

# Jail Won't Be Held Up By Unmoved Houses

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Ask not for whom the bell tolls, it tolls for the two houses owned by the Zenke family on the lot behind Guilford County's jail in downtown Greensboro — the lot where a new jail is about to be built.

When the plans to build the new jail were being drawn up, the Zenkes told the county they would move the two houses, but the county has been waiting and waiting for that to happen, and the last official deadline the county gave the Zenkes — midnight on Tuesday, June 30 — came and went over a month ago.

In the meantime, Guilford County Sheriff BJ Barnes is ready to start building his new jail soon. When Barnes was asked if he would hold up construction of the jail until something could be done with the two houses, Barnes said, "No — I mean, [deleted] no" and his second no was preceded by a four-letter word that starts with "h."

Barnes said that, if the houses are still there when construction is ready to begin, they will be torn down.

Construction is expected to start in October, but Barnes said the county

might do some preliminary work on the site before then.

"We may do some fencing in September," Barnes said.

According to Guilford County Property Management Director David Grantham, the county has gotten its footings and foundation permit from the City of Greensboro, something city officials announced this week. Grantham said the permit was given before July 1, meaning that some code restrictions that went into effect on that date would not apply to the new jail.

Chairman of the Guilford County Board of Commissioners Skip Alston said the county is getting tired of dealing with the matter, and he said the deal was for the houses to have been gone long before now. He added that the county has bent over backwards on the matter until recently.

"They've missed several deadlines and our skin is growing a little thin," Alston said.

Like Barnes, Alston said the houses won't hold up construction of the jail.

"We're not going to alter the date," Alston said.

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## Unmoved

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Guilford County Sheriff's Department Attorney Matt Mason said he didn't wish to comment on the matter other than to say that the Zenkes were currently not in compliance of their agreement with the county. Mason also said he felt the county had done what it could to work with the family but now time was growing very short.

The Board of Commissioners has gone into closed session at least once to discuss the matter and, at Jail Construction Advisory Committee meetings held over the last year, the issue of the remaining houses has come up several times.

There seems to be a sense now among county officials that, though there's little optimism the Zenkes will move the houses, there's some hope that a last-ditch effort funded by Preservation Greensboro Development Fund will be able to save the houses by moving them to new locations before a bulldozer acting on behalf of the county flattens them.

Preservation Greensboro is a nonprofit organization dedicated to preserving the "architecturally significant" homes, buildings and areas in Greensboro, and the nonprofit and its partners are trying to save the houses.

Preservation Greensboro, founded in 1966, operates out of Blandwood Mansion — which is in close proximity to the two houses in question.

Benjamin Briggs, executive director of

Preservation Greensboro, said his group would like to see the houses saved for several reasons. One of the houses is over 100 years old and Briggs said there aren't that many houses with that kind of history left standing in Greensboro. He said the other house was a brick duplex built around the time of World War I.

Briggs said both houses had a "distinct and unique" nature, and he added that, even if the houses didn't have any historic value, it would still be better to move them than put them in a landfill.

Briggs said the Zenkes had hoped to find a buyer who would relocate the houses.

"They were not able to secure anyone," Briggs said.

He said Preservation Greensboro might have more luck given its wide resources and numerous supporters.

"We have a lot of partners," Briggs said.

Marsh Prause, chairman of the Preservation Greensboro Development Fund, said he was hopeful that at least one of the houses could be saved.

He said an agreement was close that would relocate the house that was over 100 years old onto a lot on Cedar Street, just outside of downtown.

Prospects for the brick duplex built in the early part of last century, he said, were not as good, but he added that even saving one of the two houses would be a victory.