

TOWN OF HARVARD

MUNICIPAL BUILDINGS COMMITTEE



Meeting Minutes – 2 December, 9:30-11:00, Town Hall Meeting Room

Attendees

Present - Peter Warren, Marie Sobalvarro, Pete Jackson, Lucy Wallace, Willie Wickman, Maggie Green, Ron Ostberg (chair, secretary);

1. The minutes of the November 18th meeting were read and approved.
2. The attached document was handed out and served as the focus of discussion.
3. Real Estate:
 - a. Peter W. reported that Diane Newton and Rhonda Sprague would be providing evaluations for various configuration of the Hildreth property before the Workshop. He also stated that he has had difficulty getting real 'comps' for the old library, but he is meeting with Omni Properties of Concord MA to ask their opinion.
 - b. Peter will be consulting Chris Tracy on the ZBA about the viability of use changes on the old library. Lucy recommended that Gabe, as zoning officer be consulted as well.
 - c. C. Ron will talk with Scott Hayward about his ideas for the Hildreth properties.
4. Plans were made to prepare the so-called 'Space Utilization' study. This is a two-part task that will be organized by Maggie with Willie, Lucy and Pete providing input.
 - a. Part 1: Inventory and characterize the attributes of various public and private spaces in the town that might be considered as candidates for use by Town Government, COA or cultural activities.
 - i. Scheduling factors
 1. Availability – When is the space available?
 2. Predictability - Is the scheduling predictable? In other words, can you rely on it? I'm not sure how to express this, but it is a critical criteria.
 - ii. Room Characteristics factors
 1. Size/capacity of the space –
 2. Furnishings
 3. Equipment
 - iii. Operations factors
 1. Set up/Take down – requirements; how easy is it?
 2. Ease of scheduling
 - iv. Location
 1. Ease of access
 2. Availability of parking
 - v. HC accessibility
 - vi. Cost factors
 1. Rental rate –
 2. Related costs – security, janitorial staff, etc
 - b. Part 2: Then, Testing for Appropriateness (scoring) for each of the uses. In other words, how are the needs of each of the following met, or not?
 - i. Town meetings (boards and commissions – 10-20 people)
 - ii. Eating for Seniors (15-50 people)
 - iii. Multipurpose for Seniors (15-50 people)
 - iv. Offices for Council on Aging (4)

- v. 200 seat performance/meeting space (this is where we demonstrate that the upper town hall fills a particular need not met by Volunteers Hall, Cronin, Historical Society, large meetings rooms or sanctuaries of churches)
 - vi. Cultural Center core facility (two large meeting/class rooms; three small rooms; storage)
 - c. There was inconclusive discussion on the merit and feasibility of determining utilization. The team agreed to study this.
- 5. The 'tentative recommendations' proposed in the accompanying document were discussed:
 - a. There was general agreement that it was appropriate and timely to present the committee's tentative recommendations at the Workshop to obtain input from participants.
 - b. There was full agreement that all three properties should be used for civic programs and that renovations and additions should be designed to meet code and should optimize program benefit to residents.
 - c. There was full agreement that every effort should be made to mitigate the cost to the Town for the renovations and additions through pursuit of the following:
 - i. Land sale or some form of development of a portion of the Hildreth land.
 - ii. Creation of a non-profit for the cultural center.
 - iii. Taking advantage of the reduced costs in the current construction market.
 - iv. Obtain State grants for energy and community activities
 - v. Appropriation of CPC funds
 - vi. Obtain Energy company rebates
 - vii. Pursue private donations
 - viii. Sequence (and possibility phase) projects to minimize design, construction and financing costs.
 - ix. Take advantage of current low financing costs.
 - d. The content of the first year program was discussed, but no agreement was reached.
- 6. The next scheduled meeting is December 9th.

Overview:

From the outset, the Committee committed itself to identifying and evaluating all reasonable options for the disposition of these properties. To that end, it gathered information and undertook research necessary to facilitate an objective cost/benefit analysis.

Having done that, the Committee realized that lowest cost and highest benefit are at direct and seemingly irreconcilable odds. So, believing that cost alone need not dictate a sub-optimal result, the Committee went beyond the cost/benefit analysis to consider actual funding strategies – specifically phasing and Public-Private partnerships – in hopes of providing a recommendation that maximized benefits to residents at an acceptable cost.

While there is much work to be completed (construction cost estimates; assessing other spaces in town as alternative locations for certain program activities; commercial real estate evaluations; and a survey of residents), the Committee is now able to draft the outline of a tentative recommendation. The purpose of this draft is to promote, not curtail, a productive exploration of implementation strategies.

