

City of Norwalk
Museum Restructuring Committee
September 11, 2012 -MINUTES

Attendance: Judith Bacal , Patsy Brescia, James Brown, James Clark, (6:28) Erin Halsey, Mary Alice Fitzgerald, Mary Roman, David Park, David Westmoreland, Charles Yost

Guests: Ralph Bloom

The meeting started at 5:32 by Mr. Westmoreland. He made a motion to approve the minutes from the August 14, 2012 meeting and it was unanimously approved with one abstention from Ms. Brescia. Mr. Westmoreland then handed the meeting over to Ralph Bloom.

Mr. Bloom briefly discussed what the Friends of Norwalk Museum committee's wanted to do about the museum, if it were to remain in SoNo. They want to reopen the museum as quickly as possible; should they speak with the Mayor's office? Mr. Bloom explained that the current "lease" can't be called such there may not be any sub-leasing, so the contract is a memorandum of agreement (MOA). The existing display cases in the common area have always been and should remain so.

Mr. Westmoreland asked about the MOA and feels that the city needs to come up with exact terms and set up a time schedule to do so.

Mr. Parks asked who exactly was on the Friends of the Museum, and Mr. Bloom answered; Elizabeth Montgomery, Pat Hayden, Scott Gibson and Terry Tyler. The current acting Chair is George Fulton. He also asked about membership numbers and Mr. Bloom told the committee there are about 93 current members, of the 501C3 group. Mr. Bloom also said that they need to rebuild their One Park Street office space.

Mr. Westmoreland informed the committee that the Mayor is scheduled to attend the next meeting, September 25th. He also informed the committee that he will be away next week and will work on the report then, including the matrix, and document what have been discussed to date.

Mr. Westmoreland started to go over the Draft Interim Recommendations, #1: **Transfer the Museum's research archive material to the Norwalk Public Library (NPL) and create the Norwalk History Room.** Mr. Brown informed that committee about the salary that will be needed for the person who will work there, and he has someone in mind that is very interested and very well qualified. He went on to say that it would be very expensive to hire the Donahue Group, Inc. to help organize the area and maybe they could work on a temporary consulting basis in the beginning to get everyone on the right track. Mr. Brown also informed the committee that work has begun on the room.

Ms. Brescia and Mr. Park both commented on the question of timing of everything because people have been asking. Mr. Brown discussed timing briefly, and then said no decision had been made yet. Mr. Westmoreland asked if the transition would be by the end of the year and Mr. Brown explained that they have already started to physically prepare the room; carpet, painting, etc and it should be completed soon.

Ms. Brescia asked about timing again and how to expedite the move. Mr. Brown explained how downsizing at the library has affected the progress, and Mr. Parks said a

time table should be set and Mr. Westmoreland requested that a target date be set. Mr. Brown noted that the City needs to financially support the project in order for it to be completed.

Mr. Westmoreland moved on to #2: **Hire a part-time consultant with a strong collections and curatorial background to complete an inventory of the Museum's objects collection and purchase a new computer and museum collections management software such as Past Perfect to maintain the inventory records.** He went on to talk about the basic inventory, staffing with part timers and volunteers, the funds available to buy computers, scanners, etc. He also discussed possible grants available and the need to transfer the information on to a computer and the necessary soft ware to do so. He said it will be much better to know what the museum has if/when there is a move.

Mr. Westmoreland then went on to #3: **Sign a new lease with the owners of 41 North Main Street that allows for reduced square footage, and annual cancellation clause, and lease rate that reflect current market prices.**

Ms. Brescia asked about Lee Grant and where she is in the process. Mr. Westmoreland estimated it will take two years to get everything on line. He also said that Tom Hamilton has been working with him, regarding the annual cancellation clause, five year term.

Ms. Fitzgerald asked if they could cancel us! Mr. Westmoreland didn't think so, as we are now month to month with the landlord.

Ms. Brescia questioned the verbiage of the draft letter, regarding cancellation clause, noting a short term lease would result in a higher rent. Mr. Brown said it was risky; short term vs. long term. Mr. Westmoreland commented that there are many irreplaceable items and it does present a challenge to move them.

Ms. Bacal then stated and there were two key points to consider:

1. The restaurant is very important to remember and
2. The move should only take place once

Ms. Brescia suggested that short term vs. long term bullet points be written. Mr. Westmoreland said he will make changes and email them out.

#4: **A Resolve outstanding claim with the Friends of Norwalk Museum, Inc. was** the next topic reviewed. Mr. Brown asked if all outstanding claims for item and Mr. Westmoreland said he thought everything is resolved. Ms. Brescia said the Lockwood Mathews Mansion (LMM) had a stereograph (?), some plates that were at the Museum and that they concerned about the pieces. Mr. Brown suggested setting a target date for all of the claims to be settled within the next two months.

Mr. Westmoreland went over #5: **Hire a consultant to facilitate the development of a business plan for operating the Museum going forward,** then told the committee that he has a list of consultants, and the there is expertise need to come up with a business plan. He also said that what the community wants should be considered as well.

Ms. Brescia brought up the question: should be museum be repository or an active museum. Mr. Westmoreland said that Norwalk is an amazing city and has an incredible history. Ms. Brescia said that the Museum funded in the past had been dysfunctional, and that it needs a dynamic person to generate excitement. She talked about LMM and how so many people said that it would never happen, yet it did! Other notable projects that people said would never happen included the South Norwalk Train Station, The

Maritime Aquarium, Oak Hills Golf Course, etc. Mr. Westmoreland then told the committee how all of the recent Historical Society events have been very successful, and said it is important to stay positive, although it can be a challenge.

Mr. Brown asked if they would do this or hire a consultant, and Mr. Westmoreland said that consultants will be used to determine short and long term steps. Mr. Brown then asked what the mission was for the Museum. Mr. Westmoreland said that the recommendations will be made by September 25th and completed by the end of the year.

Mr. Parks then asked what the committee would be voting on and Mr. Westmoreland told him that he will go over the recommendations with the Mayor and then there would be a vote on what package to consider. If it is opposed, then there would have to be reconsiderations. Mr. Brown asked what the length of time would be for the consultants and Mr. Westmoreland said he would call and find out what they recommended as far as timing and explained that the committee needs guidance through this process.

Mr. Brown then said that there needs to be enough evidence and information before this goes out to the public and everyone agreed. Ms. Brescia talked about the practicality of moving to the Lockwood House, and Mr. Westmoreland reiterated that there has to be enough back up to move forward. The discussion of timing continued, and that a place holder was needed for budgets, as negotiations begin in October, and that the committee needs to have their ducks in a row, including the costs of new exhibits, etc.

Mr. Clark joined the meeting at 6:28PM and Mr. Westmoreland made the motion to adjourn.