

City of Norwalk

Museum Restructuring Committee

Tuesday, September 25, 2012

Attendance: David Westmoreland, Judith Bacal, Rick McQuaid, Patsie Brescia, Mary Alice Fitzgerald, David Park, Mary Roman, Charlie Yost, Atty Kolaczar, Jim Brown

Staff: Erin Halsey

Guests: Mayor Richard Moccia, Ralph Bloom, Isabelle Bullen

Call to Order

Mr. Westmoreland started the meeting at 5:35 and decided to table the minutes from our last meeting. He outlined what the discussion would be, which would be a summarization and recommendations that the committee has come up with. He briefly explained how the committee was formed, and asked the members to, after reviewing the recommendations he had written, to email him any changes

Mr. Parks noted that lots of time has been dedication to this mission and that it should be documented.

Mr. Westmoreland led a discussion on the recommendations that he had put together from all of the meetings held since May. He initially discussed the distinct differences between the archives and the content of the museum, explaining that they don't support the museum.

Mr. Parks noted that the people, who visit the museum, typically come to either looks at the exhibits or research the archives, but not both.

Mayor Moccia commented that he had a mini-tour through the Norwalk Library and he felt is was a great option for the archives.

Mr. Westmoreland said it was the best solution to move the archives to the library.

The Mayor then asked if anyone knew what the state regulation were and Mr. McQuaid told him there were no regulations the he knew of, and he has had discussions with the state.

Mr. Westmoreland informed the committee, and Ralph Bloom confirmed that the notes taken at the Common Council Meetings, pre-1913, will be put in the proper place within public records. The number 1 book is being restored at the moment.

Mr. Brown brought up parking and that it is has been and probably always will be an issue with the library. He told the committee that he has submitted some information to Mr. Westmoreland and they are working on a remedy.

The Mayor discussed briefly about how the owners of the bank remain unwilling to leave any spaces to the city, and that the First Taxing District has shown no interest either. Mr. McQuaid asked if the Eagles club had ever been approached and the Mayor answered saying that he did know, and probably had not.

Atty. Koloczar mentioned that 9 Mott Avenue, where his office it has leased property for parking, and the Mayor mentioned the availability of the Yankee Doodle Parking Garage as an option.

Mr. Brown noted that the parking situation is hurting his business, and Mr. Yost mentioned again that someone should approach the Eagles Club. The discussion on the parking situation continued without any concrete resolution.

Mr. Westmoreland then moved on to a discussion about the plan for the current inventory housed in the museum, and how even basic information is very important. He recommends the city hire a company to come in and professional catalogue the contents and that there are funds of up to \$30,000 that may be used to help with this expense.

Ms. Brechia mentioned that Lee Grant has been involved in the process already.

Mr. Westmoreland moved on to #3 of his recommendations.

The Mayor discussed a possible compromise of reducing space of the current location in SoNo, but we continue to pay for space for a building the city is not using. He also informed the committee that there are very few cities that have museums these days, due to the cost of maintenance involved and lack of funding.

Mr. Westmoreland said his general feeling was that the Lockwood House would be the best location to move the collection to.

Mayor Moccia then pointed out that the savings incurred by not having to pay rent would be significant and some of those savings could go back into restoring Lockwood House.

Ms. Brescia voiced her concern about the possibility of a restaurant going into the lower level of the building, especially with all of the irreplaceable items currently housed in the building.

Mayor Moccia informed the committee that zoning had only approved the application for said restaurant and there is nothing confirmed yet.

Mr. Westmoreland moved on to #4, donations and talked about the outstanding items

that belong to Friends of Norwalk Museum and what they say they own.

Mayor Moccia explained that if a gift is accepted in the name of the City...

Mr. Park interjected stating that the Lockwood collection has items that belong to the museum and the City.

Mayor Moccia said that was a grey area, and that the claims issues must be addressed.

Mr. Brown said there had been four (4) pages of items submitted to the Law Department. He said the Friends opened the museum and that there was too much of some of the items being donated. There was no paperwork ever generated claiming the "gifts" were regional to the city.

Mr. McQuaid asked where the Friends store these items and there was a brief discussion on sending requests to corporate council.

Mr. Brown has some items catalogued, and Ms. Brescia said that these issues need to be resolved one way or another.

Mr. Westmoreland said the bottom line is how the museum should be run in the future. The City needs a viable business plan. He went on to discuss #5, including will the museum be interesting enough to keep it open five (5) days a week? Should it become a 501C3, or should it be working with other companies?

Mayor Moccia said that the City can't afford to keep it running as is. The Archives are one of the main reasons for visiting the museum, not the exhibits. There might be grants that could be sought out, but currently the City grant writer is out on sick leave.

Mr. Westmoreland informed the committee that Scott Wands can help with the grant writing if need be.

Mayor Moccia said that there are monies budgeted for this and that he doesn't recommend broad stroking this issue. There are many different categories of items that need to be reviewed.

Mr. Brown said that technology may bail us out if we properly make investments; it will help students looking for information for school projects, etc, as they would be able to do research on line.

The Mayor asked how the museum was economically and the current ability one has to computer access. He noted how students are drawn to the WPA murals and actually benefit from seeing the actual pieces, and Mr. McQuaid concurred. The Mayor said that a consultant could be hired on a temporary basis.

Mr. Westmoreland as he has been looking for someone to help up as a committee to

provide guidance.

Ms. Brescia and Mr. Bloom had a discussion about the WPA murals and how a committee and the persistence of people saved and preserved the collection.

Ms. Bacal noted that there are many opportunities with the city to make this the best museum it can be.

The Mayor said they never had a committee as dedicated, and that it has accomplished a great deal in a very small time frame. He told everyone how much he appreciated all the hard work. Mr. McQuaid chimed in and said it is the best team he has seen organized in a long time.

Mr. Parks referred back to point four (4) that has expected a representative from the Connecticut Tourism, but they did not attend.

Mr. Westmoreland went over the hand out and he will continue to work on it.

Mr. Parks reiterated that marketing needs to be a large part of the business plan (free?)...also discussed what marketing can do to help us make everyone aware of the changing status of the museum. He said that we need to vote on the revised recommendations next week, and determine dates for next meeting.

Mr. Westmoreland told us about getting consultants, Mr. Brown asked about numbers, and Mr. Westmoreland asked what does the Mayor want to do? The Historical Commission need to be involved, as well as the Common Council, which will need to push the issues to have them go to committee.

Ms. Brescia asked if this committee should meet with the Historical Committee and suggested that they come to one of our meetings. Mr. Westmoreland agreed to invite them to a meeting so he could present to them our committee's recommendations. Ms. Brescia felt the committee will be criticized if we don't invite them. She said everyone should be invited, even if some members chose not to attend.

Mr. McQuaid recommended an informal meeting first. Mr. Westmoreland suggested we invite them for our October 16th meeting and that the invite should come from Mr. McQuaid and himself.

A larger room was recommended and will be confirmed for that day.

There was a motion made to adjourn by Mr. McQuaid, it was seconded by Mr. Parks and were adjourned at 6:35 pm.

Respectfully Submitted, Erin E. Halsey