

Written Media Statement from Historic Hospitality, LLC and Shah Family, August 8, 2020:

We were incredibly surprised to read for the first time Monday morning, August 3, 2020, in an article in the Aiken Standard that fellow business owner Malia Koelker made a formal complaint and requested that the City of Aiken Design Review Board consider an inquiry of Demolition by Neglect with respect to Hotel Aiken. We have requested a copy of the complaint from the City but have received no response as of Friday, August 7, 2020. We have received no written complaints or recent requests from Ms. Koelker or the DRB in connection with the renovation of Hotel Aiken or the status of the building itself. Even following publication of the article Monday, we were not contacted by the DRB. Despite the short notice, we were able to attend the August 4, 2020 work session for the DRB, with hopes of learning the factual basis of the complaint and the particular “deterioration” of Hotel Aiken that falls within Aiken Zoning Ordinance 04142003A.

During that work session, we learned that the complaint was a general cosmetic complaint and no specific deterioration was discussed or established in connection with Hotel Aiken that would fall within the Ordinance referenced. We were pleased to have the opportunity to advise the DRB on the progress we have made in connection with the interior demolition and architectural and engineering progress, including several evaluations of Hotel Aiken by a structural engineer, and pricing of construction plans with our general contractor. There are no previously existing architectural drawings or blueprints for Hotel Aiken, which was built in the 1800s and renovated by the Holley family in the 1920s, so our professional team is creating drawings for Hotel Aiken for the first time as we proceed. The interior demolition is necessarily a slow process in order to properly preserve the historic features of the site and confirm the safety of the building. The demolition crew must carefully remove walls and then the architects and engineers must draft plans based on what is revealed. We cannot enter into a formal contract with our general contractor until plans have been completed and all renovation and new construction items have been priced. This is a very complicated renovation and not a project than can be completed piecemeal. While this has been a long and tedious, and frankly, expensive process, it is important to the Shah family to preserve the historic and cultural elements of Hotel Aiken. It is much simpler and faster to construct a building from the ground-up, but this project is about renovation and restoration and is an investment in and to the City of Aiken. The site is now listed on the South Carolina Historic Properties Record, which we completed in 2018. We plan to submit an application to have the site listed on the National Register of Historic Places, as well. We have been working with the State Historic Preservation Office, the National Park Service and the franchisor to confirm that we conform to the guidelines and standards required by each in connection with this project and our historic preservation goals.

We were approximately 4-weeks from submitting for a permit before the Governor declared a state of emergency due to COVID-19. We have been in regular communication with the City of Aiken and the City completed its most recent walk-through of the space in February/March, 2020. We have been clear in our communications with the City that we are experiencing delay at this juncture due to COVID-19, which has had a devastating impact on the economy in general, and especially the hospitality industry. At this time, we have ceased work on Hotel Aiken and we do not have an anticipated restart date; that will be driven by the economy.