Tentative Recommendations to Town Meeting:

1. All three buildings are to be used for civic purposes.
2. The Hildreth site is to be modified, and the house expanded to meet the needs of Harvard's senior community. The Town agrees to raise and appropriate \$x,xxx,xxx. Project design will commence immediately. Initiation of construction is contingent on securing grants, donations and proceeds of land sale totaling \$xxx,xxx.
3. The use of the old library as a Cultural Center is endorsed. The Pilot Project will continue for a year and the formation of a self-sustaining, non-profit will be a pre-condition for providing long-term lease for community use.
4. Town Hall is to be renovated and expanded to serve all aspects of volunteer town government and to provide a town meeting/performance space. In the coming year, grants will be sought for design and construction. Pending the outcome, a request for funding and a phasing schedule will be presented to the 2012 Town Meeting for approval.

While we may (come to) agree on this set of Recommendations, there is a great deal to be done to substantiate and explain them. Here is a partial list:

1. Space utilization study
2. Real estate analysis
3. Complete report on Design work
4. Grant survey and 'handicapping'
5. History and feasibility of private philanthropy in Harvard
6. A case for a non-profit for the Cultural Center
7. History and justification for civic activities on the Common
8. Creation and implementation of public education
9. Building constituency base(s)

Process:

The Committee's work has been done in four, overlapping stages. Each stage raised issues and suggested several alternative approaches. In each stage, alternatives were evaluated in terms of various performance criteria. Some alternatives were rejected as fatally flawed; others, while imperfect, were carried to the next stage.

The four stages of work (While very sketchy, this may well be the outline of our final report)

Stage 1 – Programming

1. Three programs were considered; a survey of other towns was undertaken
 - a. Town Government – describe activities and alternative 'models'
 - b. Senior Center – describe activities and alternative 'models'
 - c. Cultural Center – describe derivation of idea, activities and alternative 'models'
2. Alternative levels of operational performance were considered for each:
 - a. Town Government
 - i. Minimum provision for essential staff and operations
 - ii. Inclusion of volunteer activities
 - b. Senior Center
 - i. Minimum provision
 - ii. Dispersed model
 - iii. Inclusion of large multipurpose room
 - iv. Several additional programs spaces, interior and exterior
 - c. Cultural Center
 - i. Dispersed model
 - ii. Core facility with satellite locations with complementary spaces
 - iii. Large operation with studio and office rentals
3. Alternate locations were considered, some were rejected for the reasons stated
 - a. Town Government
 - i. Devens – not in the traditional center of town life (which is to say, the volunteer life of many residents)
 - b. Senior Center
 - i. Catholic Church – indeterminate condition; not necessarily less expensive than upgrades to current site
 - ii. Dispersed – program goals and objectives do not support this approach
 - iii. Hildreth – carried to the next stage
 - iv. Old Library – carried to the next stage
 - c. Cultural Center
 - i. Catholic Church – indeterminate condition
 - ii. Dispersed – need for a 'core' or 'home base'
4. Conclusions - Key program requirements
 - a. Town Government - elaborate
 - b. Senior Center - elaborate
 - c. Cultural Center - elaborate
5. Alternatives eliminated - elaborate
6. Alternatives carried forward – elaborate

Stage 2a – Site and Building Evaluation; Design; Engineering; Estimating

1. Building Evaluation – explain why demolition is not an option; explain the challenges of renovating historic structures; in other words, describe the conundrum....
2. Describe various criteria such as compatibility of program and building; responsiveness to program growth and unforeseeable needs; etc
3. Alternatives studied and eliminated
 - a. Town Hall
 - i. Use of old Fire Station
 - ii. Large, direct attachment to the building
 - iii. Use of attic space
 - b. Hildreth
 - i. Adding to north side and parking adjacent
 - ii. Adding to west side and parking on north
 - c. Old Library
 - i. Use of mezzanine
 - ii. Use of attic space
4. Alternatives carried forward – elaborate.....drawings; architecture, civil and building engineering reports; estimates

Stage 2b – Pilot Project

1. An experiment in determining the actual demand for services as well as the supply/enthusiasm of providers
2. Initial findings are positive

Stage 3 – Cost/Benefit Scenarios

1. Finding: Inverse relationship between lowest Cost and highest Benefit
 - a. Describe Benefit in terms of evaluation criteria
2. Description of real estate options
 - a. Sell some or all of Hildreth property
 - b. Sell or lease old library
3. Alternatives eliminated (unless last Stage is unsuccessful)
 - a. Sell entire Hildreth property and locate Senior Center in old library
 - b. Eliminate Cultural Center
 - c. Reduce program for Town Government
4. Alternatives carried forward
 - a. Maximum Benefit approach

Stage 4 – Implementation Strategy

1. Final step is determining if optimum Benefit can be funded
 - a. Consider phasing
 - b. Consider Public-Private Partnership
 - c. Seek all manner of government grants

