



Minutes of the Oberlin City Council Work Session

Held on Monday, November 18, 2013

6:30 p.m.

President Rimbart called the Work Session to order at 6:30 p.m., in order to hear and discuss a report on the Gasholder/OURC Governance.

Members Present: Charles Peterson, Bryan Burgess, Sharon Soucy, Elizabeth Meadows, Scott Broadwell, Aaron Mucciolo, Ronnie Rimbart.

Others Present: Belinda Anderson, Clerk of Council; Eric Norenberg, City Manager; Sal Talarico, Finance Director; Carrie Handy, Economic Development and Housing Officer

Presenter: Joyce Barrett, Heritage Ohio

Retrospective: City Manager, Eric Norenberg

- November 2012 City Staff and Underground Railroad Center Implementation Team submitted a grant proposal for Phase II of the Gasholder/Underground Railroad Center Park and Ride project.
- February 2013: Received notice that grant was denied.
- March 2013: Meeting with Foundation staff to learn why request was denied.
- Learned foundation board had some concern about the future governance and business model for Gasholder/Underground Railroad Center Park and Ride Project.
- URCIT Governance plan mobilization meeting
 - Through partnership with Heritage Ohio, City was able to have assessment completed at no cost to the City.
 - Scheduled November 18, 2013 Work Session to allow Joyce Barrett, Executive Director for Heritage Ohio to review results of the assessment.

Governance Assessment Overview: Joyce Barrett, Executive Director for Heritage Ohio

- September 5th: Joyce Barrett, Executive Director Heritage Ohio and Frank Quinn, Director of Preservation for Heritage Ohio held interviews in Oberlin.
- Prior to meeting received planning and grant documents from Wanda Davis, ACM/HRA and Carrie Handy, Economic Development and Housing Officer to provide backdrop for Gasholder/Underground Railroad Center Park and Ride project.
- Observations revealed that the citizens of Oberlin cared about this project. Also observed that there has been some fatigue and apathy by some citizens because it takes time for a complex historical project to be successful.
- Reviewed the projects mission statement.
- Team Members identified three goals that defined the project:
 - To preserve the historic Gasholder building thorough sensitive adaptive reuse.
 - To develop a multi – modal transportation park.

- To tell the story of Oberlin's important role in the Underground Railroad.
 - Citizens have difficulty with this goal. Different variations on how to "tell the story".
- National Trust for Historic Preservations Annual Conference Statistic
 - There are 15,000 house museums in the United States
 - There is concern in the ability for communities to sustain those sites.
- Disconnect between who is responsible for the project:
 - Impression from the Oberlin Heritage Center through the interview process that they were not interested in taking on the project without funding assistance.
 - Other expectations about the role of the City and College in taking care of the project.
 - Nord Foundation expressed concern for doing a Historic site without having the Oberlin Heritage Center involved.
- Identified uses:
 - Mixed uses: Visitor center, recreation, cultural presentations, transportation hub, event performance, exhibit space, and private rentals.
 - Site as a Museum would be more expensive than anyone wants to take on.
 - Mixed use will also have exhibit space to incorporate this desire into space.
- Four scenarios:
 - The City of Oberlin Continues to run the project.
 - Pros: people appear to trust and have confidence in City government.
 - Cons: project may continue to be a financial challenge in tight budget times.
 - Current OURCIT takes over the project.
 - Pros: expertise and long-term familiarity with phase I and II accomplishments
 - Cons: committee has passion but not the expertise to move forward.
 - New board formed to run the project.
 - Pros: independent new thinkers without hidden agenda.
 - Cons: community clarity on governance/business plan still unclear. Can community support the financial needs of another organization.
 - Challenge: who will be responsible for recruiting board, establishing by-laws etc?
 - Another organization outside the City takes over the project.
 - Pros: if the project is regional it draws wider use and wider potential funding pool.
 - Cons: some Oberlinians want to maintain ownership of project.
- Recommendation
 - Mixed uses: Visitor center, recreation, cultural presentations, transportation hub, event performance, exhibit space and private rentals.
 - Suggested Gasholder Steering Committee made up of people with specific skills that can move the project forward.

Discussion

Tony Mealy, 328 Pleasant Street

- Expressed personal concerns for losing the grants were expressed by several individuals in attendance.
 - Hope that the grant can be salvaged and they can move on to Phase II of the project.

Roland Baumann, 146 Pyle Rd

- Hope that the report will serve as a pivot to move this project of the City in new directions with fuller opportunities to deal with the future.
- Recalled history surrounding the fight to preserve the historic Gasholder building between competing interest groups in Oberlin in the early 90's.

