

City of Norwalk
Museum Restructuring Committee
July 17, 2012 -MINUTES

Attendance: Judith Bacal , Patsy Brescia, James Brown, James Clark, Erin Halsey, Mary Alice Fitzgerald, Mary Roman, David Park, Scott Wands (conference call), David Westmoreland

Guests: Ralph Bloom
Alan Lo

Mr. Westmoreland called the meeting to order at 5:31 pm and turned the meeting over to Mr. Lo, who initiated the discussion about the current condition of the basement at the Lockwood House (LH). He explained in detail what exists in the basement as far as the cooling /boiler systems and the current condition of that area. It had not been working for quite a while, but it had been updated three years ago. There had been a very hot summer and as a result, it was wet and humid in the basement. Three dehumidifiers were then installed which temporarily remedied the situation.

Mr. Lo informed the committee that there is no money in the capital budget specifically for LH; that the allocated \$50,000 is for all the buildings in Norwalk, (9) of them. Building Management has gone to bid on fixing some of the existing issues at LH; the total bid for the basement project would be about \$80,000 and the cost of just the equipment is about \$24,000, which would help heat/cool more efficiently. There are currently no mold problems that would be an issue.

Mr. Lo said that Mr. Mike Sgobbo, the building manager, might consider using other funds for a special appropriation and they discussed both short and long term options. He also informed us that the Fire Department is scheduled to move out of LH in September, 2013.

Further discussion ensued regarding ground seepage, mold, sealants, drainage and gutters, as well as possible solutions to address these issues by waterproofing the foundation. Ms. Brescia asked about painting around the LH, inside and out, and Mr. Lo informed her that he is aware of what is needed and will take care of it. Mr. Bloom was asked if any of the fire places were working fire places and he said 2 were real, and 3 were dummies.

Mr. Lo also informed us that the “basement” of the Health Department is really the ground floor and that the existing conditions are similar to typical office space. Ms. Brescia asked Mr. Westmoreland about the measurements of the Dunn Hardware (DH) Exhibit to see if it would fit, and he informed the committee that he “forgot” to measure it when he was there on Friday. Ms. Bacal questioned if certain exhibits would fit in certain spaces which brought up the question of how to get the items moved to various locations. Mr. Westmoreland commented that there might be some issues, due to narrow stairs, and small hallways. Mr. Bloom informed the committee that Titanic, the Dunn Hardware Store and Norwalk City Hall were all built in 1912, and that the DH exhibit breaks down to 7’9” sections which would help when moving it.

Mr. Lo finished up by informing the committee that he and Mr. Sgobbo will be following up with the Finance Committee within a week, and the improvements that he discussed will be taking place whether the collection is moved the LH or not, as they are long term improvements that must be done. He also said that it would be about a six month project. Mr. Lo said we should let him know if and when it might be happening so he can meet that deadline.

Mr. Parks moved to approve the minutes from the last meeting on July 10th and June 6th, however the motion was tabled until the next meeting.

The rent at the Museum in SoNo is now \$125, 000/year, and if the pieces are moved from the basement and 2nd floor, it would be reduced to \$77,000/year. Ms. Brescia voiced concern, again, about rent prices escalating in the future, and Ms. Fitzgerald recommended that the museum be moved instead of continuing to pay rent. Mr. Westmoreland agreed that the rent will continue to increase.

Mr. Bloom stated that the most immediate actions that must take place are to:

- Determine the size of the collection
- Inventory entire collection
- Take time, possibly 2 years, to make final decision about the museum

He explained that many families, have provided financial support for the exhibits, and that when LH was originally built, that there was enough land surrounding it if an addition was ever considered. He feels the collection should remain where it is, since the City would be paying for storage anyway.

Ms. Bacal mentioned that the design of the museum might have to change if it is moved, and Mr. Bloom said that the collections should not be moved too many times. Ms. Bacal noted that it will be costly to change LH and Ms. Brescia requested that the committee go back and have another look at the house. Mr. Parks said that initially, everyone was very impressed with the space.

Ms. Bacal then offered a “straw man” proposal which included:

- Move basement storage items to Health Dept. (interim)
- Move archives to Library (permanent)
- Spend necessary time to inventory museum collection
- Explore ways to open museum in Sono for the duration
- Once inventory is completed then final decision on whether to stay at Sono or move to Lockwood can be determined based on best location for collection, initial and operating cost assessment

Mr. Brown noted again the cost of putting LH back into shape, and Mr. Clark expressed the need to assess the collection. Ms. Brescia reiterated that the archives need to be moved, and the basement of the museum in SoNo needs to be emptied.

They was a discussion on how to bring people in to actually go to the museum and Ms. Bacal noted how the Maritime Aquarium has a different audience than the Norwalk Museum and that ultimately, there will have to be a combination of ideas to market it.

Mr. Brown then noted that decommissioning the Museum is an extreme possibility but perhaps no more extreme than the status quo. Ms. Brescia noted that many people sincerely care about the collection and want to preserve it. She was involved with the specs when the old Norwalk High transitioned to City Hall, and told a lovely story of the young woman who wanted to preserve the WPA murals, and how that was ultimately accomplished.

Mr. Brown then brought up the topic of parking, and the committee went on to review the list of Pros/Cons that Ms. Bacal had come up with. A discussion ensued targeting those Pros/Cons, which Ms. Bacal noted and will bring to the next meeting. She also suggested the committee come up with a draft step list, moving forward. She explained how there are many misperceptions by the public that the collection will be separated,

and that the press needs to be explicit about the difference between archives vs. collection and that there is a basic misunderstanding that needs to be corrected.

Mr. Westmoreland noted that if the archives go to the Library that the Historical **Commission would no longer have “control” of them, and that they would just be** providing over site. Mr. Brown informed the committee that he had met with a representative from the Donohue Group and they were not overwhelmed at the amount of work that has to be done, and that they were very impressed with the work that had been done to date.

There was then discussion about a possible media event, and that it is the charge of the committee to preserve our past. A number of \$10,000 or less was suggested as the cost of moving the archives and that relocation would be a multistage approach. Ms. Roman asked if any of the collection has to be returned, and Mr. Westmoreland said that the Friends of the Norwalk Museum has a substantial claim on the current contents. Mr. Bloom explained that the newer items in the collection have not been as well catalogued and that the information is only noted on index cards, not in any database. **The question was then asked “how many hat boxes do we really need” and the general consensus was, “not all of them”.**

Mr. Westmoreland informed everyone that the report the committee is charged with is due ASAP, and that a realistic roll out date would be in September, 2012.

Next steps: Ms. Bacal and Mr. Westmoreland will revise the matrix, come up with a draft of recommendations.

The next meeting will be in Room 101, July 24th at 5:30 PM.

Mr. Westmoreland made the motion to adjourn at 7:05 PM.