



The January 8 meeting of [Birmingham's Design Review Committee](#) included a lengthy discussion about future plans for the significant portion of the former TCI [Linn Iron Works](#) property. Natural gas utility [Alagasco](#) is looking to redevelop the site, located just off the corner of 14th Street and 1st Avenue North in the city's burgeoning Entrepreneurial District, for a new operations center. It would be one of two such facilities being developed to handle increased demand in the metro area.

Demolition of the largest structure currently standing on the site - a freight terminal once used by the Illinois Central, [Central of Georgia](#), and [Birmingham Southern Railroad](#); and sitting at 14 14th St. N. - was approved as well as a conceptual layout of the new development and its resulting elevations. Alan Tichansky of [Williams Blackstock Architects](#) provided committee members with [an outline of a report](#) (PDF format) developed to determine whether the structure, most recently used as a mini self-storage facility, could be adapted for the site's proposed new use. Reasons cited included a list of issues with the building's current condition - most notably the reported removal of the one story shed's truss structure bracing and the need for a complete renovation of both it and the two story building to which it's attached. They also cite an issue with the building's construction - wood with interior bearing walls - as being "incompatible" with the necessary space layout requirements.



The proposal's approval was not unanimous and not without concern from committee members ([as reported in The Birmingham News last week](#)). It would be the last significant building directly associated with the dominance of rail service along the southern edge of Birmingham's central business district - leading to the eventual grade separation project and the underpasses at 14th, 18th, 19th, and 20th Streets. Early reports have already motivated some to begin to plan an effort to save the building, [most notably "I Believe in Birmingham."](#) It is not, however, the most significant transformation of property formerly used by Illinois Central.

A quick study of the lower left side of [this historic photograph](#) hosted on the website [bhamrails.info](#) shows a terminal shed sitting along 1st Avenue North between 14th and 18th Streets. Those familiar with this part of town will now probably have a new found appreciation of the name [Innovation Depot](#) - housed in [the former Sears Roebuck and Co. flagship store](#) that now occupies the property.