- Discussions on whether or not the City should be involved in this business.
 - City has been pushed in ways that has stymied its options.
- Desire to see a fruitful conclusion :
- Point of contention - Who is going to tell the story of the Underground Railroad?
 - Oberlin Heritage Center is currently telling this story very effectively.
 - Need to consider doing something new with this location not repeating things that have already been done.
- City of Oberlin not a real option, current trend for historic projects tied to the government is that they are the first to get their budget cut.
- Mixed use center might not be the best scenario for the City of Oberlin.
- Budget constraints make it difficult for City to justify taking on a project as complex as this one.
- As the project moves forward would like to see less drama and more common sense.

Councilor Scott Broadwell

- Agreement with assessment that they will need to move on with a new steering committee.
- Loss of grant means fundraising is a must; not sure that current implementation team has the skills needed to get this done on their own.
- What is our next move?

Vice President Sharon Soucy

- Staggered by the loss of the grant.
- Not sure Council is in a position to make a decision on what the next step will be at this time.
- Will need to spend some time on this.
- Suggestions from Heritage Ohio are excellent.
- Agrees that mixed uses would be the best use of the building.
- No longer looking at the option of having matching funds to move on with phase II, will take some time to figure out what direction to go in.

Councilor Elizabeth Meadows

- Likes the idea of having multiple uses like the True North Cultural Arts Center in Sheffield Village:
 - It will maximize the number of people who will be willing to use it.
 - It will make the project more of a community institution.

Question: *Roland Baumann, 146 Pyle Road*

- What was the reason for the grant not being funded?

Response: *City Manager Eric Norenberg*

- NOACCA hadn't separately appropriated any money for phase II and phase III of the Gasholder/Underground Railroad Center Park and Ride Project. It is still unclear as to how this happened, however when Phase I closed out, the entire grant was closed out.
 - Money that was originally programmed from the Transportation Enhancement Program many years ago has ended and funds are no longer available.
 - Committee is working with NOACA and is looking at other potential funding sources to replace the money that was lost.

- Raising matching funds has been difficult will be even more difficult to raise the entire amount.
- Is important to use the advice from Heritage Ohio to develop a business plan that will be good enough to receive additional grant funding.
- Planning retreat in February for Oberlin City Council to readdress this issue. Not expecting any decisions tonight.

Question: Councilor Bryan Burgess

- When did the discussion evolve from preserving the Gasholder building to using it as a museum?

Response: Sharon Pearson, 35 Willard Court

- Initial discussion to use the Gasholder building as a museum was held in May of 1999.
- 2002 NOACA matching funds grant was awarded to City of Oberlin for an interpretive center that was to be used for a multipurpose site like what was explained in this document.
- Shocked that people are referring to this as a museum due to the costs associated with running that type of facility.

Council President, Ronnie Rimbart

- Thanked the implementation team for all of their hard work. Would like to keep a core group of individuals from the original membership to retain some of the institutional knowledge.

Councilor Scott Broadwell

- Do we want to direct staff to begin restructuring URCIT.
- Loss of funds changes the discussion.
- Want to keep things moving.
- Council consensus?

Councilor Bryan Burgess

- Council consensus should be to wait until February 2014. Council has multiple projects that must be finalized by the end of the year that are already competing with the holiday season. There isn't any way to give this topic the attention that it warrants until then.

Tony Mealy, 328 South Professor

- Historic background on transfer of title on the Gasholder Building from Kenny Clark to the City of Oberlin.
- More discussion on how project moved from the single purpose of "restoring the gasholder building" to becoming a multiuse facility.
- URCIT terms should have ended as soon as they got phase II of the project completed.
- Valuable piece of property.
- Intended use of the facility has changed very little since the URCIT was put in place.
- Moving forward City Administration needs to make recommendation for a steering committee.

Question: Sharon Pearson, 35 Willard Court

- What is meant in the report by the recommendation to “...use the building now, stop waiting for the stars to align?”

Response: Joyce Barrett Executive Director for Heritage Ohio

- As soon as the City can issue an occupancy permit for the Gasholder building, people can start using it. Once people start using it, they will develop a stronger affection for the project that will hopefully stimulate more ideas for how to use it.

Roland Baumann, 146 Pyle

- Agrees with Barrett that if the City wants the project to move forward, it will have to bring this building into the presence of the community.

Ken Sloane, 41 Morgan Street

- The Original impetus was to get the building restored, and that has been done at minimum cost to the City.
- Stay the course.

Council President, Professor Street

- These things take time.
 - Point of reference: The West Hamilton Recreation Complex took eight (8) years to complete.
 - Likes the idea of using the building as soon as possible.
 - Final words, Press on.

Adjournment

Being that there was no further business to come before Council at this time, motion to adjourn into executive session was moved by Meadows, seconded by Soucy. All members of Council consented.

Meeting adjourned at 6:55 p.m.

Attest:

BELINDA B. ANDERSON, MMC
CLERK OF COUNCIL

APPROVED: 12/02/2013

RONNIE J. RIMBERT
PRESIDENT OF COUNCIL

POSTED: 12/03/2013