

City of Norwalk

Museum Restructuring Committee

Tuesday, October 16, 2012

Attendance: David Westmoreland, Judith Bacal, Rick McQuaid, Patsie Brescia, Mary Alice Fitzgerald, David Park, Mary Roman (5:56pm), Charlie Yost, Jim Brown

Staff: Erin Halsey

Guests: Ralph Bloom, Suzanne Betts, Isabelle Bolin, Holly Cuzzone, Bruce Kimmel

Call to Order

Mr. Westmoreland started the meeting at 5:30pm and explained to the committee that **this was not a “Special Meeting” of the Historical Commission, but an informational session** where those who sit on the Historical Commission were welcome to come to ask questions, and be brought up to date on the progress that the Museum Restructuring Committee had made over the past five months. He also informed the committee that we are all invited to attend the Historical Commission next week.

Everyone went around the room, as we had several guests, to introduce themselves.

Mr. Westmoreland explained that the original intent of the meeting was to get input from the Historical Commission, to inquire as to what authority the city has over Mill Hill. Then he read from Chapter 57 A. (David, was it 57A-2 or 57A-3 that you read?) He also told us that in March of 2004, the Common Council submitted a list of sites that were subject to control of the Historical Commission, including Mill Hill, Lockwood-Mathews Mansion, Pine Hill Cemetery and several more, including **The Norwalk Museum’s lease and contents**, however that lease no longer exists, and it is unclear as to if the Historical Commission has any authority over where the collection is housed. Currently, the collection remains with the Historical Commission, and a vote will need to be taken, then forward on to that commission and Land Use.

Mr. Kimmel asked if there were differences of opinion or a tie; Historical Commission vs. Museum Restructuring Committee, would it have to go through the Common Council and asked:

1. Does the Historical Commission have to vote?
2. Does the Common Council have to approve?

Mr. Park commented that the city code includes that recommendations for acquiring or disposing of properties under Common Council needs to approve those recommendations in the end. Mr. Kimmel said he would prefer it go through the Historical Commission.

Mr. Westmoreland asked the members of this committee to attend the Historical Committee meeting, Wednesday, October 24th at 7:00pm, 2nd Floor of the Museum, and remarked that it was very important to be there.

Mr. Westmoreland then continued to go over the Draft Interim Recommendations, noting that:

- This committee is very committed to keeping the collection together
- That the archived research materials are distinctively different from the collection and discussed differences
- Noted that most visitors to the museum are there to do research
- There are many positive points to moving the archives to the library

Mr. Kimmel then asked for a timeline on how long the transition would take.

Mr. Brown said it would take about 3-5 years to complete the catalogue process. He discussed how there will be more access to everything from everywhere. He discussed the technology available; printed images of the collection, everything will be very “searchable”, accessible, and will give very in depth detail about the collection. He also mentioned that he has a very knowledgeable candidate who is an expert at this type of cataloging.

Ms. Cuzzone explained how the Wilton Library works and their current accessibility.

Mr. Brown discussed the library’s hours of operation and staffing. Then Mr. Kimmel noted that this is the most important part of the process, and that there should be designated hours for the review of the archives and how incredible Norwalk’s past is.

Mr. Brown said that the library currently has a small collection, and Ms. Betts asked if it will be accessible within the next 3-5 years. Mr. Brown said yes and that there would be down time, but they would do their best to accommodate any requests in the interim. He talked about developing standards over time, what the current technology is and that in the that the Library is investigating technology upgrades that could begin as early as spring, 2013.

Ms. Cuzzone asked for a time line that is approved, is the library ready to go?

Mr. Brown told us that the library has been affected by the economy; less staff, more

room to house the archives that the first few months they will be doing an inventory, and after that the cataloguing would begin with the imaging to follow.

Mr. Park and Ms. Bacal both mentioned how glad they were to hear real enthusiasm about it, and Ms. Betts said she was very excited to get at it! Mr. McQuaid echoed that the central location is the best solution.

Mr. Kimmel said that we would be investing in our history on various levels and how **important it was. Ms. Brescia said that was this committee's mission and Mr. Brown** noted how well it could dovetail into a great thing for the city. He talked about research, visuals, and digitizing the information.

Mr. Westmoreland discussed points #2 and #3, talking about transferring information, how it is not a quick fix and that associating the photo images to the descriptions of the items is important, as well as funding, grants, etc. He touched on reducing the amount of the lease in SoNo, pros and cons of staying at 41 North Main, and rethinking suggestions.

Ms. Brescia brought the issue of staying in that building, and the possibility of a restaurant moving into the basement. Mr. Kimmel inquired as to whether there could be a connection between the historic buildings, including Mill Hill, Lockwood House, the Norwalk River, the WPA collection and City Hall. He also told us that Newtown Turnpike was the first one in the United States! Ms. Brescia said it was not a new idea, but a great one!

Mr. Westmoreland continued with point #4, about the citizens who have contributed to the museum and that they need to be informed about the status. Ms. Brescia said that **there is a need to determine what the city owns and what they don't. Mr. McQuaid said** he had done research on the question and Mr. Yost asked if the Friends of Norwalk **wanted to pull out their "stuff". Mr. Westmoreland said it is a question of ownership, and** Mr. Brown said it is a matter of respect. He also stated that is more difficult these days to establish 501C3.

Mrs. Westmoreland went over the final recommendation, #5, and discussed the path that museums are going today. There is a need to get people to come, and to do that we **need a viable plan, who, what, when, where, how...**

Ms. Bacal wanted to move on to where the information will be moving to and Mr. Brown said that having exhibits available to those people who might be shut ins, students, etc would be important. He also talked about Scott Wands, regarding people that he knows that are interested in helping the committee. Mr. Wands has spoken with a woman in Massachusetts **and she mentioned that moving the archives to the library was a "brilliant**

idea”.

Mr. Bloom talked about family papers, letters, etc. that should be kept together at the library, and that they should all be housed in the same atmosphere. Then Ms. Betts asked about how the consultant could help the committee with this charge. Mr. Brown said that Mr. Wands had sent information to him about the Frank Lloyd Wright collection.

Ms. Betts wanted to know about the space at the Health Department and Ms. Brescia described it to her. Mr. Westmoreland then discussed the actual movement of the collection while waiting for Lockwood House to be available. He told everyone the bids that have already gone out for improvements that need to be made at Lockwood House, and the city will be making those changes in any case.

Ms. Cuzzone like the idea of moving things to the library and that it had never been discussed before. Mr. McQuaid said it would be important to have a dialogue between the committee and the Historical Commission and gave Mr. Westmoreland kudos for all of his hard work.

There was a motion made to adjourn by Mr. McQuaid, it was seconded by Mr. Parks and were adjourned at 6:45 pm.

Respectfully Submitted, Erin E. Halsey