first state capitol in Guthrie, it was brought here. The Oklahoma Legislature met here from 1913 to 1917.
- 120 Robert S. Kerr, the Petroleum Club building, offices and high-rise parking, built in 1957.

A five-story, 88,000 square foot curtain wall structure would be built at 120 Robert S. Kerr to accommodate a day care center, auditorium, classrooms, mechanical equipment, fitness center and offices. Outdoor terraces would be constructed adjacent to the building.

SandRidge currently occupies the 30-story tower formerly known as the Kerr-McGee Tower, completed in 1972.

The Braniff Building (1923) at 324 N. Robinson is part of the project but not scheduled for demolition, largely because it is on the National Register of Historic places.

The **city staff recommendation** was to **DENY** demolitions at 300 N. Robinson (135 Robert S. Kerr), 135 Robert S. Kerr, 125 Robert S. Kerr (131 Robert S. Kerr) and 107 Robert S. Kerr (111 Robert S. Kerr).

Staff recommended **APPROVAL** of demolition of the parking/office structures at 136 Dean A. McGee and 120 Robert S. Kerr, remodel and expansion of the tower at 135 Robert S. Kerr, new façade at 136 Dean A. McGee and construction of the five-story structure at 120 Robert S. Kerr.

Staff believes that buildings at 300 N. Robinson, 135 Robert S. Kerr may be eligible for the National Register of Historic Places and that the building at 111 Robert S. Kerr may be eligible next year, based on the architectural significance of its 1961 remodel. Staff further believes that the old Petroleum Club Building at 120 Robert S. Kerr is individually eligible for the National Register.

Reasons for staff’s recommendation to deny demolition of the four buildings listed above were:

- “They represent an important part of the urban fabric of the ‘Skyscraper District’ of Oklahoma City...It is indisputable that the buildings are local legacy resources representing significant historical development of the high-rise district of the City...”
- “These structures help define and enclose the street corridor, creating a sense of urban activity, intensity and spatial containment, as well as establishing the character of the street and district...”

- “The loss of buildings that may have economic viability in exchange for open space would erode the urban density of the downtown, moving it closer to a suburban character...”
- “Downtowns are defined by the presence of high-rise buildings. To eliminate five structures that represent true urban character and that define what constitutes a ‘downtown’ – buildings, massing and definition of the street edge is counter-productive to the intent and purpose of downtown development and other recent proposed redevelopment efforts in the downtown core...”

The Downtown Design Review Committee (DTRC) voted on April 8, 2010 to approve the SandRidge plan in toto. Vote was:

Ayes: Tanenbaum, Faulkner, Loftis, Ainsworth, Grubbs, McDermid

Nays: Brunsteter

The charge of the Downtown Design Review Committee is to “promote the development and redevelopment of the downtown area in a manner consistent with the unique and diverse design elements of downtown, ensure that uses are compatible with the commercial, cultural, historic and governmental significance of downtown, promote the downtown as a vital mixed-use area, create a network of pleasant public spaces and pedestrian amenities, **enhance existing structures and circulation patterns, and preserve and restore historic features,**” (Zoning Ordinance Sect. 7200.2A Downtown Business District)

According to Susan Miller (OKC Planning Dept), of the 116 cases that have come before the Downtown Design Review Committee since its inception in 2007, the Committee has gone against City recommendation only 15 times, mostly on insignificant matters.

Condition of the buildings is in dispute. According to Steve Lackmeyer (NewsOK.com), “The committee originally planned to tour the buildings Thursday [April 8] — but those plans were **changed without public notice** and committee members were given tours in pairs so as to avoid meeting quorum requirements that would have allowed the public to see the buildings, as well.”

SandRidge’s proposal is contrary to the findings of Speck and Associates, hired by the City of OKC to recommend ways to make Oklahoma City more “walkable”. Unfortunately, OKC ranks dead last currently as a walkable city. Recommendations included more density in downtown, rather than less, encouraging a multiplicity of uses: “office, housing, retail, dining, entertainment, hospitality, schools, recreation, worship and others.”

Interestingly, the report states, “The need for comfortable walk is perhaps the least intuitive part of this discussion, because it insists that **people like to be spatially contained by the walls of buildings.** Most people enjoy open spaces, long views, and the great outdoors. But people also enjoy – and need – a sense of enclosure to feel comfortable as pedestrians.” The report indicates that we should be filling in gaps between buildings, rather than creating open spaces, causing “missing teeth” in the urban landscape.

On April 19, 2010, Preservation Oklahoma, Inc. (POK), filed an appeal of the decision of the Downtown Design Review Committee. The appeal letter states, “The immeasurable impacts of this proposal have not been fully and adequately investigated and the considerable loss of historic building fabric has not been sufficiently recognized.” While POK supports many aspects of the SandRidge plan and greatly admires and appreciates SandRidge for its commitment to downtown OKC, the group believes that the SandRidge plan “does not...sufficiently address issues of

consistency with existing design elements, compatibility with and preservation of existing historic features, or enhancement of circulation patterns.”

The appeal will be heard by the Board of Adjustment on Thursday, May 20, 1:30PM in the city council chambers.

Despite concerns expressed by individuals and groups, SandRidge has consistently refused to even talk about a compromise to their plan. POK believes there needs to be further interaction regarding the plan and asks for “a more thorough consideration of alternatives to such extensive demolition of the other historic buildings on the (corporate) site.”

Legendary urban planner William H. Whyte said:

It is significant that the cities doing best by their downtowns are the ones doing best at historic preservation. Fine old buildings are worthwhile in their own right, but there is a greater benefit involved. They provide discipline. Architects and planners like a blank slate. They usually do their best work, however, when they don't have one. When they have to work with impossible lot lines and bits and pieces of space, beloved old eyesores, irrational street layouts, and other such constraints, they frequently produce the best of their new designs — and the most neighborly.

With gratitude to Doug Loudenback for the gold mine of information here:
<http://dougdawg.blogspot.com/2010/04/bye-bye-miss-american-pie.html>
<http://dougdawg.blogspot.com/2010/04/appeal-from-sandridge-decision-by.html>

A compelling argument for saving the KerMac Building:
<http://downtownontherange.blogspot.com/2010/03/save-kermac.html>

Why the SandRidge plan makes us more like Amarillo than a Big League City:
<http://downtownontherange.blogspot.com/2010/04/tear-that-sucker-down.html>

The need for some compromise to the otherwise wonderful SandRidge proposal:
<http://downtownontherange.blogspot.com/2009/12/problem-with-overwise-excellent.html>

<http://www.KeepDowntownUrban.com> Information and a poll.

Steve Lackmeyer's poll on the subject.
<http://blog.newsok.com/okccentral/2010/04/08/sandridge-the-poll